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# NEWS RELEASE

13 December 2018/ No. 201812-03

## Canada and Bhutan mark 15 years of diplomatic relations, commit to stronger ties

H.E. Nadir Patel, Ambassador of Canada to Bhutan, visited Bhutan this week to mark 15 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. From 10 to 13 December, Ambassador Patel met with H.E. Lyonchhen (Dr.) Lotay Tshering, Prime Minister of Bhutan, Hon'ble Tshogpoen Wangchuk Namgyel, Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan, H.E. Lyonpo (Dr.) Tandi Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Lyonpo J. B. Rai, Minister for Education, Ambassador Sonam Tshong, Hon'ble Foreign Secretary, Mr. Sonam Wangchuk, Hon'ble Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources and Mr. Karma Yeshey, Hon'ble Secretary, Ministry of Education, as well as several businesses and NGOs.

Ambassador Patel signed a Foreign Ministry to Foreign Ministry Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to deepen bilateral engagement between Canada and Bhutan. He also discussed opportunities for collaboration with Bhutan in the areas of education, healthcare, agriculture climate change policy, infrastructure/construction, power, and water and wastewater. He reiterated Canada's commitment to work closely with the Bhutanese government to shape the future of the Canada-Bhutan relationship and further strengthen bilateral and multilateral ties.

"As we celebrate and reflect on 15 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and Bhutan, it is also important to consider the future and to ensure that we continue to deepen the ties between our two countries. This week, I was pleased to have held productive meetings with Bhutan's Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the newly appointed Cabinet. This is my sixth visit to Bhutan, and I am proud to say that our bilateral relationship has never been stronger and I am fully committed to continuing this positive trend" said Nadir Patel, Ambassador of Canada to Bhutan.

Key highlights of the visit included:

- The Ambassador signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan and Global Affairs Canada to institutionalise the ministry-to-ministry relationship and to develop a consultation mechanism for bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

- The Ambassador announced a joint initiative between the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a Canadian Crown Corporation; the Centre for Bhutanese Studies and Gross National Happiness; and the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative, which will bring young Bhutanese scholars to the University of Oxford where they will participate in the launch of the International Society of Bhutan Studies (ISBS).
- The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) is presently funding four projects in Bhutan valued at BTN 5,455,157.59 in the areas of democracy, growth that works for everyone, and health. The projects contain a women's empowerment angle and have been assessed through a gender based analysis lens. Canada has placed a particular emphasis, both domestically and internationally, on empowering women and girls. Canada's newly announced Feminist International Assistance Policy will ensure that 95% of our bilateral international development assistance will focus on advancing gender equality. (The four recipient organisations include: the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, Rural Education and Development, Royal Thimphu College and the Disabled Person's Association of Bhutan.)
- The Canadian Trade and Investment Facility for Development (CTIF) is a seven-year, BTN 591,625,374.29 project funded by the Government of Canada, which supports trade and investment policy reforms that promote inclusive and sustainable growth in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Canada has invited Bhutanese partners to apply for funding to access Canadian expertise and support for capacity building initiatives in Bhutan.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC] announced a commitment to holding semi-annual outreach events that will focus on delivering presentations in Bhutan for potential visa applicants who are visitors, students and workers seeking employment opportunities.
- New social media accounts were launched (@CanadainBhutan) to highlight the rich collaboration between our two countries and to ensure that Canada can engage with the people of Bhutan on a continuous basis.

### **Background information:**

- Canada has a significant legacy in the education sector, which is on account of Father Mackey, who built strong education linkages between both countries. Canada is a favoured destination among Bhutanese students for corporate training and higher education, and Canadian educational institutions are reciprocating the interest.
- In 2018, the Canadian Embassy led what will become an annual Canadian Education Mission to Bhutan. This year's Edu-Canada Showcase featured eight Canadian universities and colleges that visited Bhutan on a trade mission. Over three days, they met with more than 1,000 students who were interested in studying in Canada.

- Canada's involvement in the education sector in Bhutan has also involved providing educators to Bhutan. This has been carried out through the Bhutan Canada Foundation (BCF), a Canadian charity working in partnership with the Ministry of Education in Bhutan to encourage the growth of Bhutan's system of universal education.
- In the past year, Bhutanese helicopter pilots received training at Chinook Helicopters in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada for specialized mountain flights.
- Since 2011, several Bhutanese journalists have participated in media workshops organised by the Government of Canada in New Delhi, India. Canada has also actively engaged with women influencers who have participated in women's empowerment and leadership events organised by the Embassy of Canada to Bhutan.
- Economic cooperation between Canada and Bhutan is continuing to develop. In 2017, Canadian exports to Bhutan increased BTN 28,158,747.33 from BTN 7,428,040.11 in 2016, whereas Canadian imports from Bhutan amounted to BTN 27,583,194.11, an increase from BTN 1,228,459.78 in 2016.
- This was the Ambassador's sixth visit to Bhutan, and he was accompanied by a number of officials from Canada's Embassy and Global Affairs Canada, who conducted a series of meetings with government, private sector and civil society interlocutors.

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