

Bhutan relies on its Kings during the pandemic

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When the citizens of the tiny Himalayan nation of Bhutan, nestled between the two Asian giants, India and China, first heard of the novel coronavirus outbreak in China in December 2019, no one expected it to spread across the globe and affect people's life the way it is doing now.

The Bhutanese people, majority of whom are Buddhist, firmly believed that with the protection of their local deities, the virus would never reach Bhutan. But today, 1,119 people are infected with the virus, 999 people declared recovered and a man has already died of the virus.

The country recorded the first Covid-19 case on March 6 last year when a 76-year-old American tourist, who entered Bhutan through India, fell ill and tested positive.

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While many Bhutanese wondered and worried how the small country could deal with the pandemic, everyone pinned their hope on the enigmatic leadership of their kings as they did before in the times of emergency.

His Majesty The King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, travelled all over the country and coordinated the pandemic responses. Even His Majesty the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, travelled to the high-risk areas of the country to motivate and encourage people to remain resilient.

During the two lockdowns the country experienced, the first one in August last year and the second one, which was lifted a few days ago, the King ensured that everyone impacted by the pandemic and the lockdowns was looked after by means of royal welfare.

The global pandemic, however, impacted the lives of every Bhutanese. It affected the country's economy and disrupted it, as the main backbone of the economy, the tourism and hospitality sector, is severely affected. Many Bhutanese lost jobs and lockdowns impacted daily wage earners and businesses.

The country, which is heavily dependent on India for import of essentials, was forced to seal its borders with India in March last year. Patrols have been beefed up to guard the 699kms border with India in the south, west and east, which is covered by dense mountain jungles, and 470 kilometres with China in the north, straddling the Himalayan ranges.



The government, with a Prime Minister who is a physician by profession, is doing all it could to combat the pandemic. It is, however, facing heavy public criticism, especially for the protocols it framed to address the Covid-19 affected citizens.

Like the rest of the world, Bhutan is anxiously waiting for an effective and affordable vaccine against this dreadful disease. India had already gifted Bhutan 150,000 covishield vaccines in January and the government is devising out a new strategy to vaccinate the people eligible to receive it.

Meanwhile, the Bhutanese people are hoping and praying for efficient treatment of, and quick recovery from, the disease.

Besides, they are waiting for things to return to normal while many feel blessed to have Their Majesties the Kings by their ide and India as a trusted friend in this time of health crisis.

PS: It's the authour's personal views and does not represent the views of Kuensel.

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