



Celebrations: Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay attends the opening of the 'Tradition and Innovation in Architecture' exhibition held to commemorate 40 years of Bhutan - Helvetas relation in Thimphu yesterday

Exhibition to commemorate 40 years of Bhutan-Helvetas relation opens

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Lyonchoen expresses his hope for Helvetas to continue in Bhutan

Cooperation: To commemorate 40 years of relationship between Bhutan and Helvetas, a weeklong exhibition titled 'Tradition and Innovation in Architecture' featuring selected institutions began yesterday in Thimphu. Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay along with delegates from Helvetas and Switzerland inaugurated the exhibition.

Helvetas's country director, Hansruedi Pfeiffer said the exhibition is a tribute to all who have been engaged in the partnership. "On the occasion of this celebration, Helvetas wants to express their gratitude to the government of Bhutan for the trust and partnership which has been demonstrated these past 40 years."

At the same time, Helvetas wants to thank the government of Switzerland for the confidence they have entrusted in our organization over the past 40 years, Hansruedi Pfeiffer said.

Whenever I travel the route between Paro and Thimphu, I admire the beauty of the houses, the hamlets, the small villages and bridges, and how they are nestled, Hansruedi Pfeiffer said. “I am told that these highly refined traditional Bhutanese architecture is an expression of their world, the people and society,” he said.

With respect to the Bhutanese architectural beauty, youthfulness and durability, it was why architecture and directly related themes were chosen as a focus of the exhibition and events celebrating the 40 years of relationship.

“Switzerland (through Helvetas) was, over the years, strongly engaged in contributing to institution building in Bhutan in sectors such as agriculture and forestry, education, health and others,” Hansruedi Pfeiffer said.



The weeklong exhibition is held at the Royal University of Bhutan's auditorium in Thimphu

Many 'architecture' created under Bhutan – Helvetas collaboration was generally appreciated in Bhutan and deserved, for once, to be given a special place when looking back and into the future of 40 years of collaboration, Hansruedi Pfeiffer added.

As a gift by the Helvetas to remember the 40 years of collaboration, the organization has decided to fund for the renovation of the clock tower of Sherubtse college.

Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay said the story of friendship between Bhutan and Switzerland is a unique and fascinating one. "It is how a personal friendship of 40 years between two different nations, from two different continents share similarities and share an excellent model of bilateral relations," Lyonchoen said.

Today, the spirit of the close friendship between His Majesty the Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck and Swiss industrialist Fritz von Schulthess is visible in every parts of the relationship between Bhutan and Switzerland, Lyonchoen added.

We hear stories of how harsh and under difficult circumstances Helvetas officials endured in the 1960s when first projects began in Gogona and Bumthang yet never failing to share their expertise in the fields of livestock, agriculture and forestry to the Bhutanese, Lyonchoen said.

Lyonchoen also pointed out many aspects the Swiss managed to touch Bhutanese lives starting from first manufacturing of Bhutanese cheese, to Red Panda Beer, to first bakery in Thimphu known as Swiss Bakery – a heritage and landmark of Thimphu.

"The building institutions that Helvetas built over the country are beautiful, durable and youthful where many Bhutanese experts from forestry, education and health have emerged," Lyonchoen said.

"Our successive Kings and fore fathers, even before the start of the modernization rejected development for development's sake," he said.

"With this wisdom, we carefully chose our development partners. In Switzerland, we found a perfect friend and development partner. We greatly appreciate the friendship and partner."

Lyonchoen also expressed his hope that Helvetas will remain in Bhutan. Bhutan, Lyonchoen said, has transformed since Helvetas started.

"However, I would like to emphasize that though our successes have been remarkable, achieving economic self-reliance remains within our grasp, we still face many challenges," Lyonchoen said.

The commissioning of mega-hydropower projects is yet to begin due to

unforeseen delays, mainly geological challenges. On the other hand, people's expectations in the present government has grown, support during this formative years, therefore, is vital to ensure that the government can deliver its commitment and the achievements we have made thus far is sustained, Lyonchoen said.

"The government is, therefore, hopeful that Switzerland and Helvetas will continue to remain engaged in developmental activities until we have achieved economic self reliance," Lyonchoen said. "While we remain hopeful of the continued presence of Helvetas in Bhutan, it is indeed a befitting occasion to reiterate on behalf of the people and government of Bhutan a sincere appreciation and deep sense of gratitude to the Helvetas and all the Swiss people who have been engaged in Bhutan."

I am also happy that the 40 years of relationship between Bhutan and Helvetas coincides with 30 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries and 60th birth anniversary of our Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Lyonchoen said.

The President of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Elmar Ledergerber, who was also a member of the Swiss National Council and the Mayor of the City of Zurich, the Chief Justice Tshering Wangchuk, Members of Parliament and senior government officials attended the opening yesterday afternoon.

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