

WATER MALE TIGER YEAR

Water Male Tiger to bring more diseases

Nima Wangdi and Kelzang Wangchuk

The Water Male Tiger year will continue with the threat of diseases like the past year. The astrologers at Pangrizampa College of Astrology in Thimphu say the country's economic condition would also be moderate.

However, the tiger would treat elderly people and animals better and cause them fewer diseases. The year is said to be unfavourable for young people and bad for children according to Buddhist astrology.

Of the four life forces (*Jungwa Zhi*), threats of fire and water are predicted to be higher bringing uneven rainfall causing flood and drought in different parts of the country. According to the prediction, crop destruction by rain, hailstone and wild animals would also be more.

Lopen Kunzang Chopel of the college said that it would be a good year to give birth to children and better for male babies as it is a male year.

The second and eighth months of the lunar calendar are *Dhanag* (inauspicious months), which is not good to pursue important tasks such as starting new businesses, celebrate births, consecrate houses, starting house constructions and marry.

► Pg 2

WATER MALE TIGER YEAR: **Outlook**

Bhutan ushers in optimistic year

MB Subba

The Lunar new year started with a positive economic outlook with the prime minister announcing a new Covid management strategy that will involve lifting the lockdown and relaxation of the quarantine protocol for travellers.

The economy is expected to pick up after the country vaccinates all children from the age of five to 11 years and switches to a new Covid management strategy in April.

Finance Minister Namgay Tshering told Kuensel that the

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was predicted to rebound to around 4 percent with the announcement of the unlocking process. The GDP for 2021, he said, was expected to be around 3.5 percent although data were being compiled.

However, officials are cautious that the unlocking process could be affected if a more dangerous variant than Omicron emerges.

"With the announcement of the new Covid management strategy in the new year, small and micro industries can expect significant growth. It will also boost consumption, which

is one of the drivers of GDP growth," the finance minister said.

Lyonpo Namgay Tshering said that the country is looking forward to a positive growth after having recorded an all-time low GDP growth of -10.08 percent in 2020.

The government is hoping that the impact of the ongoing lockdown on the economic front would be less severe than that of the past lockdowns.

The finance minister said that the ongoing lockdown was improved to minimise the impact on the economy. He added that the

second phase of unlocking would also offset the economic loss caused by the lockdown.

RMA projects 5.5 GDP growth

The central bank's economic growth projection is more optimistic than that of the government.

The recently released annual Royal Monetary Authority (RMA) report 2021 projects Bhutan's GDP growth at 5.5 percent in 2022 as the industrial and services sectors are expected to recover gradually.

► Pg 2

WATER MALE TIGER YEAR: **Outlook**

Bhutan ushers in optimistic year

From Pg 1

The World Bank also projects similar growth. In its report titled "Global Economic Prospects," the bank projects the country's GDP growth at 5.1 percent in the financial year 2021-22.

The report states that World Bank's projections were based on expectations that investment and external demand (exports) will rebound.

However, officials said that the Ukraine-Russia crisis could affect exports, as the demand in the international market is likely to be affected if the crisis prolongs.

Economic affairs minister Loknath Sharma said that the Ukraine crisis had come at a time when economies around the world were picking up.

Lyonpo said the crisis could disrupt the supply chain and affect the demand in the international market.

The conflict in Ukraine could knock USD1 trillion off the value of the world economy, various international media reports have said citing the UK's National Institute for Economic and Social Research. This, the economic affairs minister said, would have some impact on the Bhutanese economy too.

Inflation, Lyonpo Loknath Sharma said, was one of the main concerns.

According to the State of the National Report, by the end of 2021, the inflation rate is projected to reach 6.87 percent. But Lyonpo said inflation could touch a double-digit figure if the situation in the local and international economies prolongs.

He said the main drivers of inflation would be the increase in fuel prices and cost of transportation of goods as the supply chain is disrupted. He said that an increase in fuel prices in India and Bhutan was expected although India imports most of its fuel from the Middle East.

However, the economic affairs minister added that economic activities would pick up significantly as the country relaxes Covid control measures in the coming months.

Most of the industries, he said, were currently working at a 50 percent capacity due to labour constraints and Covid protocols. "This situation will improve," he said.

He said that work at the Punatsangchhu II project was taking place at a 45 percent capacity in terms of the number of workers and that the project would be able to bring in more workers in the new year.

The government acknowledges the challenges in reviving the economy as the country ushers in the year of the Tiger.

The finance minister said that the supply chain both in the local and international market had been affected and that it would take some time to return to normalcy.

A disruption in the supply chain would entail additional costs, which will be borne by consumers.

However, Lyonpo Namgay Tshering said that about 80 percent of Bhutan's trade was with India and that the impact of the Ukraine crisis would not be severe on the Indian and Bhutanese economies.

The finance minister said that the country would record a positive growth in 2022.

Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering on March 2 announced that the country will not lockdown even if there are positive cases in the community starting mid of April as the country switches to a different strategy of managing the pandemic.

Future lockdowns will be enforced under two circumstances: when the country reaches the threshold of bed occupancy at the Covid-19 isolation ward or if there were the emergence of lethal variants. "We hope lockdowns would not be required at all."

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Education**

Education sector innovates to beat the Pandemic



► Board examinations commenced on February 28 Photo: Pema Dorji

Phurpa Lhamo

If anything, the Female Iron-Ox Year (2021) succeeded to force the education sector to innovate and venture further into enhancing the education experience through digital mediums.

The sector also hogged the headlines for many wrong reasons.

The government received much flak for its decision to do away with the cut off point for class 10 students as it was blamed for a decrease in overall pass percentage by 0.92 percent in 2020 as compared to 2019.

As for enrollment of Class XI students in private schools, the government finally settled to provide scholarships to students in private schools for the academic year since the construction of additional

structures and hostels couldn't be completed due to the pandemic.

As much as the pandemic had shown the challenges, the Royal Kasho on education reform was a constant reminder to do better and improve the quality of education.

The Prime Minister's State of the Nation report said that Bhutan Baccalaureate System (which will be replicated in 22 additional schools) and the New Normal Curriculum (NNC) Frameworks and the new assessment were among the reforms, which had begun.

Of these, the new assessment criteria were much welcomed. Already, the performance of Class XII students showed a decline in the overall pass percentage. Further, an assessment showed that 46 percent of Classes IV to XII

students had failed to secure 40 percent in their midterm examination. This was attributed to the new assessment criteria, which required students to score 40 percent on written examinations and continuous assessments each.

Although the fail percentage increased slightly due to the new criteria, experts said that the change was necessary to improve the quality of education.

As the year neared the end, board examinations became a major concern. As cases started to surge across Bhutan, conducting examinations in such circumstances became challenging. The education ministry continued with various measures in place. As the male water tiger year begins, students are in midst of their examinations.

WATER MALE TIGER YEAR

Water Male Tiger ...

From Pg 1

If these tasks and events become unavoidable, people are advised to perform a cleansing ritual (*Dripchoe*).

Lopon Kunzang Chophel said, all those born in a tiger year should avoid visiting sick people, tilling land, fights, new births, funerals, marriage ceremonies and venturing on a long journey.

"Twelveth month of the lunar calendar is the best month for the male tiger and it is good to start or hold any

important event during this month," Kunzang Chophel said.

He said that if those who are 24 years or born in the Earth Rabbit year and 48 years old (born Wood Rabbit year) initiate any major task or event, it would bring fruitful completion.

The year is bad, especially for those who fall in the *Thuensum* and *Dhuenzur* categories. People falling under these categories are urged to avoid holding any important task.

"Tiger, horse and dog are *Thuensum* and monkey is *Dhuenzur*," prediction.

Those born in Tiger, Horse, and Dog are advised to avoid roofing houses, funerals and, *tshachu* and *menchu* (hot spring). They should also avoid any important tasks according to the prediction.

To ward off misfortune and bring a better future, it is advised to recite holy scriptures, recite *Jigten Wangchuk*, *Mani and Baza Guru* and appease local deities.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Parliament**

An eventful year for Parliament

MB Subba

Even though Parliament saw relatively less activities due to the pandemic, it passed a number of important Bills in the two sessions of the past year.

However, Parliament remained indecisive on what was considered one of the most important legislative issues – the Mines and Minerals Bill.

Parliament had spent a significant amount of time and resources to table the Bill. However, the Bill did not come to fruition.

The National Assembly Speaker Wangchuk Namgyel's decision to defer the Bill indefinitely from the joint sitting in the summer session of 2021 left many members disappointed.

The main disagreement between the two houses of Parliament was on whether or not to allow private participation in the operation of mines.

The National Assembly wanted strategic mines to be operated by the state and non-strategic mines auctioned to the private sector. The National Council wanted mines to be operated by the state.



► Parliament passed a number of important Bills in the two sessions of the past year

As the Mines Bill got deferred with no hint of when it would be reintroduced and passed, years of discussions on the Bill had gone in vain. Members, especially of the National Council and the Opposition, expressed disappointment.

The government a few months back told a media house that the Bill will be reintroduced. But Parliament lacks clarity on the procedure to reintroduce a Bill that has been withdrawn or deferred from a joint sitting.

In one of the highlights of the winter session, the prime minister did not present the State of the Nation (STAN) report in a manner it was done in the previous years.

Deviating from the past practice, Prime Minister Dr

Lotay Tshering distributed the texts of the report to members but did not read it out in the joint sitting.

The prime minister, drawing from His Majesty's National Day address pledged accountability in his short statement when introducing the STAN. He said that as the head of the government, the 'golden yoke' is upon him to deliver the highest level of accountability and be ready for consequences.

This self-styled reporting of the STAN drew criticisms from various quarters as the Constitution states that the head of the government shall present the STAN highlighting the government's legislative plans and the annual plans and priorities, once a year.

Although some MPs said the prime minister had violated the Constitution, the Opposition maintained silence on the issue.

In the past year, the Covid-19 pandemic limited MPs activities outside of Parliament such as constituency visits.

One of the significant laws passed was the Customs Act 2021, which reduces the customs duty, an indirect tax levied on third-country imports, to a uniform rate of 10 percent.

The Customs Act covers more than 500 goods including medical equipment, agriculture and education-related products. The customs duty on vehicles, alcohol, tobacco, gold and silver, however, remains unchanged.

Other important Bill passed during the year include the

Lhuengye Zhungtshog Bill, which clarifies the executive powers and functions of the Cabinet.

However, the two Houses did not come to an agreement in some of the clauses of the Civil Society Organization Bill, Anti-Corruption Bill, and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. They issues will be deliberated in a joint sitting of the upcoming session.

New faces in Parliament

In the past year, Parliament welcomed three new members.

The ruling party's Karma Gyeltshen won the Khamdang-Ramjar bye-election in Trashiyangtse in February this year and the current labour minister, Karma Dorji, won the Nganglam bye-election in Pemagatshel in June last year.

Karma Lhamo from the ruling party also won the Mongar bye-election last year.

The Opposition was reduced to 14 MPs.

The past year did not see controversial remarks by individual MPs. Members said that the past year was successful for Parliament.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Corruption**

Rooting out corruption and fixing accountability became the highlight of the year

Tashi Dema

The Female Ox year will be remembered for the emphasis to root out corruption in the country.

His Majesty The King, during the National Day address, said corruption is on rise and commanded accountability must become a cornerstone of governance henceforth.

With the country's corruption perception index score in Transparency International (TI) remaining stagnant at 68 points since 2018, it is evident forms of corruption and their causes have not changed.

Studies have already shown that the citizens' perception of the prevalence of corruption in the country is already high. Many believe it is serious and has increased in recent years.

The year started with the news of how Supreme Court Justice Kuenlay Tshering allegedly helped a woman, Khandu Wangmo, avail the Chevening scholar-

ship, based on a text message he received from an authority, which later proved to be fake.

Although the British Honorary Consulate denied unfair influence in the scholarship and claimed selection process is conducted with the highest standards of integrity and objectivity and that it is free of any local or other unfair influence, nepotism and favouritism, many people raised questions of corruption in scholarship grant.

In the case surrounding Khandu Wangmo, she and her former husband Yeshe Dorji, who was a dzongkhag drangpon, were charged and convicted of deceptively availing Nu 8 million loan from the Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan in two days on the pretext of starting multiple businesses. Many people raised how difficult it is for them to avail loans, but those with connections and influence could easily avail it.

The former home minister Sherub Gyeltshen resigned after the High Court's larger bench up-

Supreme Court suspended Justice Kuenley Tshering and Drangpon Yeshey Dorji

Raises question on judicial proceedings

Tshering Palden and Tashi Dema
 Nearly a month after the decision, Drangpon Yeshey Dorji is suspended as endorsed by the Royal Judiciary Service Council. With the...
 structure of lawful authorities, should first be impeached as per the Constitution. A lawyer said Article 32 of

held the judgment that convicted him of claiming false vehicle insurance.

Dumper truck dealers were investigated for evading green tax worth millions.

ACC also investigated alleged corruption at the Mini Dry Port (MDP) and truck parking (temporary) port in Phuentsholing and found deep-rooted prevalence of bribery and extortion by loaders and custom officials.

Officials were accused of receiving illicit payments from multiple parties in relation to the import of goods by concealing the bribes using the bank accounts of

other private individuals.

However, the pandemic has provided the opportunity to expose the bribery racket as earlier attempts failed because the exchange of bribes and kickbacks were done in cash.

The situation changed during the pandemic where goods entry were regulated and cash transactions were limited and monetary transfers had to be routed through banks.

The National Assembly passed the Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Bill, allowing the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) and the Office of Attorney General

(OAG) to investigate corruption cases to address the shortage of human resources in the ACC.

It rejected ACC's organisational and human resource independence although the National Council endorsed ACC's recommendation for it. The Bill will be deliberated in the joint sitting.

The parliamentarian discussed the need for a separate bench in courts to expedite corruption cases, but decided to leave it to the judiciary whether to create new benches or consolidate it with the existing courts.

The Supreme Court also revoked a suspension order the ACC issued against three construction companies stating ACC should follow the doctrine of harmonious construction and based on the principles of reasonableness CDB used, it was not necessary for ACC to suspend the contractors.

SC ruled ACC can only ask concerned agencies to take appropriate actions and not take actions.

Looking back— and—ahead

As the stubborn bull hits the hay and the confident tiger takes the reins, it is a solemn moment to look back on the year gone by and take stock of our failures and achievements. And with strength and dynamism the mighty king of the wild affords us we look to the future with renewed hopes and aspiration.

The Female Ox year will be remembered for the tests it laid down before us as much as for the bounty it brought. The pandemic cast a pall over the nation as rising positive cases and looming threats called for painful restrictions and lockdowns. The virus threatened to assail us to full blast, repeatedly, but each time we were rattled we prevailed with our cautious perseverance.

The scourge left no one unaffected; all sectors—government and private—ground to a halt, literally. For a small country like ours, the challenges facing us were overwhelming; recklessness would have undone us in one fell swoop. But then, we fought on and carried the day with the persistence of faithful and patient bull.

As an unprecedented number of people lost their jobs, Druk Gyalpo's Kidu Relief provided support to untold individuals and families. In a soul-stirring and mind-lulling show of gratitude to the selfless King, young people in thousands joined the de-suung programme to help the country fight the Covid battle. Thanks to their indomitable spirit and dedicated service to the nation in these dark and testing times, our borders are secure. Essential service delivery system would have collapsed without these brave volunteers, leaving us to reel in the wake of unrelenting blitz of variant evolution.

Education, one of the biggest sectors, rose to the challenge in the most dauntless ways imaginable. Pandemic and intermittent shut-ins notwithstanding, lessons had to be imparted to thousands of children. Staggering with a system alien to us, online or virtual classes quickly picked pace. The experience has given us the confidence to break new grounds in the ways we educate our future generations. That in itself is an achievement to be reckoned with.

Economy took a severe beating in the year of the raging bull. However, with the announcement of gradual unlocking process, GDP growth is expected to rebound to above five percent. Unemployment continues to be a major problem but, with shelling out of various skilling programmes, the employment scenario in the country in the coming days and months doesn't look all that dark and grim.

The pandemic may have tipped our economy and lives over the edge, but it has also given us resilience with which to fight back. It is with this strength and determination that we bid farewell to the bull and welcome the tiger.

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FEEDBACK
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MY COUNTRY, MY TOWN



Back in business:
For a while the hand washing habit waned, but it's returned now in right earnest Photo: Sonam Pemo

Send in your pictures to: formcmt@gmail.com

Plastic waste management does not need ban but better alternative regulation

This week, for the first time, the United Nations Environment adopted the “framework to curb the world's growing plastic problem” to develop an international legal instrument to end plastic pollution. Bhutan has attracted much international attention for championing the plastic ban, yet the ban has remained a paper tiger.

Article 5(1) of our Constitution makes every Bhutanese a trustee of the country's “natural resources and environment for the benefit of the present and future generations.” It also imposes a fundamental duty of every citizen to contribute to the protection of the natural environment, conservation of the rich biodiversity and prevention of all forms of ecological degradation. Article 5(2) mandates the government to protect, conserve and improve the pristine environment and prevent pollution and ecological degradation and ensure a safe and healthy environment. This makes both the citizens and government protect the environment and prevent pollution. Bhutan has enacted numerous legislations, adopted policies and strategies to address waste and prevent pollution and one was a plastic ban. History tells us that it has been more than two decades since the plastic ban was initiated and yet today, plastic

forms one of the major wastes. This means both the citizens and government have failed in our constitutional duty. This calls for alternatives to what we have done thus far.

While Bhutan's international commitments are much appreciated, the local impact of our commitments is not as per our expectations. The successive governments have used the same tactics in addressing plastic waste and we continue to face the serious challenge of regulating plastic wastes. With the ever-increasing in import of goods from household items to construction materials to groceries to clothing, almost everything comes in packaging. Plastic forms the major packaging material.

If one talks to people involved in managing the waste, it is not encouraging. For example, to address e-waste—mainly plastic, semi-metallic or non-degradable wastes, the Ministry of Information and Communication is supposed to monitor but waste managers have neither seen them visiting their dump yards nor any guidelines or solutions to address this waste. The sorting of this waste is solely left to the waste managers. While many Bhutanese officials rush outside to see waste segregation facilities, when a similar plant was installed in the capital, hardly any government official visited these facilities.

Some even discouraged such facilities without seeing them. One manager states that if it has not been His Majesty's intervention, the loans could have bankrupted the company. The open and unregulated dumping yards above Shaba in Paro and Memeylakha in Thimphu are prime examples of how poorly our regulators are in waste management.

Some of the immediate measures the government should do are to legalize the import of plastic bags with a heavy tax. The free supply of plastics in the vegetable market must stop and instead charge them to discourage the use of plastics. Impose additional taxes on the import of goods with plastic packages especially junk food and bottled water. We have cleaner water here yet import heavily chlorinated bottled water. Government must stop the use of bottled water in any kind of official function. Comprehensive e-waste management is needed urgently. Finally, let us encourage and incentivize including financial accessibility to the waste managers to set up large scale recycling in the country. Let's stop banning because it is ineffective instead regulate with better strategies.

Sonam Tshering
Lawyer, Thimphu

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are author's own.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Judiciary**

The Golden yoke of the Ox

... falls heavily on the judiciary

Tashi Dema

Punishing a senior-most justice of the Supreme Court, a dzongkhag Drangpon and a female for criminal conspiracy and abetting mutiny is what many remember when we look back at the year of the Female Ox.

The year started with the detention of the country's senior-most justice of the Supreme Court (SC), Kuenlay Tshering, Drangpon Yeshey Dorji and a woman, Khandu Wangmo.

They were later convicted for the crime with the detention of the justice raising questions of trial proceedings for constitutional post holders without being impeached.

Kuenlay Tshering's detention without being impeached violated Article 32 of the Constitution, which states that a holder of constitutional offices should first be removed by way of impeachment after which he or she becomes an ordinary

citizen and can be tried for the alleged offences.

Since there is no impeachment Act in the country, the National Judicial Commission was supposed to initiate the impeachment, but it did not happen.

The prosecuting agency, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), justified that the impeachment is for offences that are administrative in nature and committed while executing judicial functions and not for criminal offences.

People also questioned differing sentencing for the same offence or inconsistent court rulings.

The High Court reduced the sentencing for a 56-year-old teacher in Tsirang to 10 years and six months from the Tsirang court's sentence of 30 years for molesting 10 students aged eight to 10.

The HC altered Thimphu dzongkhag court's judgment in the sedition case involving de-

Teacher sentenced to 30 years in prison for child molestation

Choki Wangmo | Tsirang

Tsirang Dzongkhag Court yesterday sentenced a 56-year-

bad touch.

Tsirang police, after investigations, forwarded the case to the Office of the Attorney

amounts to Nu 900,000.

It stated that he has to pay the compensation within a month and if he fails to pay

fendant Khandu Wangmo and increased her prison term to 21 years from a concurrent sentencing of five years.

The year also saw litigants and relatives resorting to social media accusing the judiciary of miscarriage of justice besides, sharing in public, their grievances and frustration about the judicial process.

While the judiciary remained silent on the allegations, many said it opened a floodgate by conducting

hearings after the social media pleas when it was their responsibility to listen to parties.

Leveraging IT

Meanwhile, the pandemic has also given the opportunity for the judiciary to explore and adopt technology to adjudicate cases.

It launched the electronic litigation (eLitigation) platform to expedite judicial process, save time and cost. People also use social media apps to attend court hearings.

Farmers, who are comfortable using Wechat, used it for case hearings.

The judiciary also saw some major reforms like dissolving the larger bench of the High Court, which is seen as a bottleneck in delivering swift justice as many litigants prolonged the resolution of their cases by appealing to the larger bench and then to the Supreme Court.

The removal of the larger bench has shortened the appeal process.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Women and children**

Female Ox year does no good for women and children

Yangyel Lhaden

With the year starting with the second nationwide lockdown, confining people at homes, gender-based violence (GBV) increased by 53.5 percent last year compared to 36.6 percent in 2020, according to records maintained by Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW).

The organization recorded 751 GBV cases as of November last year.

The year also saw various crimes perpetrated against children, where minors were raped, adults made minors fight, and many college students and working women reported of sexual harassment.

The nation was shocked when a 12-year-old child gave birth in Samdrupjongkhar. No one in the family or school knew about her pregnancy.

In Tsirang, a 16-year-old boy was raped. A 56-year-old teacher was convicted for sexually molesting 10 students, aged eight to 10.

In Punakha, a minor student pleaded to the matron



► Royal Patron of RENEW, Her Majesty the Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck was the chief guest at an event to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Paro on November 25, 2021

in the school not to send her home when the stepfather came to take her home. The student confided to the teacher that the stepfather sexually assaults her in front of the mother.

In Sherubtse, 10 students filed a complaint against a lecturer for sexual harassment. In Phuentsholing, nine students

of the College of Science and Technology alleged an assistant professor of alleged sexual assault.

In Thimphu, an employee of the Royal Tutorial Project and an employee of Bhutan Power Corporation alleged of sexual harassment in workplace. The cases have been

forwarded to the court.

In Wangduephodrang, two men and a woman in Nyisho were convicted of making two children, aged six and four, drink. Some men were also detained and later convicted for making two boys fight and uploaded the video on social media.

However, women were not only victims of GBV, but also became perpetrators.

During the second lockdown, 36 men also came forward to seek help from RENEW and National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC).

A woman abused her husband emotionally after he couldn't provide for the family as he lost his job due to the pandemic. In another case, a woman registered a case against her husband but during counselling by RENEW officials, it was found out that man was the victim.

Meanwhile, on the brighter side, emergency shelter homes were established in dzongkhags under the Royal Command of Her Majesty The Gyaltshen during the second lockdown and about 30 women sought emergency shelter along with their children.

During the third local government election, seven women gups, 22 women man-gmis, and 149 women tshogpas were elected last year, increasing the overall women leadership in local governance.

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CALL FOR TENDERS FOR GOVERNMENT TREASURY BILLS

ROYAL MONETARY AUTHORITY OF BHUTAN

Treasury Bills of Nu. 10,000.00 million in the name of the Royal Government of Bhutan is offered for sale. The Bills shall be auctioned under Multi-Price Method and issued through the Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan.

Submission of Tenders : Tenders must be submitted using web-based application link provided on RMA's website not later than **09:30 AM** on **March 8, 2022** and tenders shall be irrevocable after submission.

Treasury Bill No.	Auction/ Settlement date	Days to maturity	Maturity / Settlement date	Amount
R 352	March 8, 2022	91	June 7, 2022	4,000.00 million
R 353	March 8, 2022	56	May 3, 2022	3,000.00 million
R 354	March 8, 2022	28	April 5, 2022	3,000.00 million

Eligibility : Any Bhutanese persons including firms, companies, Corporate bodies, financial institutions, trusts etc. can subscribe the bills.

Bids must be stated in multiples of Nu. 10,000.00 and must be for a minimum of **Nu. 100,000,000.00**

The RMA will have the full discretion to accept or reject any or all the bids either wholly or partially, without assigning any reason.

Management

ANNOUNCEMENT

NATIONAL PENSION AND PROVIDENT FUND

We would like to announce a **PRESTIGIOUS OPEN UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP** (For one slot) for Year 2022 Class XII pass student to pursue an undergraduate study in Actuarial Science in a top-rated world university in Canada / Singapore /UK/USA.

The application process for the open undergraduate scholarship opens from **13th March** and closes on **25th April 2022**.

For complete details, visit www.nppf.org.bt.



CORRIGENDUM

CONSTRUCTION DEVELOPMENT BOARD, THIMPHU

CDB/4/2021-2022/605

This pertains to the notice inviting tender issued dated **February 18, 2022** published in CDB website and **Kuensel** newspaper.

The last date of submission of the Request of Expression of Interest documents for hiring a consultancy firm to formulate a framework document for Construction Quality Compliance Mechanism (CQCM) is hereby extended up to **March 11, 2022** due to revision of ToR and REoI.

The revised ToR and REoI is uploaded in the website www.cdb.gov.bt and for further information and clarification, please call **+975 17563124/ 17431252/ 17337007**.

DIRECTOR

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND



WWF invites applications for the position of **Communications Officer**, WWF Bhutan to be based in Thimphu.

Details about the position can be found in www.wwfbhutan.org.bt. All queries regarding the position may be directed to the HR, WWF Bhutan at telephone nos. **02-323528/323316 ext. 127** or by email to hr@wwfbhutan.org.bt

Interested candidates should submit applications to HR, WWF Bhutan by email to hr@wwfbhutan.org.bt by **4pm** on **Tuesday, 22nd March 2022**.

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted and all further communication on the next steps will be intimated to the shortlisted candidates.

Human Resources, WWF Bhutan

RE-ANNOUNCEMENT

BHUTAN TRUST FUND FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION (BTFC)

Tel (O): 339861, 339862



BTFC/ADM-10/2021-22/296

In view of the uncertainty of lockdown period, BTF would like to request the bidders to visit our website, www.bhutantrustfund.bt for updates on consultancies for BTF Office construction project, or contact Mr. Thinley Wangdi, Project Focal at **17311577**.

Officer in Charge

NU. PER UNIT OF FOREIGN CURRENCY as of yesterday

CURRENCY	NOTES	
	BUYING	SELLING
US \$	74.30	76.65
POUND	99.55	102.35
EURO	83.10	85.45
YEN (100)	64.65	66.50
HK \$	9.50	9.75
AUS \$	53.95	55.50
SING \$	54.75	56.35

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Sudoku

		4	9			8	7	
2	9	6			5			
	3		6	1				9
		9		5			6	7
		2	4		1	3		
1	5			9		2		
6				4	2			1
			8			7	5	3
	8	5			7	6		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

How to play

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3 X 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9.

2	4	9	7	8	1	5	8	6
4	2	1	6	9	8	7	2	3
8	1	6	2	4	9	3	7	5
7	8	1	5	7	2	9	6	4
9	6	8	1	3	9	8	7	2
5	1	4	2	5	7	2	6	4
3	4	3	7	1	4	5	8	6
7	8	2	1	4	5	8	3	6
1	6	2	7	8	5	4	3	1
5	1	4	2	5	7	2	6	4

Answer

Kwik Xword

1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8
9								10						
11						12								
13						14				15				
16		17				18						19		20
21				22				23		24				
25								26						
27								28						

March 3, answers

Across: 1 Browse, 4 Slapdash, 9 Untold, 10 As one man, 12 Question, 13 Pained, 15 Espy, 16 High-flying, 19 In the wings, 20 Flee, 23 Tom-tom, 25 Ding-dong, 27 Mixed bag, 28 Falter, 29 Seminary, 30 Stingy.

Down: 1 Brusque, 2 On the spot, 3 Salute, 5 Lush, 6 Pinnacle, 7 Amman, 8 Hangdog, 11 Politic, 14 Chagrin, 17 Ill-gotten, 18 Beholden, 19 Isthmus, 21 Eagerly, 22 Aghast, 24 Maxim, 26 Fair.

Quick CLUES

Across

- 1 Easily crumbled (7)
- 5 Mediocre (2,5)
- 9 Acquit (7)
- 10 Hand over (7)
- 11 Understanding (5)
- 12 Somewhat (2,1,6)
- 13 A reprimand (7-2)
- 15 Fairly short period (5)
- 16 Fulcrum (5)
- 18 Peremptory (3,2,4)
- 21 Alert (2,3,4)
- 24 Human trunk (5)
- 25 Stranded (7)
- 26 Regular procedure (7)
- 27 Solicitous regard (7)
- 28 Heighten (7)

Down

- 1 Tension-filled (7)
- 2 Put in place for use (7)
- 3 Type of pen for writing (9)
- 4 Choose (5)
- 5 Sole dissenter in group (3,3,3)
- 6 Find answer to (5)
- 7 Daydreaming (7)
- 8 Bizarre (7)
- 14 Talk at tedious length (2,2,3,2)
- 15 Person easily manipulated (4,5)
- 16 Matter-of-fact (7)
- 17 Experienced soldier (7)
- 19 Indict before tribunal (7)
- 20 Area of bishop's jurisdiction (7)
- 22 To dodge (5)
- 23 Substantial (5)

Solution on Tuesday

Health Capsule



WHAT DOES THE LIVER DO?

I DON'T CARE, AS LONG AS IT KEEPS WORKING.



A LOT. IT STORES VITAMINS, PRODUCES PROTEINS AND PRODUCES AND SECRETES BILE FOR PROTEIN DIGESTION. IT ALSO CLEANS AND DETOXIFIES ALMOST TWO QUARTS OF BLOOD IN JUST ONE MINUTE.

Health Capsules is not intended to be of a diagnostic nature.

BHUTAN 25 YEARS AGO

Semtokha Rigzhung to be upgraded

March 8, 1997: In a move to preserve Bhutan's religious, cultural, and literary heritage, the Semtokha Rigzhung has introduced a new curriculum for Classes XI and XII, and also announced the decision to develop the Rigzhung into a tertiary institution for traditional studies.

WIZARD



Rebus



Split Personality

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **CULTURE**

Bhutanese culture in 2021

Thinley Namgay

The year 2021 witnessed significant developments in the areas of Bhutan's culture and tradition.

In October, the Department of Culture identified Nobgang village in Punakha as an important cultural site. The village has a unique house designs, locally known as Kabu-Dharcham.

This pilot project is expected to bring other relatively unknown historical sites into the limelight.

Bhutan also added one new museum to its list. In July, the National Library and Archives of Bhutan opened a traditional print heritage museum in Thimphu.

The museum is expected to help preserve the traditional printing culture that includes the art of paper making, calligraphy and woodblock engraving, among others.

Dzongs play an essential role in preserving our culture and tradition.

October saw the installation of the much-awaited serto (golden pinnacle) of the *utse* (centre tower) on Lingzhi Yue-Gyal Dzong.

Leytshog Lopen of the

Central Monastic Body, Sangay Dorji, presided over the installation ceremony. Coinciding with the ceremony, the newly built Thongdrel of Zhabdrung Phunsumtshogpa has been consecrated.

Lingzhi Dzong, located about 4,300 metres above sea level, showcases authentic Bhutanese architecture. The third Druk Desi Chogyal Minjur Tenpa built the dzong to commemorate the victory over a Tibetan invasion in 1668.

Lingzhi Dzong used to house both the drungkhag administration and monastic body until it was damaged by an earthquake in September 2011. The reconstruction works on the dzong began in March 2018.

The year 2021 saw a boom in textile-related activities in the country.

One of the main activities in 2021 was an exhibition called "Hingtham: Weaving from the Heart, A Capsule Collection", in December. An exhibition was launched by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck at the Royal Textile Academy in Thimphu.

The exhibition show-



► Her Majesty the Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck and Her Royal Highness Princess Euphelma Choden Wangchuck launched an exhibition called "Hingtham: Weaving from the Heart, A Capsule Collection" at the Royal Textile Academy in Thimphu.

cased products made from local textiles such as rugs, cushion covers, futon mats, and shawls. Raw materials to make natural dye and fibres, and looms were also on display.

Designers, textile companies, and civil society organisations representing over 200

artisans in Bhutan participated in the exhibition.

The first South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) children's day was held at the Royal Academy of Performing Arts in December in Thimphu. Close to 70 students from Thimphu were engaged in

the celebration. Traditional games such as archery, *khuru*, *sogsum*, and shotput were introduced to the students.

The SAARC children's day marked the importance of imparting Bhutanese culture to the younger generations.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Tourism**

OX year: Dry year for tourism sector

Phurpa Lhamo

As the tourism sector moved forward from a disappointing 2020, the hope was that 2021 would be different.

The year began with the endorsement of the first tourism policy to ensure activities throughout the year. However, as days wore on, the sector saw its hopes wane and activities dwindle.

The budget report 2020 showed that revenue from the tourism sector declined by 41 percent in 2019-2020 compared with that of 2018-2019.

By 2020, arrivals dropped by 91 percent from 315,599 visitors in 2019 to 29,812 in 2020.



► Fran Bak with Gembo and Tashi Tshering

Similarly, gross receipts decreased by 92 percent, reaching USD 19.84 million in 2020 from USD 225.87 million in 2019. Direct revenue declined by 90.4 percent

to USD 2.76 million in 2020 from 23.42 million in the previous year.

The year 2021 saw the arrival of first tourist, Fran Bak from America only in

September.

Her entrance in the country was particularly remarkable as Bhutan had imposed the 21-day compulsory quarantine period for unvaccinated tourists and 14-day days for those who were vaccinated.

But pandemic also brought some urgent lessons and reforms in the sector. As the year came to an end, the SDF fee of USD 65 for international tourists and Nu 1,200 for regional tourists was lifted for days spent in quarantine.

The Office of Attorney General (OAG) interpreted the Tourism Levy Act 2020, which was earlier silent on the topic.

Further, discussion ensued with regard to issuance of one-time tourist visa tariff. However, the suggestion wasn't accepted.

In many aspects, pandemic hit those in the tourism sector the worst. In 2020, more than 11,000 individuals in the tourism sector were recipients of the Druk Gyalpo's relief kidu.

To address much of these issues, the infrastructure and product diversification plans was introduced. This meant infrastructure development of tourist sites to engage those who lost their jobs.

As the bold tiger stride in, only time will tell if the sector will rise like the Phoenix.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Climate**

Earth sweats as climate agenda take a back seat

Choki Wangmo | Tsirang

Climate

The World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) 2021 state of the climate report states that in the past 10 years, conflict, extreme weather events and economic shocks have increased in frequency and intensity, further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the greenhouse gas concentrations reached new highs last year, countries across the globe reported extreme weather events with major localised impacts. The situation was no different in Bhutan.

National reports have shown that the rainfall and temperature are rising in Bhutan, with Punakha recording the highest daily maximum temperature at 37.5°C. At the same time, Haa recorded the lowest daily minimum temperature at -12.0°C.

Currently, the six datasets used by WMO in the analysis place 2021 as the sixth or seventh warmest year on record globally.

The impact, however, is felt by the farmers. With the rapid drying up of drinking and irrigation water sources, farmers are leaving their land fallow, seeking better opportunities in



► Climate change impacts make cardamom farming a less predictable livelihood

other sectors. In the country, a total of 147 water sources have dried and 2,317 are drying up. Cardamom farmers are no longer able to harvest a good yield due to increasing heat and moisture. This might put the livelihood of cash crop farmers at risk.

As climate changes, experts say that there is the increasing emergence of invasive species in Bhutan's forest. For example, blue pine encroaching into spruce, maple, and birch forests.

Experts and studies have warned that Bhutan's greenhouse gas emissions will rise if nothing changes. The green-

house gas emission is highest from the transport sector, calling for sustainable transport mechanisms.

The risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood is ever lingering with 567 glacial lakes within the four river basins of Bhutan, of which 17 are potentially dangerous.

Last year, the world witnessed the most dangerous floods in Uttarakhand in India. The devastation caused should remind the Bhutanese authorities about the vulnerability of the fragile mountain ecosystem in the Himalayas and the probability of such climate-induced

events in Bhutan. Considering the similar landscapes, topography, and hydropower development activities along basins, the probability of such events in the country is high, experts warn.

There were some local initiatives towards including climate in the national dialogue.

Bhutan launched the first climate series to raise climate awareness and ambitions. The Snowman Race Secretariat launched the '41 Fun Challenge for Climate Action' to create awareness, generate actions, and commitments for climate action.

Environment

As the chair of the Least Developed Countries, Bhutan called for increased climate finance support ahead of the COP26 last year.

The National Environment Commission introduced a new licensing system for Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) importers under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol which Bhutan ratified in 2019.

In 2021, the country reported a record number of waterbirds in Babesa sewerage in Thimphu. A lost species of rhododendron, *Rhododendron Pogonophyllum* was rediscovered from Trongsa. The Samtse

forest division recorded the first sighting of an adult male tiger in a remote camera trap.

However, everything is not faring well in the country that prides on its environment, calling for concerted conservation efforts. For the first time in decades, no herons in Phochu and Mochu in Punakha, the herons' oldest habitat. This was attributed to the habitat disturbance caused by activities in the hydropower projects.

Royal Society for Protection of Nature is calling for nature-based solutions for heron conservation.

Studies warn that Thimphu city's forest cover could reduce to 16.32 percent by 2050. The capital's waste production doubled during the lockdown. As the country fights the mounting plastic waste every year, Bhutan's plastic ban remained on paper.

To address human-wildlife conflict, World Wildlife Fund Bhutan has recommended the need for integrated risk management approaches. However, without a proper insurance system in place, farmers in the central parts of the country still worry about losing more of their livestock to tigers in the Year of the Tiger.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Renewable energy**

Country embraces alternate renewable energy

Yangyel Lhaden

Bhutan has huge potential in renewable energy but it imports energy during the lean season. While it produces energy from renewables, 78 percent of the country's energy consumption is met by fossil fuel, largely for the transportation sector.

The year of the Female Ox has witnessed a major shift in embracing solar energy through solar farms, pilot demonstration of solar energy, electrification of Aja Ney with solar energy and the National Assembly endorsing to join in International Solar Alliance.

However, the renewable energy department (DRE) had to forego establishing a 30 megawatt (MW) plant in Shingkhar, Bumthang after it could not obtain community clearance. The department identified 114

acres out of 800 acres available pastureland to construct 80,000 solar panels but in vain. Shingkhar villagers were reluctant to part with their pasture land.

The ministry decided to construct the first solar power plant of 17 MW at Sepyhu, Wangdue this year. DRE has also identified seven sites that have a capacity to generate 308 MW.

DRE launched the first 180 kilowatt (KW) solar power plant in Rubesa, Wangdue. The first of its kind as the energy generated from the plant is feeding electricity into the national grid for distribution.

For the first phase of renewable energy demonstration, DRE launched an 11.7-kilowatt grid-tied solar photovoltaic car park which supplies energy to a building to complement energy from hydropower and solar water heating system to heat



► The proposed solar project in Shingkhar in Bumthang

water which is connected to the economic affairs ministry's canteen.

The initiative was to gather data and study the impact of solar energy.

Aja Ney under Shermuhung gewog in Mongar is the first place in the country to get electricity from the Solar photovoltaic system of 80 KW. It

falls under Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary and to electrify by hydropower was dropped in earlier two Plans.

The pandemic hampered the electric vehicle (EV) project which aims to replace 300 taxis by the end of the year as it delayed the arrival of the vehicles. As of February, this year, there are 71 EVs through the project.

Through the project, 25 charging stations were installed in 15 locations across six dzongkhags- Thimphu, Paro, Punakha, Haa, Chukha, and Wangdue. The government also approved Nu 69M to co-fund the project and install charging stations. By end of this year, the remaining 14 dzongkhags would have two charging stations each.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR



His Royal Highness Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, the President of the Bhutan Olympic Committee and member of the International Olympic Committee, met with the athletes, coaches and officials

- MAY 7, 2021** Home Minister resigned officially
- MAY 26, 2021** Bhutan receives 5,850 Pfizer doses through the COVAX Facility
- APRIL 29, 2021** Thromde Election held 
- JUNE 15, 2021** One of the worst tragedies claims 10 lives in Laya
- JULY 5, 2021** Samtse records its first tiger sighting
- JULY 14, 2021** Bhutan decides to go with mix and match vaccines
- JULY 22, 2021** Tala shut down costs millions in revenue
- JULY 30, 2021** Children in nine dzongkhags receive Covid-19 vaccine
- SEPT 9, 2021** His Majesty grants dhar to new layog lyonpo and others
- NOV 10, 2021** High Court increases Bumden Khandu's prison term from 5 to 21 years
- DEC 23, 2021** Third LG elections concluded successfully
- JAN 1, 2022** Karma Feed compensates Nu 48 M for feed contamination
- JAN 11, 2022** Government decides to import chillies
- JAN 17, 2022** Massive Covid-19 screening across 14 dzongkhags after local case emerges in Wangdue
- FEB 7, 2022** Surprise snow in low-lying regions
- FEB 21, 2022** Covid-19 claims sixth life
- FEB 28, 2022** Around 26,800 students begin board exams today



IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Phuentsholing**

The lockdown capital of Bhutan

Rajesh Rai | Phuentsholing

On the evening of April 16, 2021, when a 10-year-old schoolboy tested positive for Covid-19 from the community in Phuentsholing, little did its residents know about the long journey they were to take clinging by the tail of the Iron Female Ox year.

People shut their homes with a firm belief the lockdown would end within 21 days at the most.

But Phuentsholing opened only on August 10, 2021, after nearly four months of lockdown. It is considered by many as the longest lockdown in the world.

After the lockdown, about 14 days later, a mass testing commenced and brought some hope to the residents. But their hopes quickly crashed as community cases surged even as the testing was carried out. The initially quiet residents raised complaints.

While Phuentsholing residents showed resilience against Covid-19, many among the approximately 33,000 people faced financial burden and mental trauma, as the lockdown extended beyond two months.

Many of them lived on a meagre salary or daily wage in small enterprises in the private sector. This came amidst mounting pressure to pay rents for shops and houses without any income. Soon, people started to form group chats on social media forums and started raising their concerns.

Only a few got waivers or discounts on house rents. Many left Phuentsholing.

By the end of July 2021, residents of Phuentsholing had gone through three mass screenings. Every time more community cases emerged.

Between the lockdowns in April, the thromde residents re-elected their former thrompon Uttar Kumar Rai and gave him a second term.

He nearly lost to his childhood friend, Tashi



► After Phuentsholing opened up on August 10, 2021, after nearly four months of lockdown



Wangchuk in the Damgnoi Zomdu from his demkhong. After that, he wrestled a comfortable win against his three competitors securing nearly half of the total votes cast on the poll day.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) carried out rigorous investigations on alleged corruption related to bribery and other practices at the Mini Dry Port (MDP) and truck parking (temporary) ports. It revealed deep-rooted corruption practices from MDP. It was reported many were allegedly involved in smuggling contrabands and tobacco.

As the year saw numerous lockdowns, parents continued to worry about the education of their children. Students from

Class IX to XII were sent to other districts to continue, the remaining students had completed most of their schooling learning through online classes in 2020.

The 2021 academic session started with students attending schools in Phuentsholing. Parents realised their mistake soon. By mid of August 2021, students from Class IX to XII were again relocated to Punakha and the rest continued their learning online.

Many parents who didn't have access to laptops and smartphones, which affected the online classes of many children. Some teachers and a bikers' group even searched and donated smartphones.

When Phuentsholing lifted all restrictions on August

10, positive cases emerged in the same evening from a health facility functioning in a containment mode and shutting it down again. However, the authorities continued with the relaxation after the three-day blackout period.

From then on, to many people's surprise, the journey with the Iron Female Ox was comfortable, without a single community case until the emergence of the Omicron on January 7, 2022. Many believe it was the second dose that helped their immunity.

After the town went into lockdown on April 17, records with Phuentsholing Thromde showed about 4,129 people were facilitated to travel to Thimphu, Paro, and Wangdue as of August 12, 2021.

However, this was inclusive of those who left the bordering town after they were stranded when the third lockdown started in April. Soon, the number climbed to 8,000. It also included those who left on official or personal reasons and returned.

From August 10, 2021, to January 7, 2022, residents witnessed a calm period. But everything changed on January 7, 2022. An expatriate woman tested positive for Omicron. She worked at Lucky Bar and Restaurant in the heart of the town.

A three-day shutdown was initiated after which the SC19TF started a phase-wise opening. Just as normalcy returned, two more tested positive on January 14. Soon more cases were detected and subsequently, a lockdown was announced on January 16.

The notorious Iron Female Ox with her iron toes raced again bringing dark days for people of Phuentsholing. This time, because it was Omicron, the speed of transmission was faster.

A 47-year-old with underlying health conditions died with Omicron in Phuentsholing.

The SC-19TF faced pressure from the residents as the lockdown continued with community cases emerging every day.

Mass testing was initiated on February 16, after the town was put under a complete lockdown on February 6. In the meantime, the quarantine strategy changed. The task force was running short of quarantine facilities. Primary contacts, and later, even the positive cases were kept under home quarantine and it continues to date.

Just before the end of Iron Female Ox, the SC-19TF announced the third phase of the relaxation. People were allowed to move from one mega zone to another. All businesses could open.

The Water Male Tiger Year brought hope to her people, as the Prime Minister announced major changes in the management of the pandemic on the eve of Losar.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **RCSC**

RCSC takes major step towards civil service reforms

Phurpa Lhamo

For Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), the Female Iron Ox year will be remembered for its bold reforms, which came after the Royal Kasho.

In 2021, many of the RCSC's announcements and decisions shocked and left most civil servants disgruntled.

It began with the removal of around 500 positions in civil service as part of the 12th five-year plan staffing and organisation. While many affected raised their disappointment over the decision, RCSC stuck to its decision.

As part of the civil service reforms, training of over 100 civil servants at the Center of Bhutan Studies (CBS) in research also began last year.

This is to improve research capabilities and further help in better

50% of top civil servants fail RCSC's leadership assessment

Some could be moved out, demoted or offered retirement

Phurpa Lhamo

In the first Leadership Assessment Exercise, 50% of top civil

and recognise those who were able to perform. "Those who demonstrate that they are not able to perform

ity to assume expanded roles.

It is unknown who among the secretaries and director generals had performed well or

decision-making when the civil servants return to their agencies.

RCSC is also engaged in various programmes to ensure leadership training and workshops.

The RCSC introduced the leadership statement (LS), which include strategies and tasks that are beyond the department

or agency's annual performance agreement target. With LS came the Support Functions Assessment (SuFA) to enable senior management in the agencies to assess areas where they are performing well and learn from it.

This Ox year, RCSC redeployed over 180 civil servants. This year's rede-

ployment was stringent.

As the year advanced, the public realised these decisions were only a build up towards the assessment of the executives. In the first ever leadership assessment of the executives, of 62 executives in the levels of secretaries, directors-general, and dzongdags, 50 percent failed.

More than the failure rate, it was RCSC's decision to manage out those who failed which really shocked the nation. The decision meant demotion, change of career path, and moving the civil servants out of the current position.

RCSC's leadership assessment results came a month after His Majesty The King's speech during the national day in which 'accountability' was a key theme.

When the RCSC shelled out the decision, many welcomed and felt that the decision was much awaited.

After about a month, RCSC assessed the directors and shared that those who failed would suffer similar fate. RCSC also iterated that those who perform well would be rewarded.

RCSC will continue to make headlines and surprise the readers in the Male Iron Tiger year.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Thimphu**

Thimphu in 2021 had some achievements to count

Thinley Namgay

Despite inconveniences caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Thimphu saw some changes and achievements in 2021.

Thimphu got two female gups after the third local government (LG) election in December, inspiring women to take part in leadership roles.

Women gups today comprise 25 percent representation in the dzongkhag Tshogdu (DT), one of the highest among dzongkhags.

Former mangmi Sonam Zangmo is the gup of Chang gewog, and Tandin Pema was elected gup from Maedwang gewog. Tandin Pema had served as gup in the first LG election.

Sonam Zangmo and Tandin Pema were the only two gup candidates from 22 during the *dhamngoi zomdus* that ended on November 14.

The Thimphu dzongkhag in 2021 gave impor-

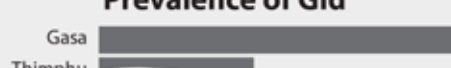
Gid kills more than 1,000 yaks yearly

Thinley Namgay

More than 1,000 yaks die in the highland communities every year due to the gid disease per the record of the Highland

matter of dogs containing parasites. Another reason could be dog bite. If the virus affects the left

Prevalence of Gid



every year in the country as per our record.

He said that livestock department plan to eliminate gid disease in yaks by 2027

tance to its highlanders.

DT in September approved increased rates for porter-pony services for the highland communities of Lingzhi, Soe and Naro.

One of the main sources of income for highlanders continues to be porter-pony services that they provide for the government, tourists and local commuters.

The DT revised the daily porter charges to Nu 500 and Nu 700 for pony services.

For better connectivity, the DT in April decided that remote Chebisa village under Lingzhi will get B-mobile 4G network.

However, highlanders also had to grapple with some challenges.

Lingzhi community lost more than 100 yaks due to the gid disease. Locally known as *guyoom*, gid is a central nervous system disease caused by the larval stage of the tapeworm *taenia multiceps*, which infects animal's small intestine. The virus affects the brains of young yaks aged one to three years and kills them painfully.

One of the main concerns around the country amid the pandemic was the continuity of education for the students. Thimphu

dzongkhag did quite well in this field.

The dzongkhag education sector successfully facilitated classes X and XII students to study in the self-containment zone to prepare for their board exams.

Necessary arrangements such as classrooms, bedding, drinking water, kitchen, and ICT were put in place before calling students in the school. During that time, 408 class X and XII students were engaged at Khasadrapchu MSS, Kuzhugchen MSS, Wangbama Central School, and Yangchengatshel MSS.

While many youths in

Thimphu lost jobs due to the pandemic, others found their ways and took advantage of the pandemic. Youths started commercial oyster mushroom farming.

Chencho Thinley set up a commendable oyster mushroom farm at Wangsisina in July after availing a loan of Nu 500,000 from the national CSI bank. He earns Nu 400 per Kg of mushroom.

But the year had some challenges for Thimphu, too.

With the growing populations in Thimphu, social issues such as lack of adequate drinking water, high house rent and unemployment surged in 2021.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Politics**

Not much politicking in the year of the Ox

MB Subba

The tenure of the government entered the third year, but the Covid-19 pandemic limited political activities last year.

Apart from the bye-elections there were not many political activities. The party presidents of Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) and Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) did not visit the constituencies to campaign although the past year saw three bye-elections.

The DNT increased its seats in the House from 31 to 33 last year. It won the Nganglam and Khamdang Ramjar constituencies as new seats in the National Assembly, while it retained the Mongar constituency. DNT officials said that the bye-elections were an indication that people

were happy with the performance of the government.

Parties outside Parliament made their presence felt and kept a check on the government questioning decisions and policies. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) in November accused the finance minister of "recklessly misusing" Nu 19 from the General Reserve (GR) to meet the capital expenditure of gewogs in Paro in the financial year 2020-21. The party called on concerned agencies to correct the wrongdoing of the finance minister and hold him accountable. The Opposition Party also accused the government of policy corruption and violating the Constitution and public finance resource allocation formula (RAF).

The change in the Cabinet

- former labour minister Ugyen Dorji becoming the home minister in September last year and the new Nganglam MP, Karma Dorji the new labour minister didn't bode well with some in the DNT.

Some members from the ruling party expressed dissatisfaction on the government's move while some serving MPs said that they had expected one of the senior MPs to be appointed as a new minister. A voice clip in which a person claiming to be a DNT supporter from Athang-Thedtsho constituency said he would not support the ruling party in the upcoming election after the appointment of the new minister.

One of the vice presidents of DPT, Lily Wangchuk, resigned from the party in August last year.

As she was not elected, she said her positive contributions to the party from within became challenging. She said that she could not contribute to the nation as much as she wanted.

In another development, the DPT appointed former executive director of the Guide Association, Sonam Tashi, as its new Secretary General in August 2021. He is also a former journalist.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) also appointed former journalist Kuenga Tashi as its new secretary general in July last year.

Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party (BKP) remained silent most part of the year.

BKP in July 2021 was featured on the national TV where the party claimed that it will not

only take part in the next parliamentary elections but would win the 2023 election. The party did not come into the limelight since.

The People's Democratic Party in September last year criticised the government for implementing the new academic assessment criteria midway this year. The Opposition Party raised its concerns over the ruling party's proposal to 'discontinue drafting the Five-Year Plan'.

The DPT questioned the 'abrupt' decision to discontinue the 'time-tested' development planning tradition of preparing a draft Five-Year Plans. It stated that the change would have huge implications, seriously disrupting the socio-economic development and overall governance of the country.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Election**

A year of elections

Dechen Dolkar

Never were so many elections held in a short period as it was done in the Female Ox Year. The year witnessed three bye-elections for constituencies of the National Assembly, third local government elections, and the third thromde elections.

In April, last year, voters of Thimphu and Gelephu chose new thrompons over the incumbent ones. A former urban planner of the thromde office, Ugyen Dorji was elected in Thimphu, and Gelephu thromde has elected Tshering Norbu, a contractor. Phuntsholing gave another five-year term to Thrompon Uttar Kumar Rai.

Unlike normal situations, the election in Phuntsholing thromde was held during a lockdown, election officials collected votes from door to door services.

On June 29, the bye-elections of Mongar and Nganglam constituencies were held.

After 13 years and four rounds of elections, the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa's (DPT) stronghold in Pemagatshel is broken. Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) candidate Karma Dorji, secured 2,951 votes to DPT candidate Richen Pelzang's 2,285 votes.

Similarly, Mongar constituency DNT candidate Karma Lhamo, a former DPT MP,



► Voters queue to vote at a *dhamngoi zomdu* in Gelephu in 2021

won the bye-election with 4,149 against 2,035 of DPT candidate Dorji Youden.

The former home minister and Mongar MP, Dasho Sherub Gyeltshen resigned on May 6 after both the Prime Minister and Speaker of the National Assembly accepted his resignation.

The larger bench of the High Court sentenced him to two months in prison for claiming false vehicle insurance worth Nu 226,546. The crime took place after he superannuated from the civil service and before he joined DNT to contest in the third parliamentary elections.

The former Nganglam MP Choida Jamtsho from Pemagatshel died on the night of April 18 after consuming a curry made of

some wild plant in Baelangdra, Wangduephodrang.

On December 24, the third LG elections were held in all gewogs across the country.

The Royal Audit Authority (RAA) revoked the audit clearance of nine LG candidates in November disqualifying them from participating in the LG elections. It was revoked because the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) had written to authority saying that the individuals have cases against them.

However, seven of the nine local leader candidates, whose audit clearances were revoked, appealed to the High Court on November 29. The court dismissed their plea saying that the court does not have jurisdiction to question the legality of any

decision taken or given by the election commission.

RAA on December 6 reinstated the audit clearances of the nine candidates following a letter from the ACC. The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) then rescheduled elections in the eight affected gewogs on January 6.

Third LG elections recorded the highest voter turnout so far with 68.42 percent. It also saw eight candidates with master's degrees contesting for posts of gup and mangmi.

Third LG elections also saw increasing women participation and elected in various posts. From a lone woman gup, which represented 0.5 percent in the first LG elections to two women gups, which was 0.98 percent in

the second LG elections, the third elected seven women gups, making it 3.41 percent.

In the first LG elections in 2011, 165 women contested for various posts. In the second LG elections, more than 200 contested. The third LG election saw about 491 women contest for various LG posts.

Meanwhile, the voters and candidates were reportedly frustrated with the commission for the delay in declaring provisional results on the poll day. Many knew about the results only the next day. It was learned that the ECB system got crushed and SMS application was not working properly which led to a delay in declaring the result. The ECB declared the official results towards evening the next day.

On February 3, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa candidate Karma Gyeltshen won the Khamdang-Ramjar bye-election with 3,152 votes against Druk Phuensum Tshogpa candidate Jigme Tashi.

Khamdang-Ramjar constituency post was vacant since November 15 after former MP Kuenga Loday from Khamdang-Ramjar tendered his resignation to the speaker.

The MP was sentenced to five years in prison by the Trashiyangtse dzongkhag court on August 14 this year for the illegal construction of a road in a restricted area.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Paro and Haa**

Unprecedented and difficult year for Paro and Haa

Phub Dem

Paro came under the nation's scrutiny with many people blaming it to be the source of Covid-19 that caused the second lockdown.

When the Female Ox Year began, many people questioned the dzongkhag taskforce and the government why a school bus driver in Paro was not quarantined after transporting passengers from the airport to the quarantine centres.

The quarantine lapse, many claimed, led to a full-blown community case in Paro and Thimphu.

The dzongkhag, which is known for the lush green fields, had also faced agricultural-related challenges for the whole year.

Paro, the rice bowl of Bhutan, was hit the hardest by continuous rainfall during the peak harvest season. The rain affected about 793 acres of paddy fields, damaging an estimated 1,945 metric tonnes of rice production.



► Bhutanese returning home at Paro International Airport

About 907 households from 10 gewogs in the dzongkhag known for the vast flatland and rice production was affected.

From losing paddies to natural disasters and potatoes to wild boars, farmers of the two dzongkhags also faced export issues to sell cabbages, acute shortage of carrot and cardamom market.

Poultry farmers of Paro and Haa also lost more than 5,000 birds to feed contamination.

Farmers in Haa and

Paro were disappointed by the price of potatoes, cabbages and carrots and the buyback procedures.

Although Paro has fertile land, some areas remain fallow because of water shortages. Villages like Due-Zhi and Bara in Dopshari gewog, Lholing in Shaba and Tenchekha in Dogar gewog are impacted by water shortage.

An irrigation scheme worth Nu 53 million to benefit two chi-

wogs failed right after its completion. The project expected to benefit 200 households lies defunct for more than five years.

Mounting waste and illegal dumping of waste were the heart of discussion in Paro last year. The valley known for serenity and gateway to international visitors was and still is dealing with the waste problem.

In Haa, the year saw the plight of remote gewogs without reliable health centres and

support staff.

The dzongkhag came to the limelight when a sweeper taught students because of shortage of teachers in Sombaykha.

The remote gewogs also reported poor quality of basic infrastructures such as roads, bridges and health centres.

However, Haa dzongkhag tshogdu stopped mineral exploration in Dorithasa to save the village and red panda from degradation, which came as collective support to protect the natural environment and its ecosystem.

Meanwhile, the Desuung National Service Water project blessed the remote pockets of dzongkhags facing acute water shortages.

The project solved the water woes of Naja in Paro and Tshaphel in Haa.

Paro also elected three women gups last year. Out of 276 candidates contesting for the local government (LG) posts in Haa and Paro, 51 were women candidates.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Tsirang and Dagana**

Not a bountiful year for Tsirang and Dagana

Choki Wangmo | Tsirang

As other dzongkhags reported an increasing number of positive cases and underwent subsequent lockdowns, Tsirang and Dagana dzongkhag remained green zones with zero positive cases.

However, the impact of lockdowns in other dzongkhags, particularly Thimphu and Phuentsholing, was felt strongly by the farmers of Dagana and Tsirang, who faced marketing issues and challenges in exporting their produce.

Ginger, cardamom, quinoa, and mandarin growers were worried about less export; some explored local markets for mandarin. Food Corporation of Bhutan Limited came to the rescue with the ginger buy-back scheme.

The farmers also faced issues with chilli production with delayed harvest due to prolonged monsoon and damaged seedlings.

Farmers in both the dzongkhags reported unidentified disease that affected chilli plants,

leading to yellowing from the tip of the plants and gradual death.

Tsirang also reduced pork production.

Some agri business owners in Tsirang explored new products such as Kiwi wine and jam. A local entrepreneur in Dagana ventured into the first spice production firm in Dagana to address market shortage challenges and reduce spice import in the country.

There were some interventions to help farmers sell local products. Vendors along Sunkosh highway received new sheds which were not only aesthetic but also comfortable.

However, the organic capital's market was filled with imported fruits and vegetables and the local government leaders had asked the dzongkhag administration to control import of vegetables in the dzongkhag.

There were increasing number of rape cases in the dzongkhag with the district court handing out harsh sentence to culprits.

In Dagana, the number of contract farmers increased

drastically with the support of Bhutan Livestock Development Corporation Limited. But the onion growers who took up large-scale onion cultivation to address the shortage in the country suffered losses without proper market facilitation.

As human-wildlife conflict continues to ravage Lhamoidzingkha, residents along with the support of developing partners explored agave plant cultivation to tackle the issue.

Shortage of irrigation and drinking water in both the dzongkhags led to dire consequences with some villagers migrating to other places.

This has led to local government candidates in both these dzongkhags promising adequate drinking and irrigation water supply at the centre of their pledges.

With the implementation of the seventh Desuung National Service water project in Kana in Dagana, more than 1,000 residents of two chiwogs of Khagochen-Dalithang and Pungshi are hoping for sufficient drinking water soon.

Works have also started to revive lakes to solve drinking and irrigation water issues in parts of Dagana.

Damphu Town saw its first swimming pool in 2021. Residents were excited but much needs to be done to facelift the facility, with provision of amenities. The town introduced a new parking system to reduce congestion, which was received well by the public.

Most of the ECCD centres remain closed in Tsirang without facilitators, while working parents struggle to provide proper childcare.

Dagana saw fixing of accountability in public service delivery with the dzongkhag administration penalising contractors compromising the construction quality but the only bus stop in Dagana town remains abandoned after the administration invested millions in construction.

Dagana town residents who travelled four hours back and forth to refuel their vehicles in Dagapela are finally relieved with the news about the con-

struction of the first fuel depot in Tseza gewog.

Education sector and their service delivery in the dzongkhag was affected by shortage of principals. Nearly one in three Dagana schools are functioning without principals.

The pandemic has affected the dzongkhag's tourism promotion plans. Lhamoidzingkha remained under lockdown most part of the year.

While there were talks of 5G in other towns, Dagana residents do not have a proper mobile network and there were problems with television connection as well. They remained cut off.

Almost 90 percent of former local government leaders in both the dzongkhag re-contested in the elections but Dagana chose new faces with only three members making through. Tsirang re-elected former leaders.

Despite increased women participation in the elections, no women candidates from 26 gewogs in Tsirang and Dagana were elected for the gup's position.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Thimphu Thromde**

Thimphu Thromde kept on toes to address city's issue

Yangyel Lhaden

It was a year of change for Thimphu thromde beginning with the change in leadership of the biggest thromde in the country.

Campaigning on the promise of change, the former Deputy Chief Urban Planner, Ugyen Dorji, became the second democratically elected Thrompon of Thimphu. He ousted the former thrompon Kinlay Dorjee in a landslide victory on April 29.

The new Thrompon inherited several problems of which he was a part as the deputy chief urban planner. The biggest sewage treatment plant in Babesa ready for inauguration was shut down after the treatment plant could not treat sewage and did not meet effluent parameters of sewage treatment plant discharge standards of National Environment Commission. The thromde was criticised for rushing for inauguration before the facility was ready. The plant resumed in October with an automated system and thromde officials claim that the plant is able to treat sewage now.

After the controversial decision to decongest the Century Farmers' Market, the Ox year kept the thromde building structures. The thromde constructed vegetable markets in zones across Thimphu. The new markets didn't solve the old problem as both CFM vendors and those selling from the zones kept complaining. Many complaints of business not picking up in zones while CFM vendors were reluctant to leave their spot at CFM. The government allowed operation of CFM at one-third of its capacity angering vendors who left earlier for the zones. The Thromde reduced rent for vegetable markets in the zones.

The construction of the overhead pedestrian bridge in Olakha took more than a year to complete. When it was finally completed in September, the bridge was found to be unstable and a different contractor worked on it to fix it. It finally opened for public use on December 16.

Another change was in the parking fee. Beginning April, the parking fees across all areas in the city was raised to Nu 20 for every 30 minutes. Before the hike, the parking along the Norzin Lam was Nu

Monsoon ~~fire~~Works Display!



15 per 30 minutes and other areas were Nu 10.

The increase drew a lot of criticism from the public and even reached the parliament for intervention. The raise in parking fee was according to a concession agreement signed between KCR Private Limited and Thimphu Thromde which was why the government couldn't reduce the fare. KCR Private Limited manages 943 parking slots in Thimphu city's core area and two MLCPs.

To improve reliability and efficiency of urban public transport, City Bus Services imported 27 new buses equipped with global positioning system and facilities like smart card reader connected with Gakyid Ride application.

Poor drainage system and surface run-off water is an evergreen problem of the city during summer but untimely rain in October last year caused surface run-off water

which destroyed concrete slabs of drainage in Don-drup Lam flooding the road and ground floor meat shop.

The situation became uncontrollable and this forced thromde office to close the road to traffic.

A rusted streetlight pole in Changjiji housing colony injured a woman and she succumbed to injuries after more than eight months of the accident. Her case is still ongoing. Thimphu Dzongkhag has conducted five hearings of the case till date.

Thimphu Thromde came up with redeveloped Norzin Lam Project—streetscaping and revamping drainage system—to execute from November 2021 but it's on hold due to on-going review of Thimphu Structural Plan (TSP). All major developments in Thimphu is on hold and should align with revised TSP.

A highlight of the thromde activity in the year of the Ox was the construction of the four-lane road between Jungshina and Bhutan Telecom Office in Chubachhu. After prolonged delays, the thromde under pressure from public and other sources was able to construct the road by end of October.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Labour**

Labour ministry focus on skilling youth as unemployment rise

Shortage of labourers hampers projects and constructions

Yangyel Lhaden

The labour ministry started the year of Ox with the news of increasing wage rates of Build Bhutan Project (BBP) employees in an effort to make blue collar jobs attractive so that more Bhutanese would join the project to address labour shortage during the pandemic.

The happiness was short-lived for BBP employees. Two months later, it announced that the pay revision would not happen.

Shortage of labourers and difficulties in importing foreign labourers continued to affect the construction industry. Efforts were made to recruit Bhutanese in the

construction sector but it was not successful.

One of the construction projects badly impacted by lack of skilled foreign workers was the ongoing Punatsangchu hydro power projects. Since the start of the pandemic many skilled labourers at Punatsangchu hydropower projects left for their homes and the Punatsangchu management tried to recruit Bhutanese workforce without much success. Many Bhutanese left finding the work difficult, adaptability issues and working environment.

Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) juggled between the labour ministry and

the Prime Minister's office (PMO). PMO handed TVET back to the labour ministry. The most talked about TVET reforms to make it attractive and change the way people look at blue collar jobs finally got approval from the cabinet on July 27, and is being implemented through skills development programmes and BBP.

There were 6,922 youths looking for jobs last year.

An outcome of the labour shortage was the initiative of skilling Bhutanese youth to both create jobs and equip youth with skills. 108 skilling programmes which started from October trained 255 youth jobseekers within two months. The

ministry aims to train 9,000 jobseekers within two years.

The Youth Engagement and Livelihood Programme of the labour ministry has also supported 1,255 youth. BBP under its skilling programmes trained 2,717 youth.

Under de-suups skilling programme more than 1,000 desuups underwent various high-quality skilling programmes in about 45 centres across the country.

After more than a year, the ministry resumed the overseas employment programme with approval from the Cabinet. Until November last year, 139 youths left to work in 16 countries.

The ministry could not

revise the government's pledge to increase national minimum daily wage (NMDW) to Nu 450 last year. The ministry informed the public that it would depend on review and study of NMDW whether there would be changes in NMDW.

The ministry welcomed their new minister, Lyonpo Karma Dorji. He won the bye-election held in Nganglam constituency after the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa candidate died after consuming wild plant on April 18.

The incumbent minister, Lyonpo Ugyen Dorji was appointed as minister of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Agriculture**

Pandemic exposes challenges and opportunities in agriculture

Chhimi Dema

The year 2021 has tested Bhutan's determination in achieving its food self-sufficiency goals. The pandemic further worsened the agricultural marketing gap between farmers and consumers. The egg self-sufficiency status crashed and the winter vegetable programme suffered, forcing the government to import the two items to meet demand.

The second nationwide lockdown in the year exposed the lack of coordination in marketing the produce. Farmers didn't know who to contact to market their produce, and deprived many of their income.

A commercial farmer in Zhemgang called out to the concerned authorities but she was told "there was no market". She is among many who never found a market for their produce. A Thimphu-based vegetable distributor incurred a loss of Nu 0.5 million (M) because of vehicle permit restrictions.

Poor communication between agriculture officials in dzongkhags and farmers became evident as farmers went on to suffer losses. The agriculture ministry roped in FCBL to implement the buy-back vegetables. At one time, the agriculture minister was marketing potatoes on his social media page.

Farmers of Paro faced difficulties to market their cabbages, farmers of Samtse could not

sell their ginger, Gasa farmers could not sell garlic and Zhemgang farmers are struggling to sell chillies.

To encourage the farmers to produce, the government bought from farmers through the buy-back scheme. In 2019, the government bought a total of 50 metric tonnes (MT) farm produce worth Nu 20.74M from the farmers. A total of 3,000 MT produce worth Nu 70M was bought in 2020.

The government incurred a loss of more than Nu 2.7M in buy-back of cabbage, and Nu 30M by FCBL in 2020.

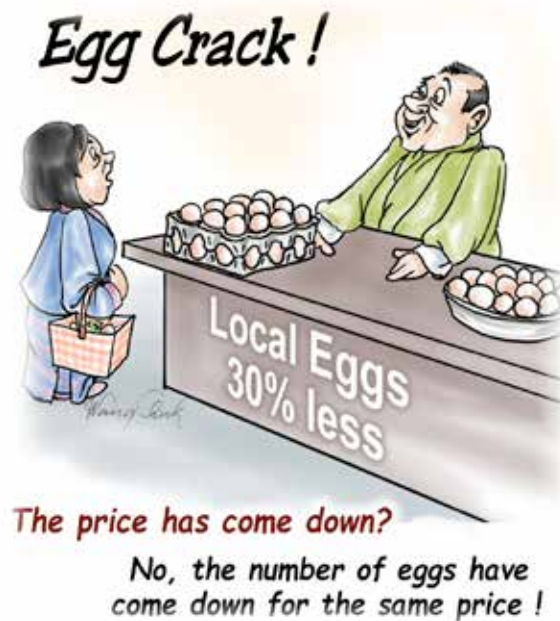
According to the Bhutan Trade Statistics, Bhutan imported 103,872 MT of RNR commodities worth Nu 5,084 million from January to June 2021.

Rice was the major imported commodity (50,921 metric tonnes of rice) among cereals.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests' target to achieve 60 percent rice self-sufficiency in the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP) remained question-able, considering the declining rice self-sufficiency ratio and the constraints facing paddy cultivation. The rice self-sufficiency in 2006 was 58.49 percent which dropped to 34.71 percent in 2019.

To increase rice production, 15,361 acres of land was developed and converted to wetland.

The Ox year began with a shortage of chilli because



incessant rain had damaged nurseries and hampered production. The price of chilli rose to Nu 600 a kg. Consumers complained of vendors taking advantage of the scarcity.

On the other hand, local chilli growers could not find buyers in the capital because the market was flooded with illegally imported chillies.

Price of eggs spiked from Nu 320 to Nu 450 and at times even crossed Nu 500. Pandemic delayed the import of parent stock of layer birds and the death of chicken from the suspected contamination of Karma Feed's poultry feeds caused a shortage of eggs.

The ministry came up with a new RNR Strategy 2040 to address the challenges in the sector through 114 initiatives and 11 strategies.

Big Ticket Initiative was started to substitute the import of livestock products and help increase food security. The initiative created new employments and is expected to reduce imports.

The ministry also started the Dog Population Control Flagship Programme that aims to achieve 100 percent sterilisation of free-roaming dogs, register, and vaccinate all pet dogs, and control feral dogs.

Despite all the adversities the ministry faced, the year of the Water Tiger is expected to be better after the abundant snowfall this winter.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Zhemgang**

Progress for Zhemgang in 2021

...but old problems remain unsolved

Nima

Zhemgang saw improved connectivity in 2021 and, with it, a renewed hopes for the people of Khenrig Namsum.

The completion of bridges (Telangang Chu zam and Samkhara Zam) along the Gelephu-Trongsa highway that connects Zhemgang with central and southern dzongkhags was an important change for the dzongkhag.

Accessibility improved with the completion of road widening and blacktopping works at Ossey bypass road, which is about 27 kilometres away from Gelephu

towards Zhemgang.

The frequent roadblocks at Ossey imposed natural lockdowns in Zhemgang. Farmers in the dzongkhag are yet to draw benefits from the improved infrastructure and accessibility.

While the rest of the dzongkhags in the south and central region struggled to conduct dzongkhag tshogdu last year, Zhemgang went ahead with minimum disruption and delay.

The tshogdu discussed at length the non-utilisation of the capital budget in August last year; local government officials raised concerns about having to discuss the issue frequently.

Despite using all budgets for the development activities, local government officials said it was confusing to learn that all gewogs reporting unutilised budgets during the tshogdu.

About Nu 65.5 million was unused in the fiscal year 2020-2021.

Earthquakes and windstorms damaged private and public infrastructures in all eight gewogs of Zhemgang.

The internal connectivity is still a big hurdle in times of disasters.

Officials from the dzongkhag, gewog, and desuup assessed the damage and provided relief ef-

forts. The windstorm stuck the gewogs in Zhemgang twice in April.

The repeated damage from such catastrophes highlighted the need to invest in resilient private and public infrastructure. The communities were caught unprepared during both incidents on April 5 and 30.

Farmers in Zhemgang continued to face marketing problems in 2021. Farmers in the lower part of Zhemgang ventured into winter chilli production after the country faced an acute shortage of chillies.

However, lack of proper transportation and scattered farmlands were major chal-

lenges for the farmers. Finding a market for the local vegetables is a challenge for the dzongkhag; the pandemic has made it worse.

The year saw local government officials raise their concerns against pooling of engineers to dzongkhag.

The decision overlooked Local Government Act that entitled gewogs to have one engineer, accountant and an administrative officer.

The dzongkhag remained unhurt by the pandemic last year. Only a few cases related to breach of Covid-19 protocols were reported from the lower part of Zhemgang.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Sarpang**

Raging Ox year leaves Sarpang and Gelephu with too many lessons

Nima | Gelephu

While Sarpang survived as the lone dzongkhag in the southern borders to remain unhurt from the Covid-19 outbreaks in 2021, the pandemic gave a heavy jolt to the dzongkhag from Gelephu.

Other dzongkhags along the borders imposed repeated lockdown restrictions but the businesses and people in Sarpang and Gelephu lived relatively normal lives.

As a border town, Gelephu though was constantly reminded of its vulnerabilities. The dzongkhag task force focused on strengthening safety protocols and containment measures.

The pandemic put a stop to some of the country's biggest projects underway in Sarpang Jigmeling industrial park, Gelephu domestic airport, Sarpang-Gelephu corridor, and construction of Royal Boulevard in Gelephu.

Jigmeling Industrial Park is being planned as the country's largest industrial estate. There were ten investors who were ready to start site development works but only one could start working at the site.

The only investor working at the park faced frequent hic-

Escape to nowhere?



cup; there were not enough labourers and procuring required materials became a huge challenge during the lockdown.

The lines of street poles and wide blacktopped roads were frequently dug up for trench line and cable network. Capital and officials clearances continue to be hurdles facing interested investors.

The land price in the dzongkhag, particularly in Gelephu, skyrocketed in 2021. A decimal

of land that was sold for Nu 60,000 five years back was sold at Nu 200,000.

The domestic airport in Gelephu remained idle since the pandemic hit the country. However, the works to upgrade the airport to an international airport took a significant turn last year.

More than 40 landowners took part in the land replacement lucky draw held in Sarpang in October. The substitute

land for over 120 landowners falling within the airport extension was planned in Samtenling Gewog.

The domestic airport currently spreads over 500 acres of land in Samtenling. Once the extension is completed, the airport will occupy more than 700 acres of land in Samtenling.

Feasibility plans, soil testing and other required technical assessment picked up in 2021. The airport is expected to save airlines' business from incurring heavy losses when flights get diverted from Paro International Airport.

Floods in summer damaged water treatment plants and pipelines in Gelephu. The water problem became worse in winter with the water sources drying up. The thromde is yet to find a permanent solution to the annual water woes.

Boulders export from Gelephu gained slow momentum in 2021. The exporters and the agencies concerned worked in collaboration with the organisation in Meghalaya to clear the hurdles along the Indian highways.

The number of active exporters dropped last year. While the trade picked towards the end of the year, lockdown restrictions disrupted the export.

Sarpang became infamous for *tshethar* activities. The rescued animals were left without care, many starving to death.

Local leaders in Sarpang raised concerns over the lack of after-care for animals rescued by *tshethar* tshogpa during the dzongkhag tshogdu in August. The tshogpa's coordinator from the dzongkhag was banned from *tshethar* activities.

When it comes to winter chilli and vegetable production, Sarpang is seen as the hope for the country. The government invested heavily in winter vegetable production in the dzongkhag in 2021.

However, the increased incidents of pest and diseases hampered the progress.

Sarpang has one of the highest numbers of poultry farmers in the country. However, farmers lost over 3,000 birds to contaminated feed in December.

The contaminated feeds were recalled and compensation was rolled out to the affected farmers. The samples were sent abroad to confirm the feed contamination but the year ended without any resolute findings.

The dzongkhag saw the completion of two desuung water projects in Taraythang and Jigmecholing in the Ox year.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Film industry**

New platforms herald opportunities for Bhutanese film industry

Chhimi Dema

In the year 2021, the Bhutanese film industry experienced an evolution with the start of two over-the-top platforms (OTTP), Samuh and Songyala.

Since the pandemic in 2020, film theatres have been closed and the industry suffered losses leaving many unemployed.

Film producers estimated, at the beginning of the year, that the industry suffered a loss of Nu 90 million with the new film releases postponed, film shootings halted, and theatres closed.

With the start of OTTP in the year, the industry let a sigh of relief. The rise of OTTP was the new normal in the world of

entertainment.

An OTTP service is offered directly to viewers via the internet as opposed to the traditional means of a cable or satellite provider. Examples of OTTP include Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, and HBO Now. Today, the platforms are accessed by people from more than 60 countries.

Another change that augmented the rise of OTTP was the signing of a memorandum between the National Film Commission Secretariat and OTTP for the self-regulation of digital content. However, the OTTPs faced copyright violations that they expected from the start.

In less than a month after

Samuh went online, the company saw the first case of its copyright infringement. Three copyright violators together had to pay a total of Nu 0.59 million (M) to Samuh for damages, the prejudices suffered and expenses caused by the infringement, including legal costs.

The year 2021 was also marked with the greater popularity of Bhutanese film in international markets.

The one-minute film "Snow Lion and The Glaciologist" won the Best Documentary Award at the International Mobile Film Festival in Paris. Director Arun Bhattarai portrays a glaciologist, Phuntsho Tshering, with the National Centre for Hydrol-

ogy and Meteorology who goes on foot to inspect the glaciers every year, and what it takes for a small country like Bhutan to protect its community against climate change.

A short film, "Why is the sky dark at night?", was selected in the Wide Angle: Asian Short Film Competition segment at the 26th Busan International Film Festival, South Korea.

The film's director Kelzang Dorjee said that "Why is the sky dark at night?" uses expositions like the superficial side of living in a city, the sad reality of arts and artists alike, and a satirical take on being born into a religion-dominated culture.

The year 2021 was a promis-



ing year for the Bhutanese film industry. What more adds to the promises of the coming year is the news of a Bhutanese film, Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom, making it into the 2021 Oscars nomination. Whether it will go on to win the Oscars will be seen in the Water Tiger Year.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **MoIC**

Enhancing public service delivery through digital platforms

Phub Dem

From Bhutanese children receiving Royal Soelra to the Royal vision of Bhutanese taking advantage of technological advancements, the year saw enhancement of public service delivery through digital platforms.

The information and communications ministry emphasised enhancing public service delivery with transformative initiatives.

It conducted many activities under the Digital Drukyl flagship programme like the development of the electronic patient information system (EPIS), which will streamline the health record of patients and the Bhutan integrated tax system (BITS) under the flagship programme.

While much of IT infrastructure development and initiatives are underway, the country launched the national digital identity, a nationwide programme to collect biometrics to create digital identities.

Besides, the year also saw many services going online, such as the launch of the electronic vehicle quota system for civil and public servants entitled to vehicle quota to process the document online and improve service delivery.

However, the two telecom companies failed to deliver the expected service as internet and mobile services became slow.

While officials from the telcos justified online engagement for work and entertainment have caused frequent internet network congestion, many people expressed frustration.

The two telcos launched the much-hyped 5G (fifth generation) service. However, not all phones can avail the service, and many blame the telcos for poor internet connection and higher data charges.

The Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) even penalised the two telcos for failing to provide quality services in Thimphu.

Besides, the much-awaited decision and talks on establishing the third international gateway did not come through and are awaited.

The Public Accounts Committee recommended putting in place an adequate infrastructure for e-resilience and

speeding up the establishment of the third Internet gateway through Bangladesh.

The committee asked MoIC to frame a strategy to ensure the sustainability of fibre resources and put systems in place to ensure monitoring controls, diligence, and oversight.

Sustainable transport system

Recognising the issues with outdated rules and regulations in the transport sector, the Road Safety and Transport Authority overhauled the laws, repealed the Road Safety and Transport Regulation 1999 and replaced it with a new regulation.

The year highlighted the sustainable transport system in the country through switching cabs and government vehicles to electric vehicles. E-mobility aimed at reducing vehicular pollution, dependence on imported fossil fuel and adverse impact on human health saw 248 electric cars and 33 charging points in the country last year.

The public transport system also saw a significant facelift by introducing 27 new city buses equipped with GPS and facilities like smart card readers connected with the Gakyid Ride app.

Aviation Industry

Inspired by a concept commanded by His Majesty The King, Paro International Airport was transformed into a national aviation facility with a unique identity. The complete makeover introduced Bhutan that balances the best of tradition and modernity and an experience that symbolises change.

Meanwhile, the sector remains the hardest hit by the pandemic. The year 2021 saw a decrease of international passengers by 72 percent compared to 2020. Bhutan Airline and Druk Air reported losses in billions and had to resort to adverse austerity measures.

Drukair employees voluntarily committed to forgoing a certain percentage of the salary as a solitary measure. Other austerity measures include deferment of leave encashment, encouraging staff to leave without pay, extraordinary leave, and strict monitoring of travel and daily allowances.

However, Drukair saw



► The country launched the national digital identity, a nationwide programme to collect biometrics to create digital identities

a gradual increase in domestic passengers' demand since the pandemic as there were no tourist passengers on the domestic routes. The domes-

tic air passengers increased by about 37 percent compared to 2020. A total of 8,899 passengers used the domestic air service last year.

The year also saw Bhutan building its satellite. Three ICT engineers began developing the payload of a joint satellite with ISRO-India.

ANNOUNCEMENT/EXPRESSION OF INTEREST



UNICEF BHUTAN COUNTRY OFFICE

UNICEF Bhutan Country Office is looking for a local consultant to support the international consultant to develop an emergency health financing strategy.

For detail ToR, please contact Laxmi N. Upreti @ lupreti@unicef.org

Qualification:

- Minimum of a Master's degree in economics, health economics, public finance, public health, statistics or related fields. PhD in similar field will be an added value.

Experience:

- Good understanding of the health system in Bhutan.
- Good Knowledge of the public financial management system in Bhutan. Evidence of having carried similar work before, particularly in the health sector will be an added value.
- Excellent analytical skills and track record of teamwork and ability to produce high quality results and outputs under pressure with minimal supervision.
- Strong communication, presentation, coordination and interpersonal skills, including excellent speaking and writing skills in English and Dzongkha.

Interested consultants may submit the following documents to lupreti@unicef.org on or before **20 March 2022**:

- Motivation letter
- CV/P11 form with qualification and experiences. P-11 form available at: <https://www.unicef.org/nicaragua/media/946/file/P11.pdf>
- Approach and methodology for executing the assignment.
- A lump sum fee structure, indicating a breakdown of professional fee for the anticipated number of working days .
- References to similar work, if available.

Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted directly.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Hydropower**

Not the best year for hydropower

Dechen Dolkar

The hydropower sector remained the bedrock of Bhutan's economy during the Covid-19 pandemic but it had its own share of challenges.

A decrease in water flow saw hydropower generation dip 12.7 percent in the first eight months of 2021, compared to a corresponding period in 2020.

Making matters worse, the 1,020MW Tala hydroelectric plant, the biggest plant in the country, was shut down for three days in July with a daily revenue loss of around Nu 55 million. Large chunks of debris due to continuous rainfall for several days clogged the gates of the intake tunnels. The plant has been facing issues ever since.

Again, the plant was shut from the end of December last year to the end of March this year and, the country is likely to lose revenue of about Nu 840 million.

Similarly, the 720MW Mangdechhu power plant in Trongsa lost its turbine number three in September 2020. A flashover has resulted in the burning and carbonisation of stator (a stationary part of a

rotary system) windings and other rotor components inside the generator causing an electric short-circuit.

The generation was resumed in August last year after more than 10 months of maintenance. The shutdown resulted in Nu 3.22 billion revenue loss.

The government launched a new hydropower policy that explores trilateral regional, sub-regional, regional cooperation in developing hydropower projects in the country in April last year. The policy, which supersedes the hydropower policy of 2008, has come with major changes, including the need to promote multipurpose hydropower projects.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the MHPA, Economic Affairs Minister Lknath Sharma received the Brunel Medal. The Brunel Medal is an award given by the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), London to recognise excellence in civil engineering, showcasing excellence in skills, research and innovation.

A contractor in Punatsangchhu Hydroelectric Project I (PHPA I), Larson & Toubro (L&T), appealed to the Delhi



► Shutting down Tala hydroelectric plant for three days in 2021 incur a daily revenue loss of around Nu 55 million

court to resolve issues related to payments and other claims.

L&T had initially approached PI authorities to compensate them Nu 3.91 billion for keeping their machines and human resources idle in 2020. PI's dispute resolution committee established that L&T's Nu 3.91 billion claims were not maintainable.

The detailed project report (DPR) for the construction of a barrage instead of a dam at the Punatsangchhu Hydroelectric Project I (PI) was supposed to be completed by February end.

by February end.

The decision to construct the barrage came after the right bank of the dam experienced multiple landslides. The project witnessed its first slide in July 2013, followed by a slide in August 2016, and another in January 2019. The fate of the PI will be decided after the DPR.

To expedite work progress, the government prioritised the import of labour for PHPA-II in April last year. Due to pandemic-related travel restrictions and strin-

gent Covid-19 protocols, PII was facing a shortage of about 2,000 workers.

The first batch of workers at PII entered through Phuentsholing in April. The second batch came on November 28 and the third batch entered through Gelephu by January 4. The project is expected to complete by July 2023.

Meanwhile, the Construction Development Corporation Limited (CDCL) signed a contract agreement with Kholongchhu Hydro Energy Limited in May for the construction of part of Head Race Tunnel. CDCL is the first contractor for major civil work packages to sign the contract for Kholongchhu Hydropower Project.

However, there is not much progress in tendering for two of the three main civil works of the project: the construction of the dam and the powerhouse. The construction of the Head Race Tunnel has started.

The pandemic and geological issues forced the second deadline extension of 118MW Nikachu Hydroelectric project delaying its completion to 2023.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Private sector**

“Engine of growth” writhing with challenges galore

Thukten Zangpo

With Covid-19 containment measures and lockdowns in place, the so-called private sector, “engine of growth”, continued to take a toll, creating economic hardships for many in 2021.

The lockdowns on April 16, 2021, for all thromdes and satellite towns in the southern dzongkhags and the January 16, 2022 lockdown in 14 districts affected everyday life and businesses severely.

Thankfully, to the relief of many who struggled to get by, Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu in the form of income support, interest waivers, and loan deferment until June 2022 greatly lessened the hardships.

The year also saw a global hike in the price of oil and disruptions in the supply chains

of goods which increased the price of the goods proportionately. The goods became costlier to the people and businesses by 7.35 percent in 2021 compared to 2020.

The construction sector (which contributed 9.5 percent of GDP in 2020) saw the cost escalation of materials by 100 percent and import of labour by 200 percent.

In addition, with the shortage of 13,000 foreign workers in the country due to limited quarantine facilities, the sector came to a grinding halt. The 400-bed temporary quarantine facility constructed on September 30 was helpful in bringing the workers.

Despite the lockdown, the government had to allow constructions to be carried out in containment mode and even announced a one-time

20 percent special advance to contractors at the year-end as support to the sector.

The government also increased the material mobilisation advance payment to contractors from the existing 10 percent to 20 percent of the contract price on March 23, 2021.

With imports limited to only essential goods in the country, the wholesale and retail trade was also affected. The value of import goods fell by Nu 3 billion in the third quarter of the fiscal year (FY) 2020-2021 compared to the same period in FY 2019-2020.

Retail and wholesale trade contributed 10.5 percent of GDP in 2020 and provided 24.1 percent of employment in the country.

Similarly, the manufacturing sector, accommodation,

and food service activities were also affected.

On January 7, 2022, the government ordered the closure of the operation of *drayang*s. The government announced to compensate Nu 1 million (M) to 1.5M to every *drayang* owner. Other entertainment centers were closed temporarily due to the higher risk of Covid-19 transmission.

As a measure to support the private sector, the government reduced the tax rate of 10 percent for small, cottage, and micro-businesses located in border towns of Gelephu, Phuentsholing, Samtse, and Samdrupjongkhar for the income year 2021 on January 30, 2022.

Similarly, the government extended the filing of tax returns for the income year 2021 by a month due to the lock-

down on February 2, 2022.

The year also saw the introduction of a provident fund scheme for private-sector employees by the National Pension and Provident Fund.

The government asked the real property owners to declare their annual rental income correctly when filing personal income tax for the year 2021 on December 24, 2021.

Importers and exporters, similarly, were asked to refrain from undervaluation, misdeclaration, and non-declaration of the import and export consignments.

According to the Royal Monetary Authority, credit to the private sector fell by almost double to 6.9 percent in 2020-21 compared to 13.3 percent in 2019-2020. However, it is estimated to increase to 10.9 percent in 2021-22.

274
Last 24 hours

14,120
Total Cases

4,043
Active Cases

10,071
Recovered

6
Death

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Covid-19**

Covid-19 virus mutation confuses health response

Nima Wangdi

The Female Ox ploughed throughout the year with all her strength and determination, but the coronavirus mutated several times and caused confused responses.

When the rat retired to its burrow, Bhutan only had about 860 people infected with the virus and one death. As the year ended, the country recorded 13,846 cases as of March 3 this year and six deaths. The daily cases spiked to 500 at times.

The year saw Bhutan receiving vaccines as aid, mainly from India and other countries.

Although India had promised to help Bhutan with more vaccines in the later days, they could not do so since there was a sudden surge in the number of daily cases in their own country. Bhutan reached out to other countries for help.

The first vaccination campaign

Bhutan made headlines in international media when it became one of the first countries to administer the first dose of the vaccine.

With more than 500,000 doses of vaccines received from India, Bhutan rolled out vaccines in March last year in a mass campaign mode and 533,558 people were vaccinated in a week-long campaign.

We also received 5,850 doses of Pfizer vaccines from New York in May, which was reserved for the children as it was only the vaccine that the World Health Organization had certified for the children who are 16 years and above then.

The government also ordered some 200,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine from Pfizer Inc., the American multinational pharma-



► More than 32,600 children aged between 12 and 17 years were given the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine in the past two days

the second vaccine that was approved for use in children for this particular age group, health ministry, upon the recommendation of the NITAG, stopped administering Moderna vaccine to the adult population. There were about 50,000 doses of Moderna vaccines left.

Since the vaccine for the children was rolled out according to the risk of places they live in, the 5,000 doses of Pfizer had already been administered to the children in Phuntsholing and Samtse, the two high-risk areas then.

While children in the two high-risk areas received the second dose, children in other dzongkhags also received first and second doses on different dates depending on the risk type of the place they lived.

Vial for Vile!



Now if you can step backwards!

ceutical corporation.

In the second batch of vaccines through the COVAX facility, USA again gave 500,000 doses of Moderna. Denmark provided 250,000 doses; Croatia, Bulgaria and a few other countries gave over 100,000 doses of AstraZeneca. People's Republic of China also gave 50,000 dose of Sinop-

harm.

The second dose of mix and match

Bhutan missed the initial eight -12 weeks deadline for the second dose after the first as the government could not get vaccines as expected. However, government said there is increasing scientific evidences that

say that the gap between the two doses could stretch to 16-20 weeks.

The second dose was administered in July. Since all the people had received AstraZeneca for the first dose, National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) recommended mix and match. Under this model, people were allowed to mix vaccines.

NI-TAG members said that in the wake of the fast-spreading Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, heterologous regime (mixing of vaccines) of vaccination was found to be more effective.

We even shared 230,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines to Nepal after vaccinating 90 percent of the eligible population for the vaccine.

Vaccinating children aged 12-17

With the Drug Regulatory Authority approving the emergency use of Moderna vaccine for the children aged 12-17, vaccine was rolled out starting in July.

Since Moderna was

Booster dose rollout

With the threat of widespread community transmission looming, booster dose was administered to have better protection against the virus.

Booster dose to the priority population started in December. People aged 65 and above, with underlying medical conditions, living in the high-risk areas, children and frontline workers are considered priority population.

It gradually was rolled out to the general public in all the 20 dzongkhags.

The female Ox retired with the Prime Minister, Dr Lotay Tshering, addressing the nation from Gelephu that there will have no lockdowns when we have community cases hereafter.

He, however, claimed that there will be strict lockdowns when Covid-19 patient hospitalisation reaches the hospital bed occupancy threshold and emergence of lethal variants in the future.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Samtse**

The year Samtse struggled

Rajesh Rai | Phuentsholing

When the Male Iron Rat relayed the new year torch to the Female Iron Ox, Samtse, given its porous border and the highest number of protocol breaches in 2020, did not see a single Covid-19 case.

As weird as the nomenclature of the year might sound, the year heaped much bigger problems for Samtse—those its inhabitants were least prepared for.

On May 12, 2021, a couple in Tashichholing, Samtse tested positive for Covid-19 on an antigen test. Later, they tested positive on RT-PCR. This was the dzongkhag's first Covid-19 infection and it was from a busy business centre, a restaurant.

Thereafter, there was no stopping of the virus transmissions and lockdowns.

Samtse then began to see the impact of lockdowns. Doma (areca nut) stock started to rot.

In Tading, several doma suppliers frantically called Kuensel for help. The problems of these few were quickly solved when the economic affairs minister intervened. It was still in May 2021. The problem continued.

By the first week of July, the weight of the Female Iron Ox fell heavy on Samtse farmers as ginger also suffered a similar export problem.

About 7.6 metric tonnes (MT) of ginger belonging to Samtse farmers lay stored in Food Corporation of Bhutan Limited's (FCBL) auction yard as the export from the dzongkhag

stopped. Farmers were desperate because more than 1,000MT of ginger stocks was in the villages. There was 103MT areca nut waiting for export.

A week later, the stocks went up to 120MT of betel nut and 16MT of ginger at FCBL auction yard in Samtse.

The export of betel nuts and ginger were stopped at Chamarchi by the counterpart officials because they were not listed under India's import list. At a closer look, it was the same problem Bhutan faced while exporting potatoes, oranges, and cabbages.

Amidst the fight against the coronavirus, Samtse came on the spotlight when Norgaygang gup and mangmi submitted their resignation in June 2021. The resignation was not accepted.

The resignation was all related to Chugu farm road in Norgaygang's Joenpang-Lingarnang chiwog, which the Samtse dzongkhag administration had alleged was built without approval.

The menace of the Ox didn't stop there.

An eight-year-old girl was allegedly raped in Samtse sending shock waves across the entire nation. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) issued a press release stating its concern about the incident.

"While OAG has continued to prosecute cases referred with utmost due diligence and sought criminal sanctions from the courts, it has now become a grave concern for the OAG



► Samtse town

and Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) with recent cases of the rape of a child as young as 12 and eight years."

It stated that OAG, in collaboration with the RBP, decided to fast-track investigation and prosecution and pursue the highest criminal sanctions against the perpetrators.

Meanwhile, as more positive cases were detected, especially from Gomtu, elephants also took their chances to maraud and destroy in Samtse. When Tashichholing was under lockdown for the fourth time, elephants took their chance.

Elephants, in herds, ran amuck on the highway, fields and in the courtyards threatening lives, properties and trampling crops.

One July morning of 2021, a 62-year-old farmer from Peljorling A was trampled by an elephant and dragged about five metres. He had a narrow escape.

Later, when Covid-19 situation improved, as the Ox year

went by, a herd of 15 elephants destroyed 2.7-acres of paddy that belonged to three farmers in Norbugang, Samtse, on the night of November 22, 2021. The farmers would have harvested and threshed the paddy in about 10 days.

In the wee hours of December 26 last year, an elephant broke into a kitchen in Sin-

geygang village of Tashichholing. An 86-year-old woman and her granddaughter were at the house and they escaped unhurt.

The Iron Female Ox year was truly a year to remember for Samtse.

Samtse also elected nine new gups on December 22, 2021. The other six gup positions were occupied by the former gups.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Samdrupjongkhar and Pemagatshel**

Pandemic wreaks havoc in Samdrupjongkhar and Pemagatshel

Kelzang Wangchuk | Samdrupjongkhar

The pandemic wreaked havoc in rural villages of Jomotsangkha, Samdrupjongkhar in the Female Ox year.

The drungkhag had to go under complete lockdown for more than a month, disrupting farming activities. Villagers, who were put in quarantine, worried about feeding their livestock and agricultural activities as the front-line workers did not allow them to come out from their houses.

The Covid-19 outbreak in the drungkhag was considered a worst-case scenario and it exposed how unprepared the

health system was.

With many policemen, including officers, testing positive for the virus in Samdrupjongkhar, police had to field in officials from Thimphu.

The year also saw an end to the Zangthapelri case between the Samdrupjongkhar thromde and a private individual.

The Supreme Court upheld the High Court judgment and asked the litigants to enforce the judgment within three months, closing the case.

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 situation was similar in Pemagatshel.

The eastern Covid-19 task

force, Dungsam Cement Corporation Limited and a private security service provide embroiled in Covid-19 protocol breach issue after the task force and corporation accused a security guard of being responsible for the virus outbreak in the community.

The security service provider was also imposed a fine of Nu 5 million for the lapses.

It, however, sought intervention from arbitration and asked the task force and the corporation to prove the case.

As the year came to an end, Nganglam saw positive cases on a daily basis and residents blamed the task force for negligence.



Good Day

- to perform Lhabsang Thrusoel
- to appease local deities
- to appoint to new post
- to marry and celebrate
- to enter into new house
- to shift house
- to learn astrology
- to preach and listen
- to hold good discussions

TOMORROW

- to start new business
 - to sow seed
- ### Bad Day
- to till and excavate land
 - to inaugurate military training
 - to appease Naga

A good day for rituals (laza): those born in the dog year.

Generally a good day (sogza): those born in the sheep year.

MARCH 7, MONDAY

Good Day

- to consecrate
- to appease local deities
- to learn astrology
- to appoint to new post
- to hand and take over office
- to start new business
- to enter into new house
- to shift house
- to approach higher authority
- to hold good discussions

- to sow seeds

Bad Day

- to marry
- to appease Naga

A good day for rituals (laza): those born in the snake and horse years.

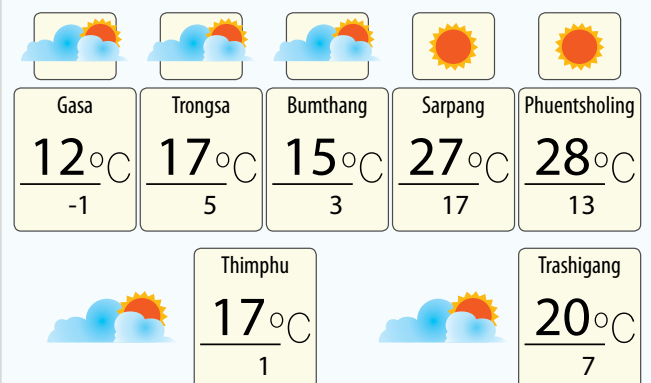
Generally a good day (sogza): those born in the rat and pig years.

A bad day (shedza): those born in the monkey and rooster years.

WEATHER

SUNRISE : 6:28am | SUNSET : 6:02pm

Time of issue: 4:00 PM, March 4, 2021



Source: National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology. For any weather information: Call hotline 335578

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Crime**

Rape cases on the rise

Tshering Palden

Besides the frequent breach in Covid-19 protocols, the number of rapes, especially those of minors, spiked in the Year of the Iron Female Year.

A 12-year old schoolgirl was raped in Samdrupjongkhar. It was only when she was about to deliver the baby that those around her realised about the crime. A man in his late 30s allegedly raped an eight-year-old boy on the way when he was returning home from school.

According to police records, there were 75 rape cases recorded across the country in 2021 an increase of more than 41 percent of cases reported in 2020.

The suspected rape and murder cases of Diana Koirala in Dangrina, Thimphu and another girl in Paro still remained a mystery. Officials said that the police force can do much more with more qualified experts in solving cases and a decent laboratory and forensic equipment.

The police force suffered humiliation when a senior member of its top brass was relieved unceremoniously for failure in his duty.

The Deputy Chief of Police for crime, Colonel Dorji Wangchuk, was terminated with benefits in June after serving a few months of suspension. Police investigation into the conspiracy case and sedition case by Khandu Wangmo revealed that he had tampered with evidence in a different

harassment case where she was involved. He had served for 36 years and would have superannuated this year.

As Covid-19 continued to rage through Phuentsholing in the year of Iron Female Ox, frontline workers at the border kept vigil. On an unsuspecting March morning, a hero emerged.

A Police constable, Suk Raj Suba serving at the Pemaling Out Post in Phuentsholing under Chukha was injured this morning after bravely preventing the entry of miscreants from across the border into the country.

At around 4:30am March 9, Chuma Suk Raj Suba along with Chuma Sonam Wangchuk, De-suup Juna Rai and DeSuup Gita Devi Koirala were on patrol when they saw suspicious movement about 50 metres away from the outpost. Four miscreants were attempting to enter the country. One of the miscreants hit Chuma Suk Raj Suba with a knife (khukuri) injuring his three fingers. Chuma Suk fought back with a stick and the miscreants fled across the border.

In another incident, a policeman was caught on camera calling out to those from across the border to return home for safety and creating awareness about the pandemic. The video became an instant hit on social media, many applauding his vigilance and efforts.

The Female Ox Year also saw many of the weaker sex, also some men, silently become victims of domestic

violence mainly during lockdowns.

According to NCWC and RENEW, there were 76 reports of domestic violence, including nine cases involving male victims, between January and February 2022. Thimphu has the highest number with 31 cases. Other cases came from Wangdue Phodrang, Paro, Chhukha, Bumthang, Gelephu, Samdrup Jongkhar, Punakha, Trongsa, Trashigang, Dagana and Samtse.

The cases are mostly related to emotional and physical abuse and most of them, who sought help were between 25 and 40 years.

The pandemic not only made people ill but also landed many behind bars.

Despite strict rules in place, people still continue to breach Covid protocols. In just a year and a half since the pandemic hit the country, the Police in Thimphu arrested more than 150 people.

Some were caught discreetly travelling on foot during lockdowns. Two men had walked to Punakha from Thimphu. Samtse dzongkhag installed CCTV cameras to monitor compliance to Covid-19 protocols in public spaces.

But it was not just ordinary people who breached the rules.

The health ministry took administrative action against two doctors for breaching the Covid-19 protocol. Their promotions were withheld. A medical officer from Gedu had gone to Phuentsholing to conduct training on Covid-



► Illegal imported chillies seized

Fast and futile?



Take your time buddy !

19 vaccine rollout for health workers in the second week of March. After the training, he returned to Gedu without undergoing the mandatory one week quarantine.

The other doctor facilitated his travel from the high-risk

area to the low-risk area. The ministry notified all health workers to strictly abide by the protocols.

Some were also caught illegally importing chillies and other banned substances like controlled drugs and tobacco.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **MoWHS**

Major infrastructure development plans under review

Chhimi Dema

With the repeated lockdowns in the Year of the Iron Ox, engineers and planners took to strengthening the planning and infrastructure development sector.

Almost 18 years after implementation, the planners began reviewing the Thimphu Structural Plan (TSP) 2002 to 2027. TSP, developed in 2002, is a long-term project spanning a period of 25 years and considered a 'living

document' to ensure proper and efficient implementation of the plan.

The review came following the shortcomings and lack of coordination between agencies in the implementation of TSP. The review is expected to finish by 2030. The redevelopment of the Norzin Lam to align it with the revised TSP.

Taking stock of the TSP 2002 to 2027, assimilation of data, technical studies for groundwa-

ter, hydrology and meteorology, forest cover, and a seismological study have been completed so far. However, the Spatial Planning Bill is now shelved for further review.

The Paro Development Plan and the revised precinct plan were approved in June 2021. The valley development plan, introduced in 2019, aims to promote integrated planning by keeping traditional architectures intact and the cultural landscape preserved.

The construction of an integrated checkpoint at Bumpagang was completed for all vehicles travelling from Phuentsholing to Thimphu highway.

The Asian Development Bank provided support of USD 24 million and USD 6 million for the construction of rental housing units in Nganglam, Phuentsholing, Samdrupjongkhar, Samtse, Thimphu, and Trashiyangtse.

The State of the Nation report states that a total of 893.129km

of farm roads were layered with granular sub-base (GSB) in 128 gewogs in the 20 dzongkhags. A total of 80.12km new farm roads were constructed adding to more than 11,200km along with the construction of 141.74km of chiwog connectivity roads.

The beginning of 2021 was tragic with the collapse of the newly constructed Damchu-Haa highway bridge causing nine lives. The cause of the collapse was unknown.

IRON FEMALE OX YEAR: **Sports**

Sports thrive despite pandemic in 2021

Thinley Namgay

Despite Covid-19 disrupting most of the sporting activities in the country in 2021, sports in general saw achievements and made the country proud.

The nation rejoiced in December last year when Sapuna Subba, a Class XII student of Gesarling Central School in Dagana, took part in badminton competition at the Asian Youth Para Games in Bahrain and bagged two bronze medals for the country. It was Bhutan's maiden participation.

Sapuna competed in the singles and mixed doubles category among participants from 30 Asian countries.

Mani Kumar Rai, a low vision student of Muenselling Institute, Khaling, participated in the men's long jump at that time.

The year 2021 was also noteworthy as Bhutanese 2020 Olympics and Paralympic participants in Japan did their personal best.

Archer Karma, swimmer Sangay Tenzin, shooter Lenchu Kunzang and judoka Ngawang Namgyel represented Bhutan in the Olympics.

Karma lost three straight sets to Deepika Kumari of India. However, she maintained a competitive game with India's number one. Karma's performance was appreciable as the three sets' scores were 26-23, 26-23 and 27-24. One of Karma's arrows hit the 10 pointer ring in the third set, is the highest.

Swimmer Sangay Tenzin completed his 100 metre (m) freestyle in 57.57 seconds (sec). His performance in the Olympics was better than in Thailand. Sangay stood fifth out of seven members in his group.

Mihrac Akkus from Turkey defeated judoka Ngawang Namgyel. Ngawang lost the match in two minutes and 56sec.

Shooter Lenchu Kunzang was eliminated in a 10m Air Rifle Women's Qualification round on July 24. She scored 618.1 points out of 654. Lenchu was ranked 43rd out of 50 shooters.

Para athletes Gyeltshen, Chimi Dema, and Pema Rigsel represented Bhutan for the 2020 Summer Paralympic Games in Japan between August 24 and September 5.



▲ U-19 national football team
▶ Badminton player Sapuna Subba

Their performance was commendable.

Chimi Dema broke her personal best record of 4.51m in the shot put event and set a new record of 5.04m.

On September 4, Gyeltshen also broke his record in the men's F40 shot put event. Gyeltshen threw 6.31m, surpassing his previous record of 6.29m.

After scoring 523 points out of 720 in the ranking round, a 34-year-old para-archer Pema Rigsel lost to the Russian archer Kirill Smirnov 2-6 in the elimination rounds of the men's individual recurve open. From the four sets, Pema Rigsel won one set. Cricket in 2021 became more reputed.

National cricketer Ranjung Mikyo Dorji debuted for the Nepali cricket franchise team, Lalitpur Patriots, in Kathmandu. He became the first Bhutanese to feature in an international cricket club. Women's vice-captain, Anju Gurung, was selected to participate in the first world fair break invitational women's T20 cricket tournament in Hongkong.

The women's national cricket team defeated Kuwait by 40 runs in the 2021 International Cricket Council's T20 World Cup Asia Qualifiers in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, despite brilliant play, the girls lost to Nepal, UAE, Hongkong, and Malaysia.

The construction of the Gelephu international cricket ground is about to be com-

pleted, which can host international matches.

Football continued to grow and inspired youth.

The under-19 national women's football team defeated Sri Lanka 5-0 in Bangladesh's 2021 South Asian Football Federation U-19 Women's Championship. For the first time, the five officials—team manager, head coach, assistant coach, physiotherapist, and media officer who went together with the players in Bangladesh were all women.

Footballer Chencho Gyeltshen joined the Indian Super League club Kerala Blasters from the RoundGlass Punjab FC in September. Former High Quality United FC player Kezang joined Garhwal Heroes FC in India.

The 2020 BoB Bhutan Premier League champion Thimphu City FC played against Maldives' Club Eagles in the preliminary round one of the Asian Football Confederation Cup in April. City lost 2-0 despite maximum ball possession.

Paro FC and Sudeva FC of India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance football further. One of the main areas of MoU was to collaborate for football development programmes in schools, colleges, and communities by organising tournaments at mutually agreed locations.

Paro FC also won the 2021 BOB Bhutan Premier League on October 2 at Woochu Sports Arena in Paro. After



at the National Tennis Centre in Thimphu which caters to many national level tournaments. BTF also became a full member of the International Tennis Federation, which will help further promote tennis in Bhutan.

Almost eight years after the chess federation became dormant, the Bhutan Olympic Committee started the chess club in July. Prior to that, Binod Rai, 29, from Sarpang, stood overall second in the maiden Chess4Solidarity online competition between Bhutan and Israel.

Boxing once again came into the limelight in 2021.

A 23-year-old former boxer, Tandin Lham, from Dagana, opened a boxing studio in Thimphu. The studio was the first to be started by women.

Bhutan also saw some new sports in 2021 such as enduro (mountain biking), skate, and under-15 Bhutan Amateur Baseball League, which is ongoing in Thimphu among five schools.

However, despite progress and achievement, sports also grappled with some issues and challenges in 2021.

Former Druk Stars FC's coach, Kota Namgay, who was previously banned for life by the BFF for match-fixing, was charged for passive commercial bribery by the Office of the Attorney General.

Lack of quality and adequate sports facilities, funds and qualified coaches continues to hinder sports development; private sports facilities were expensive for many.

Unsafe archery ranges in the country and mishaps caused by the stray arrows continue to rise. Thimphu alone recorded more than 20 mishaps related to archery. The Bhutan Indigenous Games and Sports Association conducted 'safe bow draw training' for the compound archery players at Changlimithang archery range to address the issue.

There was also the question of public accountability. The government established ten outdoor gym facilities in the capital in 2015 to combat non-communicable diseases and promote a healthy lifestyle. However, most remained non-functional in 2021.

two years, the Tigers managed to draw the game 1-1 against the defending Champions Thimphu City FC to reclaim the title. Tigers fetched 45 points, and Cityzens managed 43.

The Bhutan Football Federation introduced a mini dragon league to bring grassroots football development. The federation also introduced a district league to make BOB Bhutan Premier League more inclusive.

The 2021 Bhutan Women's Football League was played at home and away venues for the first time. Six teams from Thimphu, Paro and Punakha participated. However, due to the pandemic, Bhutan's men's national football team couldn't participate in the 2021 South Asian Football Federation Championship.

Other sports also showed progress and imbued hope.

In December, swimmer Sangay Tenzin and Kinley Lhendup participated in the 15th edition of the FINA World Swimming Championships in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates.

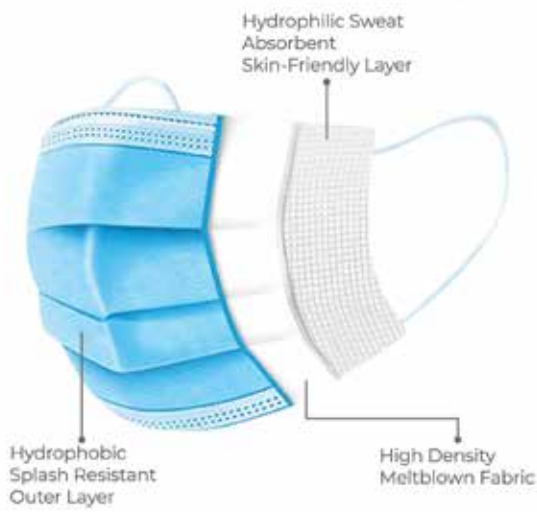
Bhutan Volleyball Federation is upgrading the existing volleyball courts at Changlimithang into an international standard. An artificial mat, toilet facilities, lighting, locker room and storeroom will be put in place.

Bhutan Tennis Federation (BTF) completed the maintenance of four tennis courts

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