



4th India-Bhutan Youth Summit

22 - 30 October 2025

PARTICIPANTS' INDIVIDUAL
JOURNEY REPORT 2025

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ABOUT THE SUMMIT

Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP), Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), India-Bhutan Foundation (IBF), and Pallavan Learning Systems (PLS) successfully organised the 4th India-Bhutan Youth Summit from October 22–30, 2025.

The first India-Bhutan Youth Summit was organised in 2018 to mark 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The launch of the Summit came at an opportune moment to celebrate this enduring friendship and partnership. The second and third summits followed in 2019 and 2024 respectively, further strengthening the ties between the youth of both nations.

The main objective of the Youth Summit was to enhance the understanding and appreciation among young participants of the importance of building and sustaining the India-Bhutan friendship. It aimed to create a network of potential ambassadors who would carry forward this collaboration for years to come. The summit provided a platform for meaningful dialogue, cross-cultural engagement, and networking opportunities for the youth from both nations.

The broad theme for the 2025 Summit was “Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) and the Neighbourhood.” 22 Participants from India and Bhutan came together in the Indian states of Meghalaya and Assam, and in the Bhutanese border town of Phuentsholing, for a nine-day programme combining exposure, learning, and adventure. The itinerary included an introduction to both countries, a three-day trek across the scenic landscapes of Shillong, interactive sessions on the summit theme, and meetings with eminent personalities from India and Bhutan. Participants also visited significant sites and interacted with local communities to deepen their understanding of the countries and their shared aspirations.

Participants also experienced aspects of college life in both India and Bhutan, hosted respectively by the Royal Global University (Assam) and the College of Science and Technology (Phuentsholing). During the programme, they had the opportunity to interact with distinguished leaders including Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, Director of Asian Confluence; Dr. A.K. Buragohain, Vice Chancellor of Royal Global University; Dasho Chewang Rinzin, Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB); and Mr. Rabssel Dorji, Chief of Communications at the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC).

Both structured sessions and informal exchanges during the summit inspired participants to identify potential collaborative themes for future engagement. They collectively developed project proposals across five key areas — Environment, Education, Community, Digital Forum, and Gender — aligning their contributions with their individual skills, knowledge, and interests. In addition to the group projects, participants maintained daily reflections on the Pallavan Learning Systems online portal, documenting their experiences and learning throughout the summit. After the summit concluded, they submitted individual reports detailing their personal journeys and group presentations linking the summit theme to the broader India-Bhutan relationship.

The 4th India-Bhutan Youth Summit concluded with a renewed commitment to fostering cross-border friendships and nurturing a growing community of youth ambassadors dedicated to strengthening India-Bhutan relations.



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

SLN	Name	Nationality	College/University
1	Adrita Buragohain	Indian	Dibrugarh University, Assam, India
2	Amrutha Bharathi Chowdary Thunga	Indian	Shiv Nadar Institute of Eminence, Uttar Pradesh, India
3	D. Adithya Rahul	Indian	St. Stephen's College, Delhi, India
4	Dawa Choden	Bhutanese	Jigme Namgyel Engineering College, Bhutan
5	Keerthana S	Indian	Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Tamil Nadu, India
6	Kezang Choden Namgyel	Bhutanese	Sherubtse College, Bhutan
7	Kinzang Choden Tshering	Bhutanese	Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan
8	Kshetrimayum Jobalaxmi Devi	Indian	Miranda House, Delhi, India
9	Md Sazad	Indian	Second Chance School, Ritinjali, India
10	Mohammad Faisal Iqbal	Indian	Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Tamil Nadu, India
11	Monash Monger	Bhutanese	College of Science and Technology, Bhutan
12	Namgyel Dema Norbu	Bhutanese	Norbuling Rigter College, Bhutan
13	Pelden Wangchuk	Bhutanese	College of Natural Resources, Bhutan
14	Pema Lhazin	Bhutanese	Gedu College of Business Studies, Bhutan
15	Ritesh	Indian	St. Stephen's College, Delhi, India
16	Ryka Gogoi	Indian	The Assam Royal Global University, Assam, India

17	Seldon	Bhutanese	College of Language and Culture Studies, Bhutan
18	Shree Banerjee	Indian	Jalpaiguri Government Engineering College, West Bengal, India
19	Sonam wangchuk	Bhutanese	Gyalpozhing College of Information Technology, Bhutan
20	Tashi Lhamo	Bhutanese	Paro College of Education, Bhutan
21	Tendral Zangmo	Bhutanese	Samtse College of Education, Bhutan
22	Zenab Sabunwala	Indian	CEPT University, Gujarat, India

ADRITA BURAGOHAIN



When I look back at these nine days, what stands out to me the most is not any single event, but the way everything connected, people, conversations, landscapes, histories, emotions, and even the silences. This journey was not just a summit. It was a personal unfolding. It was a reminder to pause, to observe, to listen, to feel, and to allow myself to grow.

First stop – Royal Global University, Assam

Belonging to Assam, I am familiar with the northeast India, its valleys, the rhythm of rain, the quiet strength of its forests, but this trip allowed me to experience it all in a new way. When we walked through the Mawphlang Sacred Forest, guided by stories of ancestors and traditions, I was thrilled. The forest was not just a place; it was a living memory. Listening to the guide speak about how communities protect the forest with unwritten rules, I felt a sense of deep reverence. It made me think of the Ahom rituals I have grown up

Mawphlang forest



around, how my own culture too rests upon respect for nature and ancestry. And yet, I realized how often in our daily lives we overlook the sacredness of what surrounds us.



David Scott Trail, Meghalaya

Lunch by the riverside



The day we trekked the David Scott Trail was like breathing again after months of running. The path was long, the shoes were heavy, but I kept walking. I think somewhere along those eight kilometres, I learned that it is okay to slow down. Lunch by the riverside, just rice, dal, chicken, sabji, felt surreal. Maybe it was the hunger, maybe it was the peace, or maybe both. But in that moment, everything felt enough.



The campsite

Later, when Thupten sir introduced us to a new meditation practice, I could feel my mind finally settle. Thoughts that had been running for months found space to breathe. I promised myself that I would carry this practice forward, that mindfulness would not remain just an idea, but something I consciously return to.

The Asian Confluence, Shillong





Thereafter, our visit to Asian Confluence made me think more deeply about development and inclusion in the Northeast. The presentation there was very insightful, yet it left me questioning whether local communities are truly benefiting from such large-scale projects. As someone from Dibrugarh who has seen BCPL (Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited) operate for years, and the harm it has caused to the local communities, this reflection felt very real and necessary.

With professor Alak Kumar Buragohain

Similarly, meeting Prof. Alak Buragohain in Guwahati remains one of the most unforgettable parts of the summit. His thoughts on sustainable development, and how science and humanities must complement one another, still stay with me. He said, *“Of all the titles that have been given to me in this lifetime, I like being called a teacher the most.”* As someone who aspires to be in academics and hopes to become a professor one day, this line deeply moved me. I, too, hope that when I look back on my journey, I will be able to say the same, that I was truly a teacher. I want to be able to connect with my students, to learn and unlearn alongside them, and to grow through the shared experiences of the classroom. One day, I hope to find that same sense of purpose and fulfilment in teaching. He spoke about balance, simplicity, and the need to rethink what progress means. After that, we visited the Brahmaputra River Heritage and did some shopping.



The mighty river Brahmaputra, Guwahati

At Brahmaputra River Heritage



On 26th October, our journey from Guwahati to Bhutan began. We passed through Barpeta, Bongaigaon, and finally reaching Jaigaon. Even though it was long, watching the landscape slowly change was calming. At the immigration office, things took a bit of time, but everything went smoothly. By evening, we reached RIGSS, where we were welcomed with a white *khada*. I tried *ema datshi* for the first time, spicy, simple, and so comforting. I video-called my mom and showed her the beautiful

Bhutanese architecture around me. Everything felt serene and well cared for.

While waiting, Mr. Hasta Bdr Rai shared with me and Joba the history of Bhutan, how Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel unified the country in the 17th century. This immediately reminded me of Sukapha and the Ahom kingdom in Assam, leaders who united diverse communities with a shared vision rather than force. It made me think about how closely connected our histories are, even when separated by borders.



The next day, we began with a wonderful breakfast followed by an insightful session on the Gelephu Mindfulness City by Rabsel Doji. His words made me realize how much the world needs a shift toward mindfulness, sustainability, and balance. The idea of a city built around spiritual well-being and ecological harmony felt powerful, something truly ahead of its time. I even caught myself imagining living there someday.

Milarepa Lhakhang

At the top of Milarepa Lhakhang with friends

Later, our visit to Milarepa Lhakhang was peaceful and grounding. Namghyel guided me like an old friend, explaining stories with sincerity and kindness. Our interaction with the Dasho Vice Chancellor also helped deepen my understanding of Bhutan's history and its enduring relationship with India.

One recurring question throughout the summit was: "What do you truly want?" At first, it sounded simple. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized the



complexity hidden in it. What do I really want? A good life, yes. A meaningful career, yes. But beyond that—I want peace. I want work that fulfills me, not just work that pays. I want to feel connected to what I do.



During Presentation of Project Druk Disha

Project Druk Disha was born from that desire. While brainstorming with Adithya, Tendril, and Pema, we discussed our own confusions growing up, the lack of guidance, the decisions made from pressure rather than clarity. We imagined a system where students could explore their interests early, learn through real exposure, and make decisions from understanding rather than fear. Presenting this idea in front of principals and educators was intimidating, but also empowering. Even though I was nervous, I spoke from my heart. And that mattered. If this project ever becomes real, it could change so many lives. Sometimes, leadership is not about doing something grand. Sometimes, it is simply creating what you once needed.



Bihu performance at RIGSS

I performed Bihu along with Joba and Ryka during the cultural night, and even though we had very little practice, I danced with joy. Sharing my culture on such a beautiful platform felt meaningful. Watching the Bhutanese dances was equally moving, their expressions, grace, and devotion reflected a culture deeply rooted in spirit and simplicity. It reminded me of how our identities are both personal and shared. They shape us, but they also connect us.

One of the greatest gifts of this summit was the people. The friendships formed over meals, walks, music, tired laughter, shared silence, and deep conversations under open skies. I saw how everyone carried their own stories: Some spoke about identity, Some struggled with pressure, Some dreamed of change. And yet, in those conversations, something beautiful happened, we listened to each other. Not to reply. But to understand. The sense of community that formed was unforced. It grew gently, like trust does.

The Bhutanese participants, especially, taught me something profound: gratitude. Their respect and love for their King felt genuine and heartfelt. It made me think about how leadership, when rooted in compassion, can create devotion instead of fear.

When we woke up at 4 AM on the last day, my heart felt heavy. The bags were packed, but I didn't feel ready to leave. As the plane took off from Bagdogra, memories flooded in—the forests, the songs, the faces, the food, the laughter, the tears, the quiet moments. More gratitude This summit taught me that life does not need to be rushed. That peace is not found in escaping life, but in learning how to live with awareness. That leadership begins with understanding oneself. And that the most meaningful changes are often the quiet ones. I am leaving with friends. With memories. With a heart that feels full.

ADITHYA RAHUL

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit was more than just a conference — it was a journey of reflection, learning, and mindfulness. Each day offered new perspectives, and each interaction became a lesson in itself. Looking back, the summit taught me that the deepest learning often happens outside classrooms, through genuine human conversations and shared experiences.

The first day began much before the formal sessions at the airport, during long hours of waiting. What seemed like a tedious experience turned into an unexpected classroom of human interaction. Conversations with people from different states and even from Bhutan revealed how diverse minds connect not just through language but through shared energy and emotions. I realized that if we truly wish to think outside the box, we must step beyond our comfort zones. Growth begins where familiarity ends.

In Meghalaya, I was deeply inspired by the Khasi community and their symbiotic relationship with nature. Their matriarchal traditions and ecological sensitivity reflected a wisdom that modern society often overlooks. Our discussions on worldviews, AI, and community responsibility reminded me that awareness is the first step towards change. A particularly meaningful conversation with Mr. Tupten on the David Scott Trail deepened my understanding of mindfulness and responsible tourism lessons that felt both personal and universal.

Late-night discussions with friends from India on social structures, class, and media biases helped me see our country with new eyes. These exchanges reinforced the idea that education must not only build intellect but also empathy and social awareness. During group reflections on meditation, I realized how essential it is to quiet the mind to act consciously.

Real transformation begins from within we cannot change the world without first changing ourselves.

Visits to the Asian Confluence Centre opened another layer of insight. I was struck by how Buddhist art holds deep philosophical and symbolic meaning. What began as simple admiration for aesthetics became a journey into the spiritual language of art. I also reflected on the deeper questions of governance and democracy in Bhutan about power, rights, and the gift of freedom. These thoughts made me realize how development, democracy, and mindfulness are intertwined.

Listening to Dr. A. K. Buragohain was a privilege. His reflections on sustainability, right livelihood, and the philosophy behind Gross National Happiness (GNH) gave me a new lens to view development not as the accumulation of wealth but as the cultivation of well-being. His idea that ancient languages like Sanskrit and Pali carry scientific depth was fascinating. His words made me believe that the future will be shaped not by technology alone but by mindful philosophies.

Arriving in Bhutan was like entering a living lesson in mindfulness. The calmness of the people, their humility, and their traditional attire reflected a society that values respect and simplicity. The hospitality of the Bhutanese people was overwhelming and served as a reminder that no matter how high one rises, kindness must remain at the core of all human interaction.

The contrast between Jaigaon (India) and Phuentsholing (Bhutan) showed me how two societies can exist side by side interconnected yet distinct. It was a powerful example of coexistence and interdependence. Even small gestures, such as cars halting at zebra crossings, revealed how mindfulness is practiced not just in words but in daily behavior. The final day was filled with emotions and gratitude. Bonds formed over the eight days had transformed strangers into friends, and the India-Bhutan connection felt more personal than ever. While the government-to-government relationship between the two nations remains strong, I realized that people-to-people relations are the true bridge of understanding.

Strengthening these human ties is what will sustain the friendship between our nations.

The summit's discussions on education, gender equality, digital well-being, and community development further emphasized the importance of collaboration. The collective ideas we shared were not just academic; they were seeds of change.

This journey was not just an event; it was a deeply mindful experience. Every conversation, every cultural encounter, and every quiet moment of reflection contributed to my growth as a person and as a leader. The Bhutanese idea of mindfulness — to live consciously, humbly, and sustainably — has left a lasting impression on me. I learned that mindfulness is not limited to meditation or calmness; it is about awareness — of our words, actions, and their impact on others. I hope to carry these lessons forward in my daily life, to practice empathy, humility, and mindful leadership.

Ultimately, the summit reminded me that real progress is not measured by how far we go, but by how deeply we grow — within ourselves and with one another.

AMRUTHA THUNGA

This is my first time participating in an international youth summit. So was so excited but also very nervous. My heartfelt gratitude to Centre for Escalation of Peace, India, Pallavan Learning Systems and Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies, Bhutan for provide us a platform to voice our opinions along with the India-Bhutan Foundation, Bhutan for funding our trip.

As I began this journey, I realized that while my training in International Relations has taught me to approach everything with a critical eye, it has also shown me that understanding often begins with listening. So that's what I did. I followed the "We listen and we don't judge" formula. The summit provided a rare opportunity to connect with diverse youth and move out of my echo chamber, allowing me to learn from diverse perspectives.



One of my first interactions with the Bhutanese participants, included the girls telling me it would be easy to remember my name because of Amrita Devi Bishnoi (who they remember as the girl who hugged the tree). I felt honoured to be associated with an Indian environmental activist.

On the trek by the river, I collected tiny stones to play *Achankayalu*, a childhood game I used to play back home. To my surprise, my Bhutanese friends said they also had a similar game called *Ik du pa*. Joba, my friend from Manipur called the game *Kut lot pi*. We

might also be familiar with the Korean name *Gongi*. I enjoy finding such shared experience of childhood that connects people from different regions as well as nations.



North-East visit

The first leg of the trip to Meghalaya, from understanding the significance of the Mawphlang scared forest, to trekking down the David Scott Trail, to sleeping in tents deep within the forest, eating locally cooked meals, no connectivity, traveling in a local city bus, and going to the marketplace, we got the experience a part of how the Khasi people live. Their challenges and perspectives showcased resilience. I realized that we can only protect these people's culture and heritage by experiencing and understanding their way of life. Especially as youth leaders. Following the Khasi mountain lifestyle, we got to witness the Shillong city life which marked a huge contrast from the tents. Modern bathrooms, warm blankets, a cozy room and diverse food choices. It made me aware of the privileges of having a comfortable life.



The storytelling and folk music by the fire sessions were my favourite part of the first leg of this trip. It was a new experience not just for my Bhutanese friends, but also many of my Indian peers including myself who don't usually get exposure to the North- Eastern culture so often. Even with a sore throat, the songs were too addictive not to join in dancing and singing the local tunes.



Joba was saying that the Duitara instrument was making her feel very emotional, which reminded me of how the Carnatic flute has that same impact on me. This made me realise that as we look for things that connect us globally, there will still be cultural experiences that differ from person to person and that's a beautiful thing. We also went through a period of no network connectivity at the camp, which was a great opportunity to interact with each other and form real-life bonds.

Seminars

The seminar at Asian Confluence brought forth an opportunity to discuss the complexities of policy making and grassroot level engagement. The Question and Answers session with Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, the Executive Director of Asian Confluence emphasised on collaboration and future opportunities for youth leaders who can bridge the gap between local and global concerns.

Meeting Mr. Rabhel Doji, the Chief of Communications of the Gelephu Mindfulness City project was another highlight. It was a nuanced discussion that addressed the concerns

of sovereignty, environment and development. It taught me the importance of taking risks, trusting the process and believing in one's values to achieve a wide-ranging project like the GMC.

Sharing Ideas and Memories

An interesting story my Bhutanese friends shared with us was that of how bad habits like drinking, smoking and gambling which might not seem too destructive at the time, would later lead to larger destruction. At that stage, it is believed that a violent reincarnation of Buddha will come and teach them a lesson. It reminded me of my father's lessons on discipline and self-restraint.

Hearing the same ideas echo in their spiritual story, made me reflect on such universal values. This also applies to my time management skills. Over the last course of this trip, I have been in awe at how disciplined the Bhutanese students were with regards to being on time, cleaning up the table after them and their food disposal technique. There is definitely a lot I can learn from them with regard to this.

As the summit progressed, my friends and I discussed the role of youth summit which brought us together. While nine days might have been too short to solve complex problems, it showed me that we, the youth, are not perfect individuals. However, we also go beyond that, as we learn to be open to new ideas and think out of the box. The reason being, we all have the same concerns about the world and want to change it to a more peaceful place to live in. A place fuelled by harmony and not greed.

For me, the final ice breaker between the Bhutanese and Indian students was the late-night campus tour of the College of Science and Technology (CST), Phuntsholing that Monash took us on. He showed us around his favourite places, we played basketball, which was a great team building activity. Teaching Pelden and a few other Bhutanese friends a simple *Kuchipudi* step which symbolized a flower blooming was another memory I'll hold close to my heart. It kind of felt symbolic of our own journey, as we slowly opened up to each other.



Presentation and Cultural Show

As we worked on the final presentation, I got to hear so many unique thoughts and perspectives as I contributed mine as well. We all sat together and brainstormed a few ideas. I got to learn a lot about Bhutan's agricultural history and the Indian students shared their agricultural knowledge. We thought of collaboration between the two nations and how to implement it. And when everything started coming together, we were confident to present it in front of a large knowledgeable crowd.

We were asked to do a cultural show towards the end, so I had two things to prepare for side by side, the presentation of our youth project along with the cultural representation of my country. It was a great coincidence to have Keerthana, a Carnatic violinist and singer in the group of Indian students selected. She was more than happy to sing for me as I dance a small Kuchipudi item showcasing how last-minute collaboration also brings great results. Everyone loved our performance :)

It also got to witness a mesmerizing North-Eastern dance performance by Joba, Adritha and Ryka. Along with a dance performance by my Bhutanese friends. Post-event, Kinzang and Kezang were interested in trying to dance on the brass-plate I had used for my performance (a unique feature of Kuchipudi dance). I was happy to teach them how to do it and it was so heartwarming to see them follow the technique after me.





Farewell

The farewell at 4:30 a.m. was deeply emotional. My Bhutanese friends went out of their way, waking up so early, giving us gifts and warm wishes before sending us off. I'm never going to forget their hospitality ever. Apart from the friends that I made, I will also cherish the conversations I had with Choki sir and Thupten sir throughout the trip. I would also like to thank Choden ma'am and Shedra sir for being such wonderful hosts in Bhutan (they even helped me get my dance brass plate which I had forgotten at the hostel right before the presentation). All of them played a huge role throughout this journey in guiding our thoughts towards the right direction.

As I journeyed back, I found myself sleeping in Bhutan and waking up in Bengal. We had a long layover in Siliguri. It was a good time for us to rant, share funny stories, and also engage in meaningful discussions. Zainab and I brought back the discussions we had read about in the previous summits including the 2000rps note story and the shipwreck story and heard really interesting perspectives.



We then bid farewell to each group one by one with the promise to meet once again and took a flight to Delhi. While walking in the metro station in Delhi, I heard honking and hustling which made me miss the quiet and peaceful town of Phuentsholing. But at the same time, the smell of Indian street food, and the taste of my aunt's *ghar ka khaana* transported me to a place called home. Leaving me with wonderful friendships and memories from the trip that I will cherish for life.

DAWA CHODEN

The India–Bhutan Youth Summit was not just a program—it was a heartfelt journey that taught me the true essence of friendship, cultural connection, and pride in who we are. Our adventure began in the early morning hours as we departed for Paro Airport. Excitement and nervousness filled me, especially since it was my first flight. Although the thought of flying scared me, I trusted the moment and embraced the experience wholeheartedly.



When we landed in Guwahati and arrived at the Royal Global University (RGU), I was immediately captivated by the campus—so vibrant and full of life. The warm welcome,



the cultural performances, and our first interactions with Indian participants set the tone for a meaningful week ahead.

As the days unfolded, we explored new places and discovered new perspectives. At the Don Bosco Museum, I wanted to take in every detail, but the limited time had me rushing from one exhibit to another. I ran to the rooftop to capture a photograph—not just a picture, but a memory I wanted to hold on to forever.



Even during moments of exhaustion and tight schedules, what kept us going was the spirit of learning and togetherness. We shared meals, laughter, cultural experiences, and insights that crossed borders. Strangers soon became familiar faces—and, before long, lifelong friends.



Returning to Bhutan brought a wave of emotion. Nothing compares to the comfort of being home. The sight of the Bhutan Gate filled me with immense pride—pride in being Bhutanese and in belonging to a nation with such a unique identity. Eating our own food made me realize how deeply I had missed everything that defines home.



One of the most emotional moments for me was learning about the Gelephu Mindfulness City project. Seeing an image of His Majesty The King working tirelessly for the future of our nation stirred something profound within me. It sparked a deep desire to serve my King, my people, and my country with unwavering dedication.



During our interaction with the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, we understood that India and Bhutan's friendship has always been rooted in trust and mutual respect. It reminded me that, as youth, we carry the responsibility to strengthen this bond even further.



The final day at RIGSS was a whirlwind of nerves and excitement. Our team had to present a project proposal, and though I felt anxious, it went smoothly and left us proud of what we had achieved together. The cultural performance that followed brought endless smiles—watching our Indian friends dance to Bhutanese songs was both endearing and unforgettable. Receiving the certificate felt like a true reward, a symbol of every effort and experience that made this journey meaningful.



Soon, the nine days that once seemed long suddenly flew by. What began with shy introductions ended with tight hugs and tearful goodbyes. Early in the morning, as we woke to bid farewell to our Indian friends, even the sky seemed to share our emotions.



We gave them small souvenirs—not just as gifts, but as reminders of a friendship that extends far beyond borders.

This journey taught me that exploring new cultures is beautiful, but the love for one's homeland is irreplaceable. No matter where I go or how wonderful another country may seem, I will always be proud to be known as a Bhutanese.

KEERTHANA S

Day 1 – 22nd October

Today was probably the most eventful day I’ve had in a long time. To begin with, I was extremely anxious about taking a flight so far from home, and landing safely in Guwahati made me silently thank God. This trip was quite unplanned for me—I hadn’t expected to be selected, and when I was, the reality of a nine-day summit both excited and unnerved me. I had never travelled to the Northeast or to Bhutan before, so this felt like a rare and wonderful opportunity.

At the airport, I met my batchmate Faisal, and it was great hearing his thoughts on travel. He said he preferred travelling locally—taking local transport, exploring spontaneously, and staying present in the moment—whereas I’m usually a more planned and comfort-seeking traveller. His approach to travel inspired me, and I decided I’d try to be more “in the moment” during this trip.

After a short weather delay, we finally reached Guwahati and met our Indian counterparts. The diversity among the students—from architecture, political science, and history to culinary arts—was fascinating, and I knew the coming days would be full of new perspectives. We were warmly received at the Royal Global University (RGU),



which graciously hosted us. The inaugural ceremony was beautiful, featuring a traditional Northeastern dance. The campus itself was vast, green, and reminded me of IIT Roorkee with its tall administrative buildings and open lawns.



Later, we met our Bhutanese counterparts, who seemed soft-spoken, polite, and composed. We introduced ourselves briefly and retired for the night. This day taught me the importance of being open, adaptable, and positive—even after a long day of travel.

Day 2 – 23rd October

Day two was packed with activity! We began our journey to the Mawphlang Sacred Forest—a four-hour drive from Guwahati. Though I was sleepy at first, I didn't want to miss the views, so I chose a window seat to soak in the passing scenery.

Midway, our bus had a flat tyre, but the drivers fixed it so quickly and efficiently that it barely caused a delay. The bus rides also became a space for bonding between the Indian and Bhutanese students. To my surprise, everyone knew Bollywood songs! Watching people sing and dance on the bus created an instant connection between us.



At Mawphlang, we were served delicious local food. I noticed that people in the Northeast eat very healthily—lots of boiled, lightly seasoned dishes. Since I'm vegetarian, I stuck to rice, dal, and potatoes, but I genuinely enjoyed the simplicity.

We learned about the Khasi community and their sacred forest traditions. The caretaker explained that removing even a leaf or twig

from the forest was forbidden, as it was believed to anger the forest guardians. I was deeply moved by their respect for nature and cultural pride. However, I found it surprising that, despite being a matrilineal society, women are still not allowed to perform sacrifice rituals. It made me reflect on how gender inequality persists in different forms everywhere.



By evening, we reached the trout farm campsite—a digital-free zone. I was nervous about staying offline, but it turned out to be refreshing. Setting up our tents, sipping milkless tea, and watching the sunset felt peaceful and grounding.

That evening, we had a reflection session on three questions:

1. What is our perception of the world today?
2. What social, political, or environmental issues concern us most?
3. What would an ideal future look like?

The discussion was passionate and meaningful. Topics ranged from gender inequality and environmental damage to the influence of social media and the loss of human empathy. Later, a local artist performed a touching story-song about *La Phalang*, a deer whose death inspired reverence for the forest. The tale was hauntingly beautiful.

The night was freezing cold, but the experience of camping amidst nature was unforgettable.



Day 3 – 24th October

The day began early with our trek along the David Scott Trail—a 16 km hike that was far more strenuous than I had expected! I started at the front of the group but somehow always ended up among the last. Still, the scenic views and laughter along the way made it worthwhile.

We played a jigsaw puzzle game mid-way, and my team surprisingly won! It was fun competing lightheartedly while others took it too seriously. Along the trail, we passed villages where people lived in harmony with nature. I couldn't help but think about how city dwellers chase a life that resembles what these villagers already have.



I'm especially grateful to Monash and Pelden, who helped me throughout the trek—they practically saved me! The riverside lunch was serene, though I was terrified of slipping on the mossy rocks.

That evening, we had a deep discussion about the challenges faced by India and Bhutan. I realised that while both nations share similar values, their scales of development differ vastly. I admired how disciplined, polite, and humble the Bhutanese participants were.

The day ended with songs, a bonfire, and laughter—a perfect close to a demanding yet fulfilling day.



Day 4 – 25th October

We began the day by leaving the forest—a bittersweet moment. I had grown to love the digital detox and the tranquility of the outdoors. Reading a downloaded book reminded me of my pre-digital self, and it was liberating to rediscover that version of me.

The trek back was tiring, and I struggled with the physical exhaustion. On the way to Shillong, I had my *Highway* and *Rockstar* movie moments—listening to music, watching the road, and thinking about life. The quiet countryside made me wonder: if I had been born elsewhere, would I still be the same person?

At Shillong, we visited the markets. They were crowded and chaotic, and I felt claustrophobic. Later, we visited the Asian Confluence office for a presentation on their work in policy and international cooperation. I learned about the Northeast’s critical role

in regional geopolitics—it made me reflect on whether my own studies would ever contribute meaningfully to such causes.

Dinner and late-night conversations with the girls were one of the highlights of the trip. We debated cultural and political topics respectfully, appreciating each other's perspectives.

Day 5 – 26th October



The day began with another long drive to Guwahati. By this point, travel fatigue had started setting in. After resting, we attended a lecture by the Vice Chancellor of RGU. His talk on *Right Livelihood* and ancient wisdom was deeply insightful. He reminded us that studying science alone offers an incomplete understanding of the world, and true learning lies in integrating arts, philosophy, and values.

Later, we visited the Brahmaputra Heritage Centre. Watching the ferries drift along the river felt peaceful and symbolic—like life, a river flows continuously, changing yet purposeful. Having recently read *The Immortals of Meluha*, I imagined the Brahmaputra through the lens of mythology—it was surreal.

We ended the day with a visit to a mall, which was oddly comforting after days in the wilderness. I realised I enjoy a balance—three days of nature, one of modern comfort!

The day began with another early-morning journey to Guwahati. By this point, I was growing a bit weary of all the travelling. Upon arrival, I felt slightly unwell and decided to rest until the Vice Chancellor’s address later in the day.

The Vice Chancellor was an incredibly knowledgeable speaker. He spoke about how ancient Indian texts contain timeless wisdom that can guide modern society. Listening to his words felt grounding and inspiring. His comment that studying science alone gives only “half-baked knowledge” struck a chord with me—it reminded me how the arts, whether music, literature, or even quizzing, have shaped my awareness of the world around me.

After the lecture, we visited the Brahmaputra Heritage Centre, a serene space overlooking the majestic river. Watching the ferries glide across the Brahmaputra was calming and meditative. Having recently read *The Immortals of Meluha*, I couldn’t help but visualise the river through the imagery of the book—it felt like mythology coming alive. Rivers, I realised, mirror life itself: beginning in one place, flowing through many experiences, and finding their own destination in time.



Later, we visited a nearby mall. Before entering, I was feeling drained, but the familiar buzz of city life instantly revived me. Though I had loved the peace and simplicity of the campsite, I realised I had also missed the convenience and rhythm of urban spaces. I concluded that a perfect balance for me would be a 3:1 ratio of nature to city—three days of serenity and one day of modern comfort.

We ended the day quietly, finishing our pending work and preparing for the next big chapter of the journey—Bhutan.

Day 6 – 27th October

This was primarily a travel day from Guwahati to Phuentsholing—a nine-hour journey that left me exhausted. Crossing the border into Bhutan, however, was exhilarating. I was abroad after nearly a decade!

The contrast between the two sides of the border was striking—Jaigaon was bustling, while Phuentsholing was calm and orderly. The Bhutanese discipline and civic respect impressed me deeply.



We were warmly received at RIGSS, where the architecture and hospitality reflected Bhutan's cultural richness. I was touched by the kindness of the hosts and felt we could learn much from their etiquette and humility.

Day 7 – 28th October

This was my favorite day of the summit. Everyone had opened up by now, and conversations flowed easily. We attended a session on the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC), one of the most informative sessions of the trip. The speaker's honesty about the challenges and aspirations of the project was refreshing and inspiring.



Later, we visited Milarepa Lhakhang—a serene temple with beautiful architecture. I was amazed by the symbolic resemblance between Bhutanese and Indian spiritual figures, reflecting how deeply our cultures are connected.

That evening, we explored the town, tried authentic street-food momos, and visited the local market. We also toured the campus and had a casual basketball session with students. It was amazing how sports and laughter connected us beyond borders.

During a quiet walk, we spoke about our future plans and life’s unpredictability. Namja wisely said, “Go with the flow.” I realised how true that was—I hadn’t planned to be here, yet this trip had become one of the best experiences of my life.

Day 8 – 29th October



We woke up early for our final presentations. I joined the *Agri-Tech* team because of my interest in the environment and sustainable technology. With Sonam’s help, we designed a project integrating AI with agriculture. Collaborating across disciplines—engineering, economics, humanities, and logistics—was an eye-opener.

Our presentation went smoothly, and I was proud of how confidently I spoke on stage without a script. The evening cultural show was the highlight of the summit. Amrutha and I performed a *Carnatic-Kuchipudi* duet and a solo bhajan, *Radha Sametha Krishna*. The appreciation we received was overwhelming. Watching Bhutanese friends perform their graceful dances filled me with admiration and joy.



As the night ended, we clicked photos, laughed, and cried. The summit that once felt long was suddenly over, leaving behind a deep sense of gratitude.

Day 9 – 30th October

We woke up at 4 a.m. to leave Bhutan—and, to our surprise, the Bhutanese students were up too to bid us farewell. They gave us warm hugs and small mementos. I felt bad that we hadn't planned something similar for them. It was drizzling in the early morning, which felt like the perfect backdrop for a final goodbye.

I hugged those closest to me, and we quietly held back tears as we said one last farewell. The bus pulled away from Bhutan. Shedra Sir, Hasta Sir, and Choden Ma'am accompanied us all the way to the airport and had thoughtfully arranged fruits and buns for breakfast—their care truly touched me.

We Indian students waited at Siliguri Airport for nearly four hours. Zainab and I tried to make the most of our last few hours together. We promised to remember each other, while also acknowledging how hard it can be to keep in touch.

That is the beauty of this trip—twenty-two strangers came together for nine days, and though many of us may never meet again, those nine days were some of the best of our lives. We wished each other well and departed with heavy yet transformed hearts.

It felt like I had only just begun the journey, unsure of what awaited me so far from home. Little did I know then that these nine days would become some of my most meaningful experiences in learning and friendship.



KEZANG NAMGYEL

Day 1 – 22nd October

Cultural Introduction and University Tour

Today marked the beginning of our journey, filled with excitement and curiosity. After our arrival, we headed to the food court for lunch, where I tried *Uttapam*, a delicious South Indian dish that was completely new to me.

Following lunch, we were taken on a tour of the Royal Global University (RGU), which left a lasting impression. The university offers over 100 programs, reflecting its academic diversity and vibrancy. Walking through the campus, I noticed how beautifully it balanced a modern learning environment with a welcoming, student-friendly atmosphere. As we passed the School of Economics, a bulletin board filled with economic concepts immediately caught my attention, naturally drawing my interest as an economics student.



Later in the evening, after waiting for our Indian friends to arrive, we were treated to a beautiful cultural dance performance by the students of RGU. The performance was truly captivating—the rhythm, colours, and energy reflected the essence of India’s rich and diverse cultural heritage.

The day concluded with an orientation session, where I had the privilege of listening to introductions from all participants. Their stories and experiences deeply inspired me. Throughout the day, I remained mostly observant, taking in the environment and watching how everyone interacted and connected. It was a day of cultural exposure, learning, and appreciation—a perfect start to what promised to be an enriching journey ahead.

Day 2 – 23rd October

Visit to Mawphlang Sacred Forest and Camp

On the second day, we set out for an educational visit to the Mawphlang Sacred Forest, a place deeply rooted in the cultural, ecological, and spiritual beliefs of the Khasi tribe. Though our journey was briefly delayed by a tyre issue, it was quickly fixed, and we continued smoothly toward the forest.

Upon arrival, we were served a delicious local meal and noticed the healthy, simple cooking style of the region. The forest caretaker, who had authored a book on its biodiversity, spoke passionately about the sacredness of the forest and the community’s preservation efforts, especially the involvement of Khasi youth.

From his talk and our forest walk, we learned that the Khasi people worship spirits rather than idols and follow strict traditions to protect the forest. The matrilineal system—where inheritance passes through the mother’s line—was particularly fascinating. We also learned about Meghalaya’s religious diversity, the influence of Reverend Thomas Jones, who introduced the Khasi alphabet, and the forest’s ecological richness, including the rare **Himalayan Yew tree**, valued for its medicinal oil.

After exploring the forest, we trekked to the **Trout Farm**, an exhausting yet rewarding journey through breathtaking landscapes. Along the way, we passed the grave of a British officer's daughter and discussed the three major tribes of Meghalaya—the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia—and their distinct languages and customs.



At the campsite, we pitched our tents and participated in a reflective discussion on global and social issues such as gender inequality, environmental degradation, and the influence of social media. The evening ended with a touching song-story about *La Phalang*, a deer whose death inspired the sacredness of the forest. Gathered around the bonfire under a starlit sky, we reflected on the harmony between humans and nature, ending the day with warmth and gratitude.

Day 3 – 24th October

David Scott Trail and Group Activities

The third day began early with a cool morning breeze as everyone prepared for another enriching experience. After a wholesome breakfast featuring traditional rice-based dishes, we participated in a Khasi cooking demonstration where we learned to make *Putharo*, a rice-flour delicacy prepared in a clay pot (*Sarao*). The session highlighted how food in Khasi culture carries deep symbolic meaning, often tied to community celebrations like weddings and harvests.

We then embarked on the historic David Scott Trail, one of Meghalaya's oldest routes. During the trek, I had an insightful conversation with MD Sazad, from whom I learned more about Islam—its belief in Allah as God and Muhammad as His Messenger, as well

as the recognition of Jesus as a prophet. It was fascinating to see parallels between Islam and Christianity, such as the story of Adam and Eve, known in Islam as Addham and Hava.



Later, we took part in a jigsaw puzzle activity. My team, Group 1, included Adithya, whose cheerful energy kept us motivated. Though we didn't win, his positivity made the experience enjoyable. At the riverside lunch spot, we relaxed to the soothing sound of flowing water before engaging in another fun team-building challenge—to build the tallest tower. This time, our group won! We were rewarded with a book by Arun Kapur, a meaningful token of teamwork and effort.

The day ended around a bonfire, where we were introduced to traditional Khasi instruments such as the Khenyang Ma Syem, Kaduitara, and Kakshingrang. The performances carried powerful messages about living with purpose and harmony. Music, laughter, and stories filled the night, creating a sense of unity and joy.



Day 4 –25th October

Exploring Shillong: Police Bazaar and Don Bosco Museum

Today, we explored Shillong, visiting Police Bazaar and the Don Bosco Museum. At the bazaar, our main goal was to buy souvenirs for loved ones, and we found beautifully handwoven baskets that showcased local craftsmanship.

At the Don Bosco Museum, I was deeply impressed by the cultural and historical exhibits showcasing Meghalaya's incredible diversity. The displays of statues, artefacts, and representations of different traditions and agricultural





practices made me appreciate how rich and multifaceted this region truly is. From the top floor, we enjoyed a breathtaking panoramic view of Shillong city.

In the evening, we attended a presentation at Asian Confluence, which offered valuable insights into the geographical and socio-economic connections of Northeast India and the region's developmental challenges and opportunities. The session broadened my understanding of how deeply interconnected the region is with neighbouring countries, both culturally and economically.

Day 5 – 26th October

Audience with the Vice Chancellor

The highlight of the day was an audience with the Vice Chancellor, who delivered an engaging lecture on Buddhist Economics. As someone who relates more to the idea of *neoliberal Buddhism* rather than conservative interpretations, I found the session

especially fascinating—particularly his discussion on *Right Livelihood*, one of the core elements of the Eightfold Path.

The lecture prompted me to reflect deeply on my personal aspirations and whether my future career choices align with the values of ethical and meaningful living. It was an intellectually stimulating and introspective experience—one that encouraged me to think about success not just in material terms but as a life lived with purpose and integrity.

Day 6 – 27th October

Arrival in Bhutan



Today was spent mostly travelling, and I was thrilled to finally be back in my home country, Bhutan. Upon arrival, the RIGSS architecture immediately caught my eye—a



seamless blend of tradition and modernity that perfectly reflects Bhutan's balance of heritage and progress.

While waiting for the Indian participants to complete immigration formalities, the Bhutanese group used the time to rehearse for the final-day cultural performance. Even those who were initially shy joined in with enthusiasm, and by the time our Indian friends arrived, we had completed the choreography, full of laughter and teamwork.

Later, we were warmly welcomed by Ma'am Sigay Dem from RIGSS, whose hospitality made us feel at home. We were then divided into groups for the upcoming project proposal presentations, adding an element of anticipation for the days ahead. The evening concluded with a delightful dinner—a perfect end to a fulfilling day.

Day 7 – 28th October

GMC Session and Reflections on India–Bhutan Friendship

The session on the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) was truly enlightening, offering valuable insights into governance, leadership, and innovation. The following interaction with the Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan was equally inspiring, focusing on the deep-rooted friendship between India and Bhutan—built on trust, mutual respect, and shared cultural values.

We also visited the Jetsun Milarepa Lhakhang, a serene and spiritual site that provided a quiet moment for reflection amid the summit's busy schedule. The visit reminded us of the importance of mindfulness, compassion, and inner balance—values that resonate deeply in both Bhutanese and Indian cultures.

What stood out most to me was the growing bond with our Indian friends. Engaging with them



reminded me how vast and competitive the world is, and how much there is still to learn beyond one's comfort zone. The experience encouraged me to embrace diversity, challenge my perspectives, and keep growing through collaboration and exposure.

Day 8 – 29th October

Closing Ceremony and Reflections

The closing ceremony was emotional and memorable—a perfect blend of achievement and farewell. As our team worked together on the final presentation, I realised how much we had learned from each other, from using AI learning tools to creating impactful infographics. Presenting in front of the audience was nerve-wracking yet deeply rewarding, symbolising the culmination of our shared efforts.

Sharing my personal reflections on the eight-day journey felt empowering—it was both a closure and a celebration of growth. The cultural performances by the Indian participants were mesmerising, reflecting their creativity, talent, and dedication. The day concluded



with photographs, laughter, and heartfelt goodbyes—moments that will stay with me forever.



Day 9 – 30th October

Farewell and Departure

We woke up at 4 a.m. to prepare and gift letters we had written for our Indian friends—a small token of appreciation and affection. Saying our final goodbyes was bittersweet, filled with hugs, smiles, and quiet promises to stay in touch.

Later, we spent time shopping with the other Bhutanese participants, cherishing our final moments together before departing in the afternoon.

It was the perfect ending to a journey that blended learning, friendship, and self-discovery—leaving behind not just cherished memories, but meaningful lessons to carry forward in life.

KINZANG TSHERING

Date: 22/10/2025 (Day 1)

I left home at 4:30 am, filled with excitement and anticipation for the new journey. I, together with the other Bhutanese participants, visited the Paro Airport in the morning darkness, and although it was very early, our spirits were elevated. The Paro to Guwahati flight was short and yet a memorable experience as the Bhutan scenery gave way to the Assam one and I knew the real start of the summit had begun. Our hosts were the Royal Global University, who were very welcoming and warm.



Once the Indian participants arrived, the official event began beautifully with traditional dance, welcome remarks and an introduction to the objectives of our summit. We had our welcome dinner and officially retired for the day.

Date: 23/10/2025 (Day 2)



On Day two, we visited the Mawphlang Sacred Forest in Meghalaya on an educational visit that was highly enlightening in terms of the cultural, ecological, and historical values of the place. I was very impressed by the forest guide giving me a passionate briefing on environmental conservation and the Khasi traditions, which

motivated me to have a greater sense of appreciation towards the indigenous knowledge which is very important and how young people can help conserve the heritage.

I was overwhelmed by the deep respect of the spiritual relationship of the Khasi people to nature and was interested in their matrilineal society and the high level of biodiversity as I was passing through the sacred grove.

The hiking to the Trout Farm was extremely tiresome yet fruitful after the forest tour and provided stunning scenery. Subsequently, we had a reflection session later on, during which we spoke about the key social and environmental concerns alongside the issue of gender inequality, systemic weaknesses of the education systems were pointed out and reform to empower young people is apparent. Finally, we discussed the problem of the loss of humanity and compassion in the contemporary world. This discussion made me more conscious of these issues and my contribution towards correcting them.

The final one was a storytelling session during which we had a tragic tale that described how a hunter had opted to pursue glory rather than follow the advice of his mother. It was an emotional story that impressed me. Today, following the narrative, we had a fine dinner together, and then went off to our tents to sleep, much thinking about the day's adventures.

Date: 24/10/2025 (Day 3)

The third day, we woke up early and had a local breakfast and attended a traditional cooking demonstration where we learned how to make Putharo, a traditional dish in the Khasi people that is used to celebrate their culture. I immediately saw the similarity in our culture; we do have something like Khulay that is prepared the same way except it uses buckwheat. Then, we went on the historic David Scott Trail hike. One of the lessons that we learned throughout the trek involved cooperation, mutual trust, and team building in the form of a puzzle game. We later had a quiet lunch by the banks of the rivers, which was relaxing. I could have the view, and my feet were immersed in the cool water, which relieved my pain after hiking.



After reaching the campsite, we started our discussion with a short meditation. The discussion that followed was rich and varied. We discussed important issues such as environmental conservation, gender equality, the consequences of digital technology, education systems and community engagement. The participants gave personal remarks and experiences, and they used to stress the fact that teamwork, empathy, and mutual respect between India and Bhutan are very important.

The day concluded with a great bonfire that was accompanied by the traditional

Khasi music, and this exposed us to one another through the exchange of culture. I asked myself how dissimilar we are to one another, even though the relationship I had with them was unique indeed. This outdoor experience enhanced my attachment to the natural and cross-cultural community relationships.

Date: 25/10/2025 (Day 4)

On the fourth day, we began our journey from trout farm to the highway. After arriving in Shillong we went to the busy police bazaar, with its colourful stalls. It gave it a very vibrant feel, yet so packed that I could hardly breathe. The market exploration also enabled me to personalize the local culture through firsthand experience, experience of everyday life but at the same time put me at an emotional level as I reflected on how the youths offer labour and live their lives.

We relocated after the market to have lunch in an open scenic area that provided us with a refreshing and relaxing environment to rest. After lunch we visited the Don Bosco Museum which helped us to learn more about the cultural and historical heritage of Northeast India. I did not pass through the first room before I was greeted with a statue of our beloved king and queen. I was overwhelmed with immense pride which added to my experience



After we settled down in our new place (IXTSY Hostel), we got a chance to meet the Executive Director of Asian Confluence, Shri Sabyasachi Dutta. He provided a very insightful introduction to the organization and explained its mission, development over the years, and that it is a think-tank that is aimed at promoting more understanding and collaboration in the Eastern South Asian and Indo-Pacific regions. This was an incredibly motivating session, as it raised the issue of how research and community engagement may lead to positive change. It also strengthened the importance of India-Bhutan youth cooperation in the overall development of the region.

Date: 26/10/2025 (Day 5)

On day five, I experienced both anticipation and reflection because we got out of IXTSY Hostel early in the morning. We started going back to Guwahati but took a short break for refreshments. The journey was otherwise silent with some of them having the opportunity to sleep.



At Guwahati, the Royal Global University administered a lunch and a very informative lecture by Professor (Dr.) Alak Kumar Buragohain. His speech focused more on the unity of all life and the need to integrate science and philosophy with religion, sociology, and history to make progressive advancements. Additionally, Professor Buragohain allowed me to open my eyes to greater concepts of Buddhist economic and human connectedness that enabled me to consider my own contribution to the creation of harmony between progress and tradition.

Going to the Mahabahu Brahmaputra River Heritage Centre was very soothing. The crowds were huge and the people so diverse, all admiring the beauty of nature. Then, the City Centre Mall, which was teeming with life, reminded me of the modern life's pace and diversity, contrasting with the peaceful moments we had experienced previously. The gigantic mall was something that we don't have in Bhutan, but still, it got me excited a lot as I was walking in and out, up and down.

To put it all together, the day was a meaningful mix of learning, reflection, and cultural immersion, an important break that made me appreciate the region's complexity and beauty.

Date: 27/10/2025 (Day 6)

Day six was largely dedicated to travel and had a few stops. I bought some sweets from the local vendors during a short break. The whole thing felt like a small yet significant connection between me and the locals, as we all shared the same daily struggles.

Reaching the India-Bhutan border terminal and we entered Bhutan. At that instant, I experienced a mixture of very strong feelings, happiness and gratitude that I was home again. Wherever life leads me, I will always treasure and remember my country for the great support, happiness, and chances it has given me as a young person.

Having arrived in Bhutan, we made our way towards RIGSS, where cultural night rehearsal took place while we were waiting for the Indian participants to arrive. The arrival of the Indian participants marked a special Bhutanese cuisine and a merry environment. Besides that, I felt not only the praise we received from our Indian friends about the gorgeous Bhutanese architecture. CST guesthouse was the last stop for the day, where we had a brief campus tour given to us before going to sleep. This day brought a lot of emotions: the happiness of homecoming, the thrill of the cultural exchange, and the appreciation for the close ties between the two nations that the experiences shared had created.

Date: 28/10/2025 (Day 7)

At RIGSS Coronation Hostel, we had breakfast and subsequently, we proceeded to session on Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC). The presentation, which was given by the Chief of Communication Rabser Dorji online, was a transformative deep dive into the strategic plan, vision, and mission of GMC. He developed the concept of the Diamond Strategy. He underlined that it is necessary to draw in and nurture "innovative minds." The listening experience of such an extensive vision was extremely inspiring to me, and besides, I felt a bit overwhelmed by the enormous scale of the dream but also a bit challenged to perceive myself as a required contributor to this future.

The visit to Milarepa Lhakhang after the visionary session was perfect. Steeping into the peaceful environment of the Lhakhang was an instant palette cleanser. Later we had the privilege to engage in meaningful conversation with the Vice Chancellor of RUB where the youth are entrusted as the trust capital of the country. I recognize the crucial role that I have to play and will constantly strive for a better future and invest in myself to contribute meaningfully as a responsible citizen.



In the evening, we went to Phuentsholing Town with an opportunity to explore the town areas. Later, we got back for dinner and visited the CST Guesthouse to discuss our points for the project presentation. My deepest learning from this day was the realization that, while visionary leadership, such as the Diamond Strategy, is one key component in any sustainable future.

Date: 29/10/2025 (Day 8)

Day eight was all about preparation, we spent the entire morning preparing our reflection posts on the Learning Portal and working on the group presentations and cultural show. There was a sense of pressure and excitement in the air as we neared the final deadlines.

However, this pressure created a stunning sense of connection, and I felt more productive as we strived to synthesize everything we had learned at the summit into a cohesive pitch. My main idea cantered around women empowerment.



The afternoon turned into implementation with the group presentations. The key lesson of the day was about the implementation of cross-cultural collaboration under pressure. Additionally, the evening showcased a wonderful array of talent, which featured performances from both Indian participants and Bhutanese participants with the students of CST. The environment changed from a more professional atmosphere to one of celebration and mutual appreciation. Following this was a formal award ceremony awarding certificates to the participants of the 4th IBYS 2025, evoking pride and formal recognition of the work we had all done.

The night ended with an outstanding farewell dinner, excellent food, then a lengthy photo session. After this, we rested to prepare for the next long day.

Date: 30/10/2025 (Day 9)

The closing morning included a relaxed breakfast and check-out, final goodbye hugs, and packing for our separate travel home. On the last morning, I woke up feeling beautifully bittersweet, a sadness in my heart that our nine overloaded days of learning and connection were finished, yet also a profound sense of gratitude for the experience and for the people I had come to know. The last moments were meaningful.

KSHETRIMAYUM JOBALAXMI DEVI

Nine days. That's all it took for strangers to become close friends, for ordinary days to turn extraordinary, and for me to see how powerful human connections can be. So, here I am, back from the India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2025, sitting and writing this journey report while still replaying every conversation and every moment in my head like a favourite movie I can't stop rewatching.



Honestly, this entire experience felt like living inside a beautifully shot travel documentary. Only this time, I wasn't just watching it but I was in it. From dialogues about youth and leadership to spontaneous song sessions on the bus, from exploring Bhutanese culture to late-night reflections with new friends - every single day was packed, raw, and real.

And I have to say that the organisers deserve every bit of applause (and more). They somehow pulled off a schedule that was this full, this diverse, and yet this smooth. It still amazes me how we never missed a single thing, and how every activity (whether it was a visit, a talk, or even a group dinner) felt intentional, meaningful, and perfectly timed. You could tell this wasn't just an event; it was a carefully designed journey for reflection, learning, friendship, and growth.

Now, instead of writing a straight and formal journey report (which honestly doesn't do justice to the experience), I want to tell this story the way it deserves to be told, that is,

through my lens by blending my daily entries and journal notes. To be fair, I had to trim a lot of my reflections down because I apparently wrote a mini novel during those nights (turns out exhaustion makes me sentimental). But I've kept the essence - "the raw and unfiltered bits", that made this journey so unforgettable.

"Travel isn't always pretty. It isn't always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that's okay. The journey changes you; it should change you."

- Anthony Bordain

I started the journey nervously with a sense of curiosity. I wasn't sure what to expect. I thought to myself "maybe new people, new country, unfamiliar things", but I kept telling myself, "maybe this will be one of those rare trips that truly changes something in me." And in ways I can't fully explain, it did.

The first day, travelling from Delhi to Guwahati, began with a wave of panic when I realised at the airport that my luggage hadn't been dispatched and would only arrive on the next flight late at night. Despite the tension, I tried to stay composed as we headed straight to Royal Global University for the formal opening session. I remember sitting there, half distracted, hoping my bag would somehow arrive sooner. Still, I made an effort to be present. And that's when I noticed a Bhutanese participant sitting at her country's bench.



We somehow made eye contact and exchanged a brief smile, and somehow, that simple moment of connection eased my nerves a little. She was very pretty, and yes, I did make sure to tell her that after the session.

By dinner, I was still caught between excitement and worry, barely able to eat much. The chicken curry had that familiar Northeast taste, and it brought me a strange comfort, even as my mind kept circling back to the airport. Later that night, thanks to the patience and kindness of the organisers, especially Choki Sir, everything worked out. He helped with everything, starting from booking the cab to waiting at the airport till I got my luggage. I'll never forget that favour. I felt lucky that I got my luggage back that same night, and with it, a sense of relief and gratitude set the tone for the days to come.

As the summit progressed, every day became a mirror. I reflect something new about the world and at the same time, something even newer about myself.

The bus rides were one of the best and fun parts of the journey. I still remember sitting next to Dawa, the Bhutanese participant I exchanged smiles with on the first day. She told me I looked like someone who doesn't talk much (she was right). Yet, by the end of that same ride, we were talking about everything from life, culture, society and to our own weddings.

These bus rides were always lively with Bollywood, English, and Bhutanese songs. I was amazed by how well the Bhutanese delegates knew every Hindi song, and when Dawa told me they often visit Jaigaon for shopping and bargaining, I realized how close our worlds really are. The more I spoke with participants from Bhutan, again the more I realised how close our worlds already are. We are separated by borders on a map, but connected by warmth, culture, stories, and songs.



Reaching Mawphlang was like walking into a different rhythm of life. The sacred forest, the soft hills, and the village learned elder's teachings all felt heartwarming. The idea that he gave that "people protect what they respect" stayed with me long after. In the evening, we sat together sharing reflections about how we see the world today as youths. I was struck by how varied yet similar our thoughts were. Everyone's answers were woven together by "hope". The chilly breeze brushed against our skin, but the conversations kept our adrenaline high enough that we barely felt the chill.



Then came the traditional storytelling session, where we listened to the tale of Lapalang, accompanied by soft, soulful music in the background. It struck me deeply. As someone who has always been fascinated by cultural expressions and who tends to choose movies or art for their background music and emotional tone, I was honestly overwhelmed. The sound of the duitara playing in the background moved me so much that later, I looked it up and listened to the piece again and again. It was

"Muka (instrumental)" by We the Folks.

Being without internet for two days in Mawphlang turned out to be the best gift. It reminded me that connection is about genuine presence and being in the moment. When we weren't glued to screens, we started seeing, really seeing, each other. And conversations flowed freely and even silences felt comfortable.



“I’ve never really been a city girl.” That line continues to define me. No matter how much I try to adapt to city life, I always find myself drawn back to quiet spaces and open skies. Thus, being in Mawphlang felt like returning to that version of myself. Even the tiring David Scott Trail hike on Day 3 turned into something deeper. It was both challenging and deeply meaningful. I slipped crossing a stream, got bitten by a leech, and felt exhausted, yet I kept going. Every step reminded me of how

life mirrors a hike - uneven and tiring, but rewarding when you keep walking. What touched me most was the teamwork. Whenever someone lagged behind, another slowed down to keep them company. It reminded me how human it is to care and to reach out. I thought of how people online often romanticize disliking human interaction, but moments like these show how beautiful it is to be human among humans.

“The most important thing you can do is to have an open mind.”

As I talked with Bhutanese participants and local guides in Mawphlang, I kept learning new things about their culture and way of life. These interactions reminded me of the importance of curiosity and empathy. Cross-cultural exchanges like this teach us to look beyond appearances and connect through stories and shared experiences.

After returning from hiking to our camp, a short meditation session with Thupten Sir helped me breathe and process the day. That evening's reflective session was centered on three questions: *What do we admire about our country? What concerns us? What ideas do we want to take forward?* Listening to everyone speak with honesty and hope was moving. It made me realize that true love for one's country also means caring enough to question it. Later, as the temperature dropped, we gathered around a bonfire for an evening of Meghalaya's traditional music. The performers introduced us to instruments like the *duitara*, whose sound I found especially beautiful. The songs carried stories of land, people, and memory. Surrounded by warmth and music, I felt a deep sense of belonging.

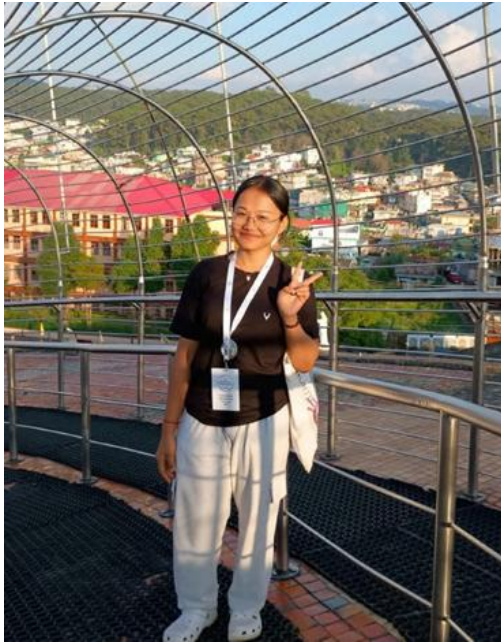


By Day 4, the warmth and connection had only deepened. Our last morning at Mawphlang felt warm and full of gratitude. The hosts came forward to thank us, and I was unexpectedly moved by their humility and kindness that reminded me of home. It wasn't just hospitality; it was sincerity, the kind that makes you feel seen and cared for. The Shillong market visit that followed was alive with colour, sound,

and scent. The sight of women vendors selling dried fish, smoked meat, and chillies reminded me so much of Imphal (my home place). Watching them, I realized again how women quietly sustain our economies and communities in the Northeast. Markets, I thought, are more than places of trade; they're spaces of identity and strength.

At the Don Bosco Museum, I felt proud and rooted. Every floor unfolded the Northeast's rich tapestry of cultures, and I found myself explaining artefacts and stories to others. For once, I wasn't just learning, I was sharing. At one point, I told Meban Sir, our shillong tour guide, about a Meghalaya song I love - "Ko Mei Ramew". I first came across it during a Northeast fusion dance I choreographed in my college. When I started humming it, he was surprised and delighted that I knew it. That small interaction turned into a conversation about music, art, and cultural continuity. It made me realize how art, whether song or dance, transcends geography and becomes a language of connection. To bond with someone through culture, through something that belongs to their home, is such a genuine way of building understanding and respect.

Our evening ride back to the hostel that day was one to remember for me. As the bus moved through the curvy roads, I rested my head against the window and watched the sun set slowly behind the hills. And as we went, the song "Suraj Dooba Hain" played loudly in the bus. At that moment, its rhythm syncs perfectly with my heartbeat, the passing sunset scenery, and the faint hum of the bus engine. Everyone in the bus, Bhutanese and Indian alike, was singing along. I smiled as I watched them, my heart thumping with the beats, the fading sunlight painting our faces in gold. For once, I wasn't standing at the edges of life but right in the middle of it, carried by the music and the warmth of those around me. I felt deeply grateful for the friendships formed, the stories shared, and the version of myself I was slowly becoming through this journey. At that moment, I was reminded of how we make our own stories as we go, through the people we meet, the places we see, and the emotions that quietly stay with us.



Our visit to Asian Confluence that evening was another turning point. Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta spoke about regional cooperation and the need to be open to global perspectives. His optimism stayed with me. But I also found myself thinking about the ground realities, about how progress must always be mindful of people's lived experiences. I understood then that true development must listen to the voices of those it touches first.

Day 5 began early with our drive from the Shillong hostel to Royal Global University, Guwahati. It was a long, tiring ride, and I started feeling unwell soon after since I'd forgotten to take my pills. Motion sickness dulled much of the day, but a few moments stood out which were : walking quietly through the Brahmaputra Heritage Museum, spotting Dr. Hiren Gohain's photograph titled "*The Assamese John Keats*," and later laughing as we played snake and ladder in the park nearby. Even through the fatigue, those little moments reminded me why I was here — to learn, reflect, and stay present. This summit wasn't just about academic learning but about inner growth, too.

The day ended on a lighter note with an unplanned visit to the mall. While others shopped for souvenirs, I wandered into a bookstore and bought a book - my kind of keepsake. Later, Amrutha and I laughed and posed in a photo booth, capturing a moment of pure joy that washed away all the tiredness of the day.





After a long nine-hour journey the next day, we finally reached Phuentsholing. I had managed to read only two chapters of *Pachinko* before dozing off for most of the ride, this time safely armed with my motion-sickness pills and a window seat. The view outside was

absolutely stunning with green hills, blue rivers, yellow clouds, and sleepy skies. One of my favorite parts of this 9 hour trip was my conversation with Thupten Sir, who sat beside me. He spoke about CEP and his other initiatives with such calm conviction that it left a deep impression on me. When he said that commitment isn't about sticking to one fixed path but about choosing consciously, again and again, it lingered in my mind long after.

Reaching the Bhutan gate felt surreal. As I watched others smile while getting their passports stamped, it hit me that this was my first time traveling abroad, and that too, to a country as serene and mindful as Bhutan. The welcome at RIGSS was warm; we were greeted with *khada* scarves and a lively introductory session by Sigay Dem Ma'am. Dinner introduced me to *ema datshi*, which instantly became a favorite. Later, conversations with RIGSS members and researchers reminded me of how intellectual curiosity can bridge worlds. I left feeling inspired, humbled, and grateful to be part of something so meaningful.



My first thought after staying a full day in Bhutan was a funny one. It was : “If I lived here for even a week, I would become so fit and healthy that my mother’s long-standing wish for me would finally come true”. I can

almost picture her proud smile if she saw how well I've been eating here. The generosity and care with which food is served in Bhutan truly humbled me.

The sessions at RIGSS were deeply inspiring. Mr. Rabssel Dorji's talk on the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) project blew me away. It wasn't just about building a city; it was about reimagining how we build. It left me thinking about how development doesn't have to come at the cost of peace or nature. As a student, I couldn't help but compare this model with the fast-paced urbanization happening in other developing nations. GMC feels like a model of what future cities could be and should be (a place where progress and mindfulness coexist). Yet, I also reflected on how such transitions take time; the challenge lies not just in building infrastructure, but in nurturing a collective mindset of such awareness and balance.



After the session, we were served food again. I couldn't help but laugh at how many times we were fed in a day. Bhutan truly knows how to make people feel nourished in every sense. I also fell in love with beef baley that day.



Our next stop that same day was Milarepa Lhakhang. It was breathtaking, serene, and filled with an energy that words cannot capture. Standing there, I thought about how faith, art, and architecture intertwine. Every corner of the complex reflected care and devotion. The intricate details, the patient craftsmanship, and the creativity made me think about how, in today's world, we often mistake speed and effortlessness for real skill and effort. Here, everything seemed to

show that true skill lies in patience, attention, and the willingness to create with heart.

Later in the day, we had another session with the Vice Chancellor of RIGSS. His talk on the historic relations between India and Bhutan fascinated me as a history student. He spoke with such clarity about how the two nations have shared a bond of mutual respect, learning, and understanding. I felt proud listening to him - proud of how our histories intersect, not through domination but through mutual respect. Walking through Phuentsholing town that evening, I noticed something so simple yet profound: drivers stopping patiently at zebra crossings, waiting for people to cross first even without traffic lights. It wasn't performative politeness; it was genuine consideration. It made me wonder what our own societies could learn from this everyday mindfulness.

After returning to RIGSS, we had a short discussion on our self-reflection reports, group presentations, and closing ceremony prep. Later, despite being exhausted, we went on another unplanned campus stroll in CST led by Monash, the student president. We wandered, laughed, and even played basketball. That night, as we got back to our work, I realized how much this journey had taught me about balance - between duty and joy, fatigue and fulfillment. Growth, I understood, often comes not from comfort, but from shared effort and quiet exhaustion alongside people who make it all worthwhile.



The penultimate day was a very busy day. Everyone gave their best to their group presentations and practice for closing ceremony performances. I felt genuinely inspired. The room was buzzing with energy and collaboration. Watching young people from different countries working together, thinking deeply, debating, and designing something meaningful made me feel hopeful about the future. It showed how powerful youth can be when given the right platform to express themselves. My presentation group : Ryka, Tashi, Norbu, and I worked on digital forums. What I loved most was how it felt like a genuine exchange of ideas rather than a formal task. One of our key insights was how loneliness often drives people toward the

digital world - seeking comfort, answers, or escape. It made us reflect on how technology connects us yet sometimes deepens our disconnection from reality.



I was genuinely impressed by how thoughtfully the entire summit was designed. Every discussion, activity, and assignment had a purpose, not just to teach, but to make us reflect and create. It truly encouraged active learning and meaningful engagement.

Watching Indian and Bhutanese participants laughing, singing, and cutting the cake together made me realize how far we had come from being complete strangers to becoming close friends sharing genuine joy in just 9 days. That night's "last supper" at RIGSS, with ema datshi, beef baley, and Dalle pickle, was full of nostalgia. On



the bus back to CST, we sang along to *Tam Tshisum* one last time, with voices tired but hearts full.

After the presentations and closing ceremony

came one of the most heartwarming surprises - a spontaneous cake-cutting for November birthdays.

As we packed for our early morning departure, our room buzzed with late-night conversations, reflections, and jokes. We barely slept, knowing goodbyes were near. When we woke up, the Bhutanese participants were already up just to see us off. It was a simple but touching act that reflected their warmth and kindness throughout the summit.

We exchanged hugs, gifts, and our goodbyes. “Oh how fast the time flies” I thought. I felt physically and mentally exhausted, yet the adrenaline was still running through me, reminding every part of me that I was going to miss this experience, these people, and that an emptiness would follow me for a while. But I could already feel it coming before I came here. Though I gave it all, made the closest bonds, and enjoyed every moment by putting my mind in the moment, in the small corner of my heart I was half anticipating the end as that is the only way I cope with the impermanence of life. This is what life taught me — to not get too attached, to guard my soft little empath heart, to remind her and myself that things end and that’s okay.

As the summit came to an end, I found myself quietly reflecting on everything — the friendships that now felt like family, the laughter that crossed languages, and the realization that “youth” isn’t just an age group but a



mindset that dreams of better worlds. The drive from Phuentsholing to Siliguri on

the last day was long and quiet, filled with sleepy faces and heavy hearts. When Thupten Sir, Hasta Sir, Shedra Sir, and Choden Ma'am joined us on the RIGSS bus and even brought cakes, juice, and fruits for us before we left, it reminded me that genuine care doesn't end with duty. Their warmth made the farewell feel both comforting and heartbreaking.

As I sat at the airport scrolling through photos beautifully captured by Shebdre Sir and Thupten Sir, I felt an overwhelming mix of gratitude and melancholy. This India-Bhutan Youth Summit had been more than an event; it was a classroom of empathy, curiosity, and connection. I came here as one person but now left with around 30 new friendships, and new perspectives with a deeper understanding of different cultures and traditions. Nine days changed me and as I return back, I carry with me not just souvenirs, but lessons, memories, and a renewed belief that the world truly feels kinder when seen through the lens of friendship and mindfulness. This Youth Summit was not only about learning *from* others, but also *with* them, and with oneself. What began as formal introductions soon turned into long, meaningful conversations about life, dreams, and differences. Strangers became friends, and those friendships became reminders of how effortlessly connections form when empathy, openness, and humanity are at the centre. Even in moments of fatigue, when I felt slightly detached, I found myself observing, reflecting, and feeling deeply



present in quieter ways. I reminded myself why I had joined: to learn, not just academically but also in spirit. Opportunities like this where one could meet new people, learn across borders, think about ideas that transcend classrooms, don't come often. Time, I realized, is always running, and it's up to us to hold on to what truly matters within it. This Summit slowly reshaped how I see learning. It is never a straight path of absorbing knowledge, but a living experience of connecting with people, ideas, and oneself.



Looking back, this journey feels like more than just a nine-day program. From engaging with people of different backgrounds to having conversations about leadership, peace, and sustainability, I realised how much we, as youth, hold the power to shape the future with empathy, openness, and awareness. Every interaction, whether at the museum, during our mindfulness sessions, or even while sharing simple meals, taught me something about the bond between humans themselves and nature, and how humanity must always stay at the centre of every decision we make.

What began with strangers slowly turned into friendships that I know will stay with me for a long time. I've come back with a broader perspective, a calmer mind, and a heart more open to understanding others. The India-Bhutan Youth Summit wasn't

just a trip. It was a journey of growth, reflection, and connection. I'm deeply proud to have been a part of it, and I'll always carry its lessons of peace, kindness, and shared purpose, wherever I go.

MD SAZAD

The summit began with an atmosphere filled with hope, curiosity, and new beginnings. It was more than just sessions and networking; it was a meeting of young minds from diverse cultures and backgrounds, each carrying unique dreams and perspectives. The true beauty of this experience lay in how everyone's differences created a space for mutual learning and understanding. Exploring Bhutanese culture became an inspiring part of this journey—its values of unity, mindfulness, and respect for tradition stood out deeply, shaping the days that followed.

A visit to the sacred Khasi forest revealed the deep connection between people and nature. The forest is treated as a living spirit, where every leaf, stone, and grain of soil is sacred. The Khasi people believe that nothing should be taken away from it, as doing so would anger the forest gods. Signs such as the appearance of a black snake are seen as messages of displeasure, while the presence of a leopard called *Labasang* signals forgiveness and balance restored. The experience reflected a beautiful harmony between faith and ecology—a reminder that respect for nature is also respect for life.

Morning light brought the aroma of traditional Khasi breakfast and the calm rhythm of community life. Group activities centered on leadership, teamwork, and timing unfolded through laughter and thoughtful collaboration. The riverside setting at lunchtime offered quiet moments of reflection surrounded by nature's beauty. Evening discussions on India's education system, governance, and social issues opened deeper conversations about change and responsibility, revealing how strongly young voices can shape the future.

The lively streets of Police Bazar were alive with color and culture. Circular paths led through bustling stalls filled with bamboo crafts, handwoven shawls, and traditional foods such as *jadoh* and *tungrymbai*. The blend of modern stores and

tribal art created a vibrant harmony between past and present. The air carried the sound of laughter, bargaining, and conversation, turning the market into more than a place of trade—it became a reflection of community spirit and living heritage.

The journey from Shillong to Guwahati marked a shift in rhythm—from the calm of the hills to the pulse of the city. Streets filled with chai stalls, conversations, and movement revealed a different kind of beauty in daily life. As evening descended, the Brahmaputra River shimmered in gold beneath the setting sun. Its vast, steady flow carried a quiet message of continuity and calm. Standing by its banks evoked a feeling of connection—between motion and stillness, between self and the wider world.

Crossing into Bhutan brought a sense of peace and warmth. The people, with their gentle manners and welcoming smiles, embodied kindness and mindfulness in every interaction. The philosophy behind the Gelephu Mindfulness City reflected in their daily lives, where respect, simplicity, and compassion guided every action. Exchanging experiences with Bhutanese friends created moments of deep understanding, reminding that true connection comes from empathy and shared humanity.

Wearing the traditional Bhutanese dress, the *Gho*, offered a deeper connection to the nation's culture and identity. Its modest design and graceful form symbolized discipline, pride, and respect for heritage. Each fold carried meaning; each thread represented unity and tradition. The experience of wearing the *Gho* became more than cultural—it felt like stepping into the rhythm of Bhutanese life, where simplicity meets dignity in every gesture.

A spirit of purpose filled the day through the presentation on *Gender and Women's Empowerment*. The topic inspired powerful reflection on equality, respect, and strength. Every voice in the group carried passion and conviction, creating an atmosphere of unity and courage. The discussions that followed brought new awareness—change begins with understanding, and understanding begins with

listening. The evening concluded with smiles, laughter, and photographs, marking not just the end of a program but the celebration of friendship and shared growth. The final day in Bhutan unfolded with quiet gratitude and emotional farewells. The bond built over the past days felt stronger than words could express. Laughter, stories, and kindness had turned strangers into lifelong friends. The humility and warmth of the Bhutanese people left a lasting impression—showing that happiness thrives in simplicity and respect. As the journey came to a close, memories of every conversation, landscape, and smile became a part of the heart. Bhutan remained not just a destination, but a feeling of peace that would stay forever.

MOHAMMAD FAISAL IQBAL

Day 1 - 22nd October 2025

Theme: *Arrival and First Connections*

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit began with my trip from Chennai to Guwahati, where we received a warm welcome from the Royal Global University and the organising team. We had a short briefing session and interacted with students from Bhutan and different parts of India, all from diverse fields like political science, animal science, and social sciences.

It was wonderful meeting people who shared similar interests and backgrounds, and it already felt like the start of something meaningful. We ended the day with a group dinner, full of excitement for the journey ahead.



Day 2 – 23rd October 2025

Theme: *Arrival, Mawphlang Sacred Forest, and Global Perspectives*

We travelled from Guwahati to Mawphlang Sacred Forest, a beautiful and sacred site in Khasi culture. Our local guide explained the traditions and beliefs

surrounding the forest, showing how nature and spirituality are deeply connected in local life.



Later, during our Q&A session, we reflected on global citizenship and shared our hopes and concerns for the world. I personally felt strongly about improving education quality, empowering women, and reducing plastic waste. Listening to others' views on issues like mindful AI use and equality was very inspiring.



Day 3 – 24th October 2025

Theme: *Learning Through Nature and Culture*

We began the day with traditional Khasi breakfast and a cooking demonstration of *Putharo*. Then, we hiked the David Scott Trail, where we enjoyed nature and played a fun team-building puzzle game that showed the value of teamwork.



Lunch by the riverside was peaceful, and later we did a meditation and reflection exercise that helped me think about what's missing in my life and how I want to grow personally. The evening cultural session by the bonfire, with Khasi music and storytelling, helped us bond more deeply.



Day 4 – 25th October 2025

Theme: *From Camping to Shillong and Regional Connections*

It was our last morning at the David Scott campsite. We clicked photos with our hosts and received small souvenirs, a sweet gesture that made us feel at home. On the way to Shillong, we had a fun bus ride with songs and laughter.



At Police Bazaar, we explored the local markets and bought small gifts. Later, we attended a session at the Asian Confluence Centre that discussed how regions like Bengal and Northeast India are connected through trade, waterways, and cultural exchange. It was an eye-opener to see how collaboration drives regional growth.



Day 5 – 26th October 2025

Theme: *Learning Life Lessons and Exploring Culture*



We travelled from New Shillong to RGU and met Dr. Anil Kumar Bagai, the Vice-Chancellor. He shared his life journey, his Buddhist philosophy, and the idea of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, “the world is one family.” It made me realise that life is

not only about science and success but also about values, compassion, and balance.



In the evening, we visited the Brahmaputra Museum, watched the sunset over the river, and ended the day with some shopping and dinner. It was a peaceful day of learning and cultural exploration.

Day 6 – 27th October 2025

Theme: *Journey to Bhutan and First Impressions*



We started early for our long drive to Bhutan. After crossing immigration and getting my passport stamped, I felt a sense of excitement and achievement. Bhutan instantly felt peaceful, clean roads, no honking, and

polite drivers stopping for pedestrians

In the evening, we reached the RIGSS campus, had dinner, and got a short briefing about the summit ahead. Despite the long journey, reaching Bhutan felt calm and refreshing.



Day 7 – 28th October 2025

Theme: *Youth Leadership and Cultural Learning*

The day began with a session on Gelephu Mindfulness City, where we learned about Bhutan's vision of building a mindful and sustainable city for the future. Then,



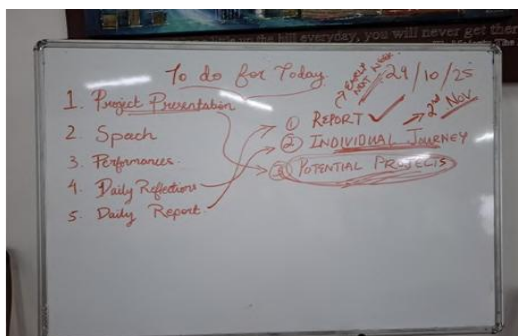
we visited Milarepa Lhakhang, a peaceful monastery where I personally felt calm and connected, even meeting a few monks there.

Post lunch, we had an engaging discussion on Youth Leadership and India-Bhutan Relations, sharing ideas on how young people can strengthen ties between the two countries. We ended the day exploring Phuentsholing town, buying souvenirs, and updating our learning portal.



Day 8 – 29th October 2025

Theme: *Presentations, Celebrations, and New Beginnings*



The final day was full of excitement and emotions. We worked on our group presentations and reflections, then presented our ideas on youth leadership, collaboration, and sustainable development.



Later, we interacted with some eminent guests, gaining valuable insights into leadership and diplomacy. The evening ended beautifully with a cultural show and concluding dinner, where we celebrated the friendships and experiences that shaped the entire summit.

Day 9 – 30th October 2025

Theme: *Departure and Gratitude*

After breakfast, we said our goodbyes and started our journey back. It was emotional to part ways after spending nine unforgettable days together. I left with deep respect for Bhutan's culture, simplicity, and mindfulness, and a renewed sense of responsibility as a young leader.





Final Reflection

The India–Bhutan Youth Summit was much more than a trip, it was a life-changing experience. I learned how culture, empathy, and leadership can bridge nations. From the peaceful forests of Meghalaya to the calm streets of Bhutan, every moment taught me the value of mindfulness, collaboration, and shared humanity. This journey helped me grow personally, I became more open-minded, reflective, and aware of global issues like sustainability, equality, and education. Most importantly, I learned that small acts of kindness and understanding can build stronger connections between countries and people.

MONASH MONGER

Day 1 – 22nd October:

The program commenced with a warm and heartfelt welcome from the faculty and family of the Royal Global University (RGU). Their hospitality made us feel genuinely appreciated from the very beginning. We were taken on a tour of various parts of the university, including academic laboratories and student lounges, which provided an excellent understanding of the campus environment and academic infrastructure.

It was also an opportunity to bond with our peers from India. Interacting with participants from diverse cultural backgrounds was both exciting and enriching. I particularly admired the confidence of our Indian friends and their ability to openly share their experiences and personal stories. This initial engagement laid a strong foundation for meaningful cultural exchange throughout the program.



Day 2 – 23rd October:

This day turned out to be one of the most memorable experiences of the entire program as we travelled to the beautiful village of Mawphlang in Meghalaya. We learned about the rich cultural and spiritual traditions preserved by the local community for generations.

The visit to the Sacred Forest was fascinating, as we gained insights into ancient rituals performed to honour local deities. We learned that historically, rituals involved the sacrifice of a red ox without any marks or scars—an important cultural belief. An interesting tradition shared with us was that the appearance of a leopard after the ritual symbolized acceptance by the deities, while the sighting of a snake suggested otherwise.

At the base camp, our team received excellent logistical support. Being disconnected from the digital world allowed us to engage in deep conversations about the challenges faced by our respective countries and build genuine, lasting connections.



Day 3 – 24th October:

We embarked on the David Scott Trail, an experience that deepened our appreciation for nature and the pristine environment maintained by the local community. Their commitment to cleanliness and conservation was truly inspiring. During the trail, we participated in team-building activities, including problem-solving puzzles. Our group displayed strong teamwork, coordination, and enthusiasm, successfully completing the challenge first. In the evening, a short meditation session led by Mr. Thukten helped us cultivate focus and mindfulness. Later, local performers presented beautifully composed traditional songs. Although I could not understand the lyrics, I thoroughly enjoyed the performance and even learned a few verses, which made the evening even more special.



Day 4 – 25th October:

We spent the day exploring Shillong town, which, unlike Bhutan, was crowded and bustling with commercial activity. During our exploration, my friend Tendrel Zangmo and I were unintentionally separated from the group and lost our way. Despite our efforts, we couldn't locate our team until we managed to reconnect through the mobile network and share our location.

This experience taught me valuable lessons:

- Always stay with friends or in a group while visiting new places.
- Carry sufficient cash.
- Ensure access to a working mobile network.
- Follow the group leader's instructions carefully.

Later, we visited the Asian Confluence Centre, where we learned about their initiatives to strengthen socio-economic and diplomatic ties across the region. Their contributions to international cooperation were both impressive and inspiring.



Day 5 – 26th October:

We had the privilege of attending an insightful session with the Vice Chancellor of Royal Global University, Dr. A.K. Buragohain. His speech was deeply inspiring, especially his reference to the book *Small Is Beautiful*, which I now plan to read. Our visit to the Brahmaputra Heritage Site offered a fascinating glimpse into the traditional tools and artefacts used by early communities living near the river. Later, we visited the city mall. Although we did not purchase anything due to the high prices, we enjoyed a simple meal and the experience of exploring the vibrant local marketplace.



Day 6 – 27th October:

We began our journey back to Bhutan with a nearly nine-hour drive from Guwahati to Phuentsholing. It felt comforting to return home, and our Indian friends expressed their joy upon reaching Bhutan, describing it as a “piece of heaven.” Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by officials from RIGSS. Despite being tired, I encouraged my friends to help unload the luggage, and I truly appreciated their cooperation and willingness to assist one another.



Day 7 – 28th October:

We attended an informative briefing on the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) delivered by Mr. Rigsel Wagchuk. I learned many new aspects of this visionary project and its long-term significance for Bhutan's future.

We then visited Milarepa Lhakhang. Although this was my second visit, sharing the experience with new companions made it feel fresh and memorable. Later, we had the honour of an audience with the Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan, who shared insightful reflections on the historical relationship and enduring friendship between India and Bhutan. His words deepened our appreciation for bilateral cooperation and mutual understanding.

Exploring Phuentsholing town with both Bhutanese and Indian friends was another highlight of the day. It further strengthened our cultural bonds and created memories that I will cherish for years to come.



Day 8 – 29th October:

The final day of the program was dedicated to group discussions and project presentations. Our team proposed an innovative idea on urban planning that emphasized social interaction and community connection. The presentation was

well received, and we received valuable feedback from principals and senior education officials present.

The closing ceremony was emotional as we shared our final meal together, took photographs, and even celebrated a few pre-birthdays. It was a beautiful and heartwarming conclusion to a truly meaningful journey.



Day 9 – 30th October:

We woke up early to help our Indian friends pack and load their luggage. After exchanging heartfelt goodbyes and souvenir gifts, we finally parted ways. I then travelled back to my college with a heart full of gratitude and unforgettable memories.

This program has been a deeply enriching journey filled with learning, cultural exposure, teamwork, and friendship. The laughter, shared experiences, and knowledge gained from both Bhutanese and Indian participants will remain lifelong treasures.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Centre for Escalation of Peace, the India–Bhutan Foundation, RIGSS, and Pallavan Learning Systems for creating such a valuable platform for youth engagement, cross-cultural dialogue, and experiential learning. This experience will always hold a special place in my life.

NAMGYEL NORBU



India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 was an educational, friend-filled, and experience-rich trip. During the nine days, I was able to not only see new places, but also learn new meanings of leadership, teamwork, and cultural understanding.

Our excitement was high since the very first day when we flew to Guwahati and to Royal Global University. The hospitality that we enjoyed made me understand the beauty of international friendship. The sight of such a colorful and developed university made me dream even bigger and enjoy the possibilities education can produce.

When we proceeded to Shillong, the fresh air and the picturesque landscape of Mawphlang taught me to be simple and to keep the traditions. My trip to the Sacred Forest and education by the locals taught me that nature and culture are usually



wiser than we are. We had adventure days, teamwork days in our camping days, be it a hiking of the David Squad Trail, learning to cook local dishes, singing around the bonfire, all of these activities only helped to form stronger bonds and unforgettable memories.

The Iew "uh Market and Don Bosco Museum visit helped me to have a better insight into the way people live with a sense of purpose and pride in their culture. Encountering such great people as Subyasachi Dutta made me believe in myself and do something good to society. His youth

leadership words inspired me to be proactive and speak out in the name of good causes.

The visit to the Brahmaputra River Heritage Center was one of the most emotional moments to me. It taught me a good lesson of how beauty and flaws can exist in life-how even the most magnificent things may have some struggle behind the scenes. It was a time of introspection and intake.



My visit back to Royal Global University and an encounter with their Vice Chancellor made me remember that humility is what real leaders possess. His statement, I am just a teacher, moved me and made me appreciate the spirit of service in leadership.

The past few days In Phuentsholing were no less significant. Peace and inspiration were achieved in the virtual meeting with Dasho Rubsel and our visit to Milarepa Lhakhang. Another proud moment that made me strive to be higher in life and education was meeting the RUB Vice Chancellor.

The closing ceremony was moving but encouraging as the summit ended. Speeches, cultural performances and the success of the program were some of the things that made me realize how much we had become one as learners, friends and as future leaders.

It was hard to say goodbye on the last day. But it was full of hope that we will see each other once again. The India-Bhutan Youth Summit was not merely a program but a life-altering event as I was able to learn the significance of togetherness, respect, and cooperation.



I am highly indebted to our mentors, Thupten Sir, Hasta Sir, Choki Sir, Shedra sir and Choden Madam, who have taken good care of us, and advised and counseled us with wisdom and kindness. These nine days really opened my mind and heart and gave me a new perspective on the world in the prism of compassion, learning, and cultural harmony.

This experience will always be the beautiful part of my life as it helped me to realize that I should accept differences, value friendship, and believe that young people can change something positive.

PELDEN WANGCHUK

Day 1 – 22nd October:

The First Flight Experience

It was the first international flight of my life — an unforgettable experience in itself. Our journey began on 21st October, as eleven of us from different universities across Bhutan gathered at the Office of the Vice Chancellor in Thimphu at 5:00 PM. We had the privilege of listening to the wise and inspiring words of Dasho Chewang Rinzin, Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan. Despite his busy schedule, Dasho took the time to brief us on the significance of the upcoming summit — its importance to the nation, our universities, and us as individuals. The hour-long session was engaging and insightful, leaving all of us deeply motivated.



At the office of Vice Chancellor, Royal University of Bhutan

After the briefing, we returned to our respective accommodations with instructions to gather at Changlimithang at 4:20 AM the next morning for departure to Paro International Airport.

Early the next morning, we arrived at the airport, where we were greeted with a warm gesture — a bowl of hot porridge lovingly prepared by Pema Lhazin’s mother. It was the perfect comfort food for the chilly Paro morning. Madam Sigay Dem and Sir Norbu Tshering accompanied us to the airport to see us off. After a quick group photo and cheerful exchange, we proceeded to check in.



Send off from Paro International Airport.

Since it was my first time at an airport, I could hardly contain my excitement. I explored every corner of the departure gate, admiring the stalls selling Bhutanese handicrafts — a wonderful initiative to promote local products. Soon, it was time to board. The takeoff was loud and slightly shaky, but once in the air, the flight was smooth and steady. Just as I was finishing my snacks, the pilot announced our descent — the one-hour journey felt like a short stroll!

We landed at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati, at around 8:20 AM. After completing the formalities, we boarded a bus to Royal Global University (RGU). The weather was warmer than expected, but the hospitality made us feel at home.



Inside the Royal Global University campus

At RGU, we were warmly received by Ms. Gupreet and her team, who guided us to our hostel. The accommodation was modern, comfortable, and beautifully maintained. After freshening up and having breakfast, we toured the campus — a stunning environment with impressive facilities that far exceeded our expectations. The convenience of having shops, medical facilities, and eateries within the campus made student life seem vibrant and well-supported.



Warm welcome and cultural exchange at RGU

Later, our Indian counterparts arrived. Around 6:00 PM, we were officially welcomed with a mesmerizing Manipuri dance performance followed by a group photo session. The evening ended with an orientation in the conference hall, where each participant introduced themselves and shared their goals for the India–Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS). Dinner was lively and filled with laughter as we dined with Indian friends, marking the beginning of new friendships.



Bhutanese and Indian participants at the 4th India Bhutan Youth Summit, RGU Guwahati

Through this day, I learned the importance of staying open-minded, adaptable, and genuine when meeting new people and exploring unfamiliar environments.

Day 2 – 23rd October:

Exploring Mawphlang Sacred Forest

“Kumno philong,” “Nga kerteng Pelden,” “Phi kerteng kumno”—phrases in Khasi that I learned and used to greet locals, meaning “How are you?”, “I am Pelden,” and “What is your name?” respectively.

We began our journey to Mawphlang Sacred Forest at around 8:00 AM after breakfast. Locally known as *Law Kyntang* or *Law Lyngdoh*, the forest lies about 26 km from Shillong. Though it was a five-hour bus ride, the scenic beauty, songs, and cheerful atmosphere made the journey enjoyable.



Mr. Tambor Lyngdoh briefing

Upon arrival around 1:00 PM, we were greeted by vast meadows. After lunch prepared by the local guides, Mr. Tambor Lyngdoh, the forest secretary and an expert in conservation, briefed us on the forest’s spiritual and cultural significance.



Entering the revered Mawphlang Sacred Forest

I was amazed by the similarities between the Khasi and Bhutanese beliefs — both revere nature and avoid disturbing sacred landscapes believed to house deities. We learned that taking anything from the forest is considered sacrilegious and believed to bring misfortune. Mr. Tambor also shared the story of a British officer who fell gravely ill after removing sacred items from the forest.



Our cozy campsite at the trout farm.

During our guided walk, we saw ritual altars, medicinal trees, and the Yew tree (*Taxus baccata*), which produces taxol, a compound used in cancer treatment. Later, we trekked to the David Scott Trail and reached the Trout Farm campsite, a tranquil spot established by a local villager.

With no internet access, we spent the evening reflecting and connecting deeply. In a reflection circle, each participant described themselves and shared perspectives on global issues — from gender inequality to environmental degradation.



Sharing thoughts and reflections during the session

The evening ended with a storytelling session where a local teacher narrated *U Seer Lapalang*, a moving tale of a mother and son deer — a lesson on respecting nature. The day closed with dinner and a bonfire under the Khasi skies — a perfect end to a day of cultural and spiritual awakening.



Evening bonfire: Sharing stories and warmth under the Khasi skies

Day 3 – 24th October:

Hiking and Cultural Immersion

Our day began early with fresh air and a traditional Khasi breakfast. We first attended a cooking demonstration where we learned to make *Putharo*, a rice-flour delicacy prepared in a clay pot called *Sarao*. The dish symbolizes togetherness and is served during harvest festivals and family celebrations.



A hearty start with authentic Khasi cuisine

We then embarked on a 20 km hike along the David Scott Trail, one of Meghalaya's oldest trade routes. The trail offered breathtaking views of rolling hills and streams. Along the way, we played a team puzzle game that strengthened our coordination and teamwork. Lunch by a riverside offered a serene moment to rest and appreciate nature.



Learning to prepare Putharo, a symbol of Khasi togetherness.

Back at the campsite, we meditated and held group discussions on education, environment, and digitalization. I shared my concern about Bhutan's culture being influenced by global trends and emphasized the importance of preserving our traditions. These discussions revealed that despite differences, India and Bhutan share common dreams of peace and sustainability.



Recharging by the river during the hike.

The evening came alive with music around a bonfire. Local musicians introduced us to traditional instruments — *Khenyang ma Syem*, *Tundrang*, *Kaduitara*, and *Kakshingrang*. The night resonated with laughter, stories, and songs — an unforgettable cultural exchange.



A night of music, stories, and connection around the bonfire

Day 4 – 25th October:

From the Sacred Forest to Shillong City

Our final morning in the forest began with gratitude for our hosts. After breakfast, we hiked back to the starting point and exchanged farewell speeches. Their warmth and hospitality deeply touched us.

In Shillong, the bustling streets and markets offered a stark contrast to Bhutan’s calm environment. Divided into small groups, we explored the vibrant bazaars filled with bamboo crafts and souvenirs. I purchased handmade gifts for friends and family before we regrouped for lunch at the Golf Ground.



Exploring the vibrant markets of Shillong

We then visited the Don Bosco Museum, a remarkable institution showcasing Northeast India’s diverse cultures through

artefacts, textiles, and exhibits. Later, at Asian Confluence, we attended an enlightening session with Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, who spoke about regional cooperation and sustainability. His presentation on projects like Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) illustrated how interconnected development initiatives can promote shared growth across South Asia.



Exploring the cultural treasures of Northeast India.



Dinner followed at Asian Confluence, marking the end of a deeply informative and reflective day.

Learning about regional cooperation and sustainable development

Day 5 – 26th October:

Learning, Culture, and City Exploration in Guwahati

After breakfast, we began our journey to Guwahati, reaching around noon. At Royal Global University, we attended a thought-provoking lecture by Professor (Dr.) A.K. Buragohain, Vice Chancellor, on *Right Livelihood, Sustainable Development, and Buddhist Economics*. His references to *Small Is Beautiful* and *Our Common Future* offered valuable insights into holistic growth and ethical living.

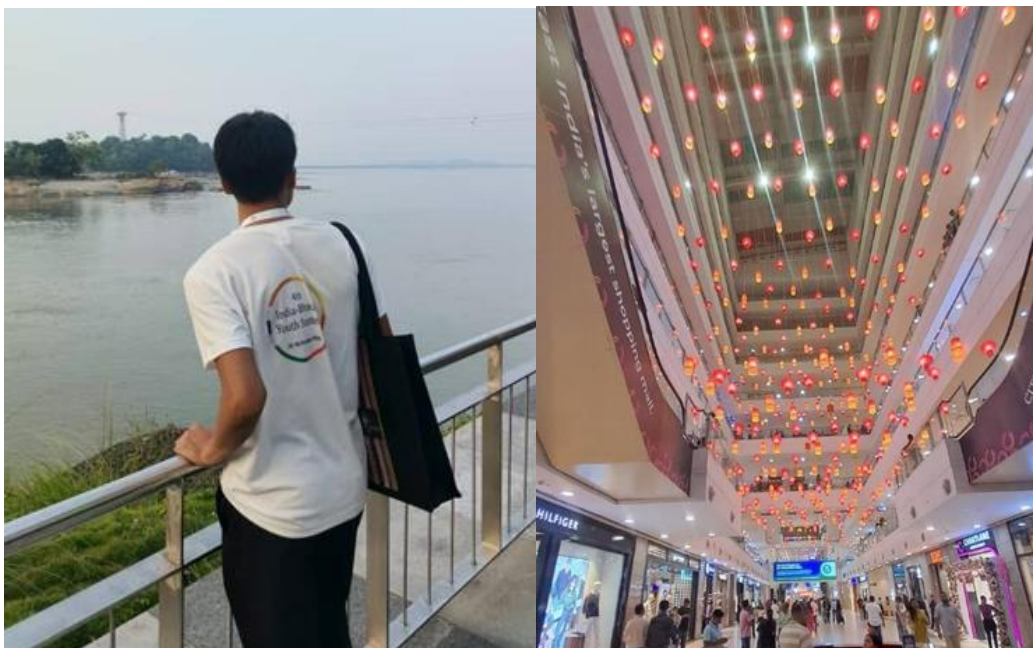


Participants enjoying an early breakfast before departure



An engaging lecture by Prof. (Dr.) A.K Buragohain at the Royal Global University.

In the afternoon, we visited the Mahabahu Brahmaputra Heritage Centre, a beautiful riverside museum celebrating the region's culture and its connection with the Brahmaputra River. Later, we explored the City Centre Mall, sampling local street food before returning to the hostel.



Day 6 – 27th October:

Journey Home and Reflections at RIGSS

After breakfast, we began our journey back to Bhutan, reaching Phuentsholing around 5 PM. We were welcomed at RIGSS with refreshments, followed by an emotional farewell to our guides, Mirban and Mati, whose kindness and professionalism deeply touched us.



That evening, Madam Sigay led a reflective session, reminding us of the importance of sincerity and dedication. Dinner followed, after which we retired to the CST Guest House, grateful for the day's lessons and experiences.



Ending the day with reflection and gratitude at RIGSS, Phuntsholing.

Day 7 – 28th October:

Inspiration and Reflection at RIGSS

After breakfast at RIGSS Coronation Hostel, we attended sessions with Mr. Rabssel Dorji, Chief of Communications for the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC), and Dasho Chewang Rinzin. Mr. Rabssel described GMC as a visionary project grounded in His Majesty's *Diamond Strategy*, representing innovation, sustainability, and mindfulness.



Session with Mr. Rabssel Dorji.

Later, we visited Sangye Migyur Ling Lhakhang, where we offered prayers and received blessings. In the afternoon, Dasho Chewang Rinzin emphasized the India–Bhutan friendship and encouraged us to cultivate the habit of reading. The day ended with a renewed sense of purpose and pride in Bhutan’s vision for mindful development.



Visit at Sangye Migyur Ling Lhakhang



Interaction with Dasho Chewang Rinzin

Day 8 – 29th October:

Final Reflections and Closing Ceremony

After breakfast, we began preparing for our final project presentations. My group focused on an AI-based agricultural platform to empower farmers and improve transparency in trade between India and Bhutan. We also proposed an Agri-Rail System linking the two countries for efficient produce exchange.



Morning collaboration on final project

The afternoon closing ceremony was emotional and joyous, filled with speeches, laughter, and farewells. We celebrated friendships and growth with photos, performances, and heartfelt goodbyes — a perfect culmination of the summit.



Day 9 – 30th October:

Farewell and Return to College

Our last night together was spent reminiscing, talking, and sharing gratitude. By 4:30 AM, our Indian friends were ready to depart. We helped them load their luggage and presented small parting gifts as tokens of friendship. Watching their bus drive away was bittersweet — it marked the end of a life-changing journey.

After breakfast, we began our return journey. By evening, I reached Punakha, tired yet filled with gratitude. This summit was more than a trip — it was a journey of learning, self-discovery, and lifelong friendship.

PEMA LHAZIN

The India–Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 was far more than a program — it was a journey of growth, connection, and self-discovery. Over nine unforgettable days, I experienced what it truly means to learn, to connect, and to appreciate the beauty of shared humanity. What began as a gathering of youth from two different nations soon became a family built on laughter, understanding, and mutual respect.

From the very beginning, there was an air of excitement and curiosity. Meeting new faces and hearing different stories opened my eyes to how much we can learn when we step outside our comfort zones. Despite our different cultures and backgrounds, our conversations flowed easily — about life, dreams, challenges, and the future we hope to build together. The warmth and inclusiveness everyone showed made me feel instantly at home.

Throughout the summit, I realized that true learning doesn't always happen in classrooms. It happens in the small moments — in deep conversations during long bus rides, in shared meals, in the calm silence of nature, and in the laughter that broke down barriers between us. I learned about leadership, empathy, and the importance of taking responsibility, even in small ways. I discovered that being a change maker starts with awareness — with the courage to care and to act.

One of the most memorable moments of the entire summit was spending time with Sir Thupten during dinner. His words left a deep mark on me and changed how I view people and relationships. He spoke about the three types of people who will help us on our journey through life.

The first, he said, are the neutral people — those we may not know personally, yet they make our daily lives easier and brighter, like taxi drivers, shopkeepers, or cooks. The second type are our loved ones — our family and friends, who support us through both joy and hardship. And finally, the third type are the difficult people,

or as he said with a smile, “our enemies.” These, he reminded us, are our greatest teachers, because they challenge us, test our patience, and help us grow in ways comfort never could.

His wisdom taught me to look at conflicts and challenges differently — not with resentment, but with gratitude for the lessons they bring.

The cultural exchange was another highlight — singing, dancing, and sharing traditions from both Bhutan and India created an atmosphere of pure joy. It reminded me how music, art, and kindness can bridge even the widest differences. In those moments, I saw the beauty of unity — how two nations could come together in friendship and shared purpose.

As the summit came to an end, emotions ran high. Saying goodbye was one of the hardest moments. There were hugs, tears, and heartfelt promises to meet again. It was difficult to part with people who had, in such a short time, become like family. Yet, amid the sadness, there was gratitude — for the experiences, the lessons, and the friendships that will stay with me forever.

This summit reminded me that borders may divide countries, but they can never divide hearts. It taught me that kindness and understanding are the true foundations of progress, and that youth have an incredible power to shape the future when we work together with empathy and purpose.

The India–Bhutan Youth Summit was not just an event — it was a journey of the heart. It reminded me to stay curious, to value every person I meet, and to find lessons even in challenges. As I look back, I carry with me the wisdom of Sir Thupten, the laughter of my friends, and the realization that we, the youth, are not just tomorrow’s leaders — we are the hope and change of today.

RITESH

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 provided me with a valuable opportunity to engage with young individuals from different regions of India and Bhutan. The summit was particularly meaningful given the vital role that youth play as future leaders and decision-makers. It served as a platform to foster responsibility, awareness, and mindfulness among participants while encouraging cross-border understanding and cooperation



Waiting at Delhi airport

From the very first day, I felt as though I had embarked on a transformative journey to rediscover a part of myself that is deeply connected to nature. The summit brought together participants from diverse cultural and regional backgrounds, enabling me to appreciate multiple perspectives and broaden my understanding of the world around me. As I boarded the flight from Delhi, a realization dawned upon me—the necessity of moving beyond a narrow worldview to adopt a more comprehensive perspective. This understanding, I believe, will help me navigate

future challenges with greater wisdom. My arrival in Guwahati marked the true beginning of this journey of self-discovery, with every experience shaping my personality and strengthening my resolve to contribute meaningfully to society.



At the Royal Global University, Guwahati

Our journey from Guwahati to Shillong was both refreshing and reflective. The cool mountain breeze brushing against my face reminded me of the intimate bond that exists between humans and nature. It reaffirmed my belief that one can truly discover their inner self only in the presence of nature's serenity. Without this connection, human life risks becoming mechanical and devoid of vitality. This thought deepened further as we visited the Mawphlang Sacred Forest, where I learned how nature holds a sacred place in the lives of local communities. I realized

that when we exist in harmony with nature, it awakens a hidden strength within us, empowering us to face life's challenges with confidence. With this renewed sense of purpose, I looked forward to the days ahead, eager to expand the boundaries of my learning.



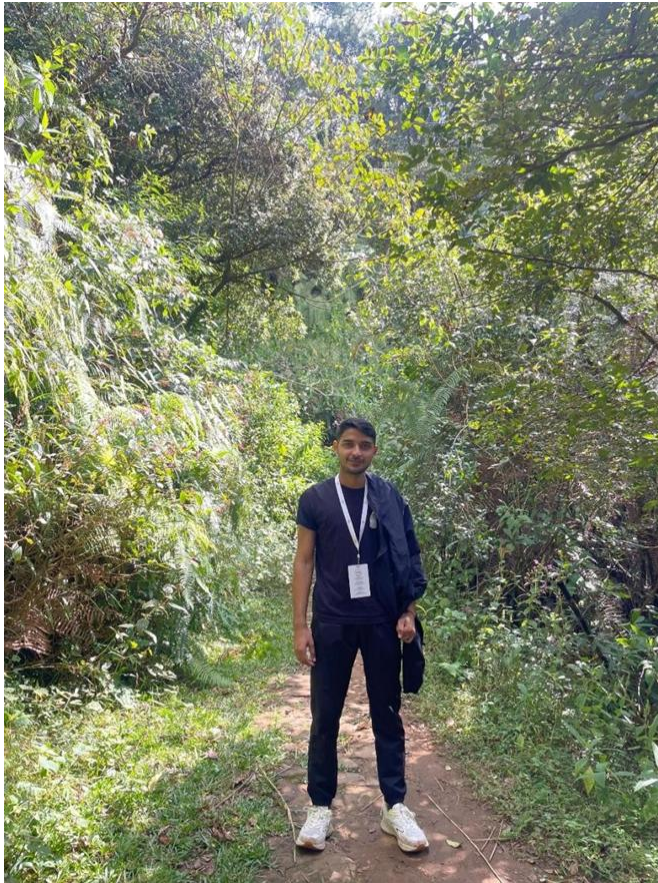
Reaching the Mawphlang Sacred Forest

During my stay at the camp, I witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by people living in remote areas, where even basic facilities require long journeys to access. This experience helped me value the resources I often take for granted and instilled in me a sense of gratitude toward nature for providing life's essentials selflessly. The kindness and warmth of the local residents deeply touched me; their willingness to help with whatever little they had spoke volumes about the spirit of humanity. Such acts of compassion nurture a sense of equality and unity among people, reminding us that service to others enriches both giver and receiver. As the day ended, I carried with me the lesson of gratitude, kindness, and empathy — a lesson I intend to uphold throughout my life.



Camping in the forest

The return journey from the camp to Shillong was filled with joy and reflection. As we sang and danced together on the bus, I understood the importance of living fully in the present moment instead of being constrained by the burdens of the past or the uncertainties of the future. Embracing the present allows one to channel complete attention and energy into meaningful work, bringing satisfaction and contentment. In today's world of constant distractions, this ability to stay focused on the present is invaluable. That realization strengthened my belief in self-improvement and reminded me of the summit's core objective — to shape individuals who can create rational, equitable, and compassionate solutions for a peaceful global society.



Walking through the nature

The journey from Shillong back to Guwahati was reflective in nature. It reinforced my understanding that policies and decisions affecting people must include their voices and perspectives to remain effective. I also realized the importance of regarding human beings as ends in themselves, not merely as means to achieve a goal. Only with such a mindset can policies become truly sustainable and respectful of human dignity. Our visit to the museum deepened my appreciation for cultural traditions passed down through generations. Many of these, such as traditional weaving, continue to hold great relevance today. My interaction with students at the Royal Global University in Guwahati gave me an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogues and better understand diverse viewpoints. These exchanges cultivated mutual respect and built lasting friendships, further reinforcing the human connection that the summit embodied.

Our long journey to Phuentsholing was physically demanding yet mentally enriching. Surrounded by lush landscapes, I realized that perseverance, even through exhaustion, often leads to profound satisfaction. The moment we entered Bhutan, the fatigue turned into joy, and the natural beauty around us instilled a renewed sense of calm. The warmth and kindness of the Bhutanese people reminded me of the vital role that respect and compassion play in strengthening human relationships. As I ended the day, I reflected on how essential it is to preserve these human values in a world increasingly detached from genuine emotional connections.



Reaching Phuentsholing

The following day, one concept that deeply fascinated me was the idea of the Gelephu “Mindfulness City.” This innovative approach aims to harmonize human life with nature, redefining growth beyond its economic dimension to include spiritual, environmental, and emotional well-being. It made me reflect on the true meaning of development and the importance of ensuring that progress does not come at the expense of the planet’s health. Sustainable and mindful growth, I realized, is the only path that can ensure lasting prosperity for both humanity and

nature. The concept resonated with me strongly in the context of current global challenges such as pollution and biodiversity loss, reminding me that the time to act is now. As the summit neared its conclusion, we engaged in compiling reflections, preparing reports, and discussing project ideas within our groups. These discussions reaffirmed the importance of dialogue and collaboration. Open communication fosters mutual understanding and transforms differences into shared learning experiences. While such deliberations can sometimes be strenuous, they form the foundation for trust, peace, and sustainable partnerships. The experience underscored how meaningful conversations, even among small groups, can plant the seeds of positive global change.



Getting our participation certificates

On the final day, as we traveled from Phuentsholing to Siliguri and then to Delhi, I reflected on the journey as a whole. Life, I realized, is defined by moments of connection and the memories we create with others. I had arrived as a stranger among strangers, but I left with deep friendships and unforgettable experiences.

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 not only built bridges of understanding between two nations but also nurtured bonds of empathy and lifelong companionship. I feel profound gratitude for having been part of this summit, which reaffirmed my faith in humanity and the power of collaboration. I believe initiatives like this play a crucial role in shaping thoughtful, compassionate, and visionary leaders who value peace and uphold human dignity. When humanity stands at the center of our actions, conflict gives way to cooperation and peace naturally escalates.



Setting back for our homes

RYKA GOGOI

"Kehte hain agar kisi cheez ko dil se chaho toh puri kainath usse milane ki koshish mein lag jaati hai," which translates to, "They say if you want something with all your heart, the entire universe conspires to help you get it."

The Indo Bhutan Youth Summit was something just like this. I kid you not when I tell you this, but after choosing to pursue bachelors in Political Science, I earnestly yearned to grow up to live the life of diplomacy. And like any other Pol Sci, student, S Jaishankar (External Affairs Minister of India) became my inspiration. But apart from all of that, I truly loved how much being a diplomat allowed you to travel so many places. The constant videos and reels of UN, coming up in my fyp ignited the longing all the more. Finally by the destined faith, I got nominated by the Dean of student affairs for this Summit, that too completely funded! And upon receiving the email of my selection, I was truly elated beyond measure. Only 11 youths from India and 11 from Bhutan were selected and I was the youngest among all. Then came the part of physical preparation, especially for the trekking's through Mawphlang



Sacred Grove and the David Scott Trail. I exercised daily to build my endurance and mental strength. The summit really fulfilled my wishes in so many ways- I was begging my parents to revisit Shillong and Bhutan (previously I visited the Kingdom in 2018) as I missed the calm and serene atmosphere compared to its bustling urban counterpart. I guess, God heard my prayers and presented before me this wonderful opportunity! As the

days neared, my heart was full of expectations and gratitude to be a part of this.

Finally, it was 22nd October and I was waiting for the rest of the Indian participants to arrive in my University where the Ghy leg of the summit took place. The Bhutanese participants were already there, waiting for the Indians and one of the most beautiful Bhutanese girl, comes up to me and tells me, "Hi, I feel you have a very positive aura", that was enough to make my day. And that ladies and gentlemen, was Dawa Choden whom I'd call the 'most beautiful Bhutanese in and out'! Her fierce loyalty towards the King and her zeal to serve the society for the greater good was amply reflected in her speeches throughout the Group Discussions we had. In addition to that, every other Bhutanese participant were so very welcoming and hospitable that I never truly felt that I had left home to attend this summit. For those 9 days, they became my home. The best part about them was the fact that they weren't just blaming the govt. for their drawbacks but they themselves were also actively working for a cause and change to pave a sustainable and literate future for their countrymen. Somewhere in between, while I saw them appreciating the king, I truly felt that if the youth of India also collectively work for a better and sustainable India instead of blaming the govt., even India could go places. And fortunately, the bunch of Indian delegates, I bonded over this summit were truly walking the talk and were actually involved in many initiatives for helping the nation to grow and that inspired me truly.





For me, the Shillong leg of the summit was the most memorable in terms of the life skills and friendships I formed throughout! On the second day, when we visited the Mawphlang Sacred Grove, nostalgia set in since I had visited this grove as well as the trail, once before, along with my parents. And as I was walking through the grove along with the rest, the guide explained us the religious significance of each tree, everyone sought the trees' blessing and as I simply waited for the rest to finish, Dawa looked at me and asked if I didn't need the deity's blessings. I replied, "The deity will see my deeds and will decide to bless me." She remarked saying that I'm pretty nonchalant and she aspires to be like me. Well I'm unsure if that was a compliment or an insult, lol. Nevertheless, as the day neared to an end, we trekked to the Rainbow Trout Fishery Campsite and I gasped at how beautifully raw the place was, the tents in between the fisheries! As the sun set behind the mountains, the view from the campsite was breath-taking. The evening was followed by group

discussion on the topic, "How do I see the world as today's youth and what are the things that concern me?" What amazed me more than anything was the fact that the delegates didn't just complain but provided concrete solutions and their sincerity was reflected in their speeches. When it was my turn to speak, I drew attention to the fact that how the digital disconnectivity of the campsite was much needed for all of us due to the constant exposure to media content which at times distorts our ability to distinguish between reel and real. I urged all participants not to simply end the deliberations and discussions behind these rooms but take it

forward and implement it in the near future. When the discussions came to an end, one of the young Khasi scholars from North-Eastern Hill University Meghalaya (NEHU) had come over from the main city to narrate us the story of U Sier Lapalang, the beloved stag whose mother's cry still moves the hearts of the Khasis till date. The story was truly heart touching and it carried the message of paying heed to our elders when they warn us not to err. Following the beautiful narration, we were served authentic Khasi food that was truly scrumptious and nutritious at the same time. Dinner was followed by a desperately needed Bonfire amidst the chill, in the middle of the forest. The thought of residing in forest campsite excited me for some reason, maybe it was the adrenaline rush that the uncertainty in darkness of the forest brought to a person. Finally we retired to our camps with our bellies full and our minds enlightened.



The next day was the most challenging day for me as we were going to trek the David Scott trail and have lunch at the riverside. Honestly, what made this trek difficult for me was that the soles of both my trek shoes came off and I was constantly slipping in the trek, as a result, I was getting the team late in completing the trek but thankfully, I carried a few fevikwiks with me and I'm so glad I did! We took a stop at a grazing ground for a group activity of solving the Jigsaw puzzles and that truly strengthened the personal bonds with each participant all the more. The team

work, the shared struggle, the common goal, all of it synchronized in the beautiful harmony of the scenic environment surrounding us.

Upon finally reaching the riverside, and enjoying lunch as I soaked my aching feet in the river, all of it felt worth the pain and obstacles.

Returning to our campsite, we had another group activity planned! We had to construct the tallest model comprising of 10 marshmallows and 20 spaghetti sticks. It was truly intriguing to watch the IITians amongst us, brainstorm the best construction, haha! Unfortunately, my team lost both in the Jigsaw Puzzle and this game as well but surprisingly, I wasn't sad or discouraged. On this note, I'd like to add that the organizers truly played a pioneering role in shaping us youths through this summit and they have done a truly commendable job. Thupten Sir, Choki Sir, Choden ma'am, Shedra Sir and Hashta Sir; shall forever be etched in my heart. Their patience, care, the camaraderie they inculcated amongst us youths, their "every ready to assist you" attitude, I couldn't have asked for better guardians! Being around supportive people, made me keen about learning and unafraid of making mistakes, rather than being scared of faltering at any given task.





Followed by the fun and games, the second night in Shillong followed the same ritual of group discussions wherein each participant said the one thing they need in their life. Each response gave an insight into their unfiltered raw inhibitions and it was followed by deep, meaningful and critical speeches. The night blended into a harmonious conclusion as we danced to the traditional folk music of the Khasis, around the bonfire.

The final day in Shillong was truly golden. It was our last day at the campsite and the staff gifted us with cute little jars of honey and honestly, the Khasi people are so very hardworking and thoughtful that even after constantly working day and night to give us the best camp experience, and the previous day, they even made us the traditional Khasi Breakfast which was painstakingly time-consuming, they still managed to bid us farewell with return gifts. I expressed my gratitude because this camp experience wouldn't have been this special if it wasn't for the diligent and amazing staff that tirelessly worked day and night to make our stay in Mawphlang count!



For the first half of the day, we explored the Lewduh market and I was amazed that the market was dominated solely by the Khasi population which truly reflects the intact authenticity of the land. The market exploration was followed by lunch at the lush ground of Golflink which set the perfect tone for the second half of the day.



After lunch we visited the Don Bosco museum and the highlight of the place was the 360° view of the Shillong city from its roof. The overcrowded construction of houses was a stark contrast to the peaceful silence of the surrounding. Finally, in the evening, we all went to the office of Asian Confluence and EO Sabyasachi Dutta Sir graced the event and interacted with us all. I was truly amazed at the importance

of geopolitics and how well my state, Assam, was adapting to it. With the onset of the Advantage Assam Summit as well, the infrastructural growth of Assam is soon going to set standards of economic development.



The theme for the Asian Confluence was about "engaging the third space" and the theme of this youth summit, "Gelephu Mindfulness City and its Neighborhood City" was well reflected in the presentation.

Who'd have imagined, one country yet two systems! Building all of it from scratch, from the settlements to the administrative system, what a tedious task but a revolutionary step in the history of Bhutan! As the discussions and presentation came to an end and the "third space" was well utilized, we were led to the dinner. After enjoying the savoury meal, I explored the place and imagine my excitement when I spotted multiple volumes of the Rajya Sabha debates in one of the book shelves and unfortunately, due to time constraint, all that I could do was click a pic of it as a treasured memory.

Interacting with the young officers there, truly strengthened my ambition to pursue a similar career all the more! That day, the place where we were staying for the night was a "travellers hostel" and it was a new concept for me that there existed a place as such. Basically, there were 3 bunker beds and a single bed in the room which represented a hostel room. And the next morning when we went to the third floor to have our breakfast, I spotted something all the more unique as well as unusual- a 24*7 Self-service, snacks store shop! A shop that purely ran on honesty! You take whatever u want and simply scan the QR code and pay. Shillong truly never fails to amaze me!



The second half of the day, after reaching RGU, we had a session with the interim Vice Chancellor, Dr. Alok Kr. Buragohain, and his talk on the Buddhist Economics and to live by Right Livelihood is the need of the moment, truly has left a lasting impact on me. Now that I'm very much aware of the degradation of environment with the changing economic, social and political scenario, I'm all the more taking steps to even remotely bring changes in my daily habits for a sustainable future because actual change lies in our daily habits and yes, it's that simple to be little mindful of our actions.

Finally, the next day, we were off to Phuentsholing where the final leg of the summit would take place in the upcoming three days.

Believe me when I tell u this, each day was so beautiful, that knowing it was all coming to an end soon, truly hurt. The 1st night in Bhutan comprised of checking in at the Immigration Office for Tourists and obtaining our permits and finally when we reached Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), my heart truly skipped a beat. The intricate wooden carvings in the walls, the warm welcome by the senior officials and our eager Bhutanese friends, excited to greet us in their



homeland, the atmosphere felt anew and lively yet never foreign. If u ask me, it was a home away from home. Even in the dark evening, the warmth of the Bhutanese people around, outshined anything and everything else. We were briefed on the goals, objectives, view and expectations of RIGSS from this summit and honestly, it wasn't very delegate-like behavior of me but my mind and attention was completely scrambled and all I could focus was whether we were being served Ema

Datshi (Bhutanese dish comprising of chillies and cheese) for dinner. Indeed I tried my best to mask my lack of attention span but as soon as the meeting was dismissed, I was restless to discover what we were being served and indeed there was Ema Datshi and the day just became the best because it was not only I who enjoyed the dish but the rest of my Indian friends too relished!

The next day I attended one of the most interesting ppts about the GMC and it was presented by none other than Mr. Rabssel Dorji who is an alumni of my dream university, the Geneva University! His replies to each one of our questions were so



very crisp and to the point that it really amazed me at how knowledgeable and promising and sharp he is. That day we even visited the beautiful Milarepa tower (Sangye Migyur Ling Lhakhang) and explored the town of Phuentsholing where I bought a few souvenirs for my near and dear ones. One thing that intrigued me about the Milarepa tower was the large area in between the Tower and the Temples that was left untouched. Right when I was thinking about it, Hashta sir comes up to me and tells me that it was the playground for the goddesses children and that truly was a beautiful analogy. What made the day more memorable was the fact that Namja gifted me a traditional bowl as a token of appreciation for my hospitality during her stay in RGU and honestly, I am truly grateful to have known such a beautiful, funny and true friend like her. All thanks to this summit.

Finally, it was the last day and the most hectic one as well. We all had to curate our presentations and even prepare for the cultural performances. I dozed off actually for one good hour cuz I was so very tired but finally, the evening that followed was the culmination of the hardwork of each and every delegate. My team had prepared a pitch to build a digital forum called "M-Shala", wherein M stands for "mindfulness" and shala stands for "room". It translated to Room for Mindfulness. It's supposed to be a digital forum curated by the students for the students to help each youth to gain practical and theoretical knowledge and even a space for guided meditations and Mind Rooms. Plus the model would have an automated voice assistant for easy interface. The goal was to encourage literacy and mindful digital media consumption by the young population.



Finally, we had the cultural performances where Adrita, Joba and I prepared a fusion of Manipuri prayer that was recited soulfully by Joba and it was followed by a Bihu dance by the trio, which is a folk dance of Assam. Even though we were under prepared, the performance went pretty smooth. But Amrutha and Keerthana's duo performance stole the show, especially when Amrutha started balancing her moves on a brass plate. Joba and I stared at Amrutha with our mouth agape and truly it was a mesmerizing performance which was evident as the crowd cheered in a loud uproar.

Our Bhutanese counterpart also lit the stage with their performances and it made me truly happy to dance in a stage where within a single night, two nations performed and truly symbolized the beautiful friendship between India and Bhutan. Dawa and Seldon made my day when they gifted me a Golden Coloured Iron Brooch with the engraving of the King and it made my heart giddy actually. To have gained their trust that they gifted me with such a beautiful pin, touche. I'd cherish this gift my entire life.

As the day came to an end, I looked at the Institute one last time, and bid a silent farewell with the hope that someday, we all will meet again, by chance or by destiny.

The next day, on 30th October, all of us Indian participants were ready to go back to our hometowns. We were dropped at the Bagdogra Airport and after the tedious procedures and formalities I was ready to take my flight back home. I had Adrita by my side as we both had our final stops in

Guwahati. But taking the first flight of my life without my parents felt symbolic honestly. The transition from being a carefree kid to a conscious adult was becoming evident and this summit has given me the courage to face every hurdle in life headstrong.

The beautiful bus rides as we vibed to our favourite songs, the little girl-talks, the smiles we shared, the memories we created, the knowledge we gained are all a treasure trove that I shall carry with me till my hair turns grey and the soul becomes wiser.

This is Ryka Gogoi, signing off from the India Bhutan Youth Summit, 2k25. Kadrin Cheyla.



SELDON

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 was a cross-cultural academic program designed to promote leadership, intercultural understanding, and collaboration between youth from India and Bhutan. Held from 22 to 30 October 2025, the summit provided a platform for young participants to explore diverse themes such as sustainability, culture, and mindfulness. The experience offered an opportunity to expand knowledge, develop communication and teamwork skills, and build meaningful cross-border relationships.

Day 1 – 22 October

Our adventure began on 22nd October, the day I took my first ever flight. Fear, excitement, and wonder blended as the plane ascended over Bhutan's mountains. By the time we landed in Guwahati, that fear had transformed into pure excitement. At Royal Global University, the warm welcome, cultural performances, and the kindness of our Indian friends instantly made us feel connected.



Day 2 – 23 October 2025

Participants began their journey to Meghalaya, visiting Mawphlang village and exploring the Sacred Forest. The visit emphasized the balance between

preservation and conservation, offering deep insights into the spiritual connection between humans and nature.



Day 3 – 24 October 2025

The day involved a hike along the David Scott Trail, combined with cultural and team building activities. Participants engaged in traditional Khasi cooking and reflected on the importance of teamwork, endurance, and intercultural learning.

Day 4 – 25 October 2025

Visits to Iew Duh Market and the Don Bosco Museum provided exposure to the cultural diversity of Northeast India. An interactive session with Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta inspired discussions on ethical leadership and responsibility.



Day 5 – 26 October 2025

Participants returned to Guwahati, where they attended a lecture by the Vice Chancellor of Royal Global University. Later visits to the Brahmaputra River Heritage Centre and group reflections fostered appreciation for natural and cultural heritage.



Day 6 – 27 October 2025

The group traveled back to Bhutan, reflecting on the experiences and learnings gained throughout the summit. Informal discussions on leadership and intercultural cooperation continued during the journey.



Day 7 – 28 October 2025

Sessions led by Mr. Rabssel Dorji and the Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan explored mindfulness and sustainable development. Participants learned about the Gelephu Mindfulness City initiative and reflected on humility as an element of leadership.



Day 8 – 29 October 2025

Participants presented group reflections and project outcomes during the final presentations. The closing ceremony celebrated the success of the summit through cultural performances and exchanges between Bhutanese and Indian participants.



Day 9 – 30 October 2025

The final day was marked by farewells and expressions of gratitude. Participants reflected on the friendships formed and the growth achieved throughout the nine days of learning and collaboration.

Personal and Academic Impact

The India Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 significantly contributed to personal and academic growth. Participants developed critical soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, and problem solving. The structured interactions and experiential learning activities encouraged confidence, curiosity, and lifelong learning. For me, the summit was a transformative experience that broadened perspectives on global citizenship and the shared responsibilities of youth in fostering sustainable development.

Conclusion

The India Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 was not merely a program but a life changing academic experience. It strengthened the foundation of friendship, understanding, and collaboration between the two nations. The lessons learned will continue to guide participants in their future endeavors, inspiring them to lead with compassion, integrity, and a commitment to positive change.

Acknowledgment

Sincere gratitude is extended to the coordinators, facilitators, and mentors — particularly Thupten Sir, Hasta Sir, Choki Sir, and Choden Madam — for their unwavering guidance and support throughout the summit. Appreciation is also expressed to the Royal University of Bhutan, Royal Global University, and all participants whose collective effort made the program a success.

SHREE BANERJEE

Introduction

India and Bhutan have shared a longstanding and deeply bonded friendship for more than half a century, establishing themselves as close neighbours. This enduring bond has fostered a mutually beneficial relationship, primarily through diplomacy and collaborative development projects. To further strengthen this friendship and create stronger ties among the youth of both countries, the India Bhutan Foundation established the India-Bhutan Youth Summit in 2018, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the India-Bhutan Friendship. The summit's primary goal is to bring young minds from both nations together to continue the great tradition of friendship and engage in collaborative projects that contribute to the development of both India and Bhutan.

DAY 1: 22nd October, 2025

I woke up early and left my college hostel around 4:00 AM IST that morning, feeling quite anxious about my 10:25 AM IST flight to Dibrugarh. The journey began smoothly, and I was happy to reach Bagdogra Airport by about 7:30 AM IST. There, I met Thupten sir, who would also be traveling with me. After passing through

security, we boarded our flight.



We arrived in Dibrugarh around 12:00 PM IST and met Adrita. The three of us then took our connecting flight to Guwahati, landing around 3:30 PM IST. At

the Guwahati airport, we were greeted by the other Indian participants for the IBYS 2025 (India-Bhutan Youth Summit) and Choki sir.

From the airport, we travelled together to the Royal Global University (RGU) of Assam. It was there that we finally met the eleven Bhutanese participants. After checking into our rooms and freshening up, we headed straight to the official welcome meeting.

During the meeting, we were officially welcomed with speeches from representatives of CEP (Centre for Escalation of Peace), RIGSS (Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies), and RGU. Following the speeches, we received our amazing goodies, which featured the IBYS 2025 logo, and our ID cards, which served as our official proof of identity for the remainder of the summit. We then introduced ourselves, sharing our name, college, and something exciting about ourselves.



After the meeting, we had dinner and spent some time exploring the incredibly beautiful RGU campus. This marked the end of the first day of the summit.

Also, I would like to say that I made a conscious effort to connect with as many attendees as possible and I'm happy to say that I've learned how to manage my fear of communication and now actively try to talk with others. I also realized that self-confidence and a willingness to step out of our comfort zone and approach people are key to becoming a good speaker.



DAY 2: 23rd October, 2025



This morning, we woke up and packed our luggage. We took our bags with us to breakfast, and once we finished eating, we loaded them onto the bus before starting our journey toward the Khasi Hills.

We had lunch in the Khasi Hills and then went to explore the historical and beautiful Mawphlang Sacred Forest. There, we learned about the local people's rituals and beliefs. We discovered that this forest maintains a specific, defined boundary and, remarkably, has not expanded over time.

After exploring the forest, we began our 45-minute trek downhill toward our camping site at IF Farms, where we would stay for two days. Our luggage had already arrived at the camp ahead of us. We all took a moment to enjoy the view of the farm and then selected our tents. I shared a tent with three other students. Upon reaching the camp, our mobile network disconnected, and we found ourselves completely connected to nature.

That night, we sat together and discussed our worldviews, the issues that affect us, and our hopes for the future. During this conversation, I reflected on how many people aspire to be like a sponge, absorbing everything. However, I observed that people might be happier if they tried to be an adsorber instead—one who takes things in on the surface but only allows truly beneficial thoughts, statements, or advice to penetrate deeply.

We also had the privilege of hearing the story of Lapalang, presented in the traditional storytelling style of the Khasi tribe. After dinner, the farm staff set up a bonfire (or "bornfire," as you wrote), which felt wonderful in the chilly Khasi Hills night. We enjoyed the warmth of the bonfire for a while before heading to our tents to rest.

DAY 3: 24th October, 2025



I woke up around 5:00 AM IST and went to the first floor of the wooden house to enjoy the beautiful morning view. After freshening up, we had a delicious breakfast of traditional Khasi tribal food. Following breakfast, two local women taught us how to make their traditional dish called "Potharu," and I even had a thrilling time trying to make one myself.

We then set off for a trek along the David Scott Trail. We crossed a river using a suspension bridge that swayed excitingly as we moved across it. Our trail led us uphill to a village that was incredibly clean—it even had dedicated dustbins. It was clear that the people living there were enjoying their lives happily, free from the chase for riches that often consumes city dwellers. They focused on farming and other local activities. During our walk, we stopped to try a red-coloured berry from



a tree; its deep, almost blood-red colour was striking, and it tasted good. We also saw a child happily washing clothes in the river and waving at us.

We eventually reached the end of the trek, where we took a short break to play before our mentors launched a planned activity. We were divided into groups and tasked with solving a puzzle whose pieces were scattered across a distance. The game began, and we ran as fast as possible to gather the pieces for our teammates. We tried our best to assemble the puzzle quickly, but unfortunately, we didn't find all our pieces and lost. Despite the loss, it was a lot of fun to play. The winning team members each received a book and shared their experience of the activity.



After the game, we started walking back toward our camps. We stopped to have lunch along a riverside, where we enjoyed the beautiful view and dipped our legs into the cooling river water—it felt amazing! After lunch, we returned to our camp site.

Once at the camp, we were given activity to build a tower with 20 Spegaties and 10 marshmallows and all got engaged in that with our groups which was very interesting. Though we couldn't make the tallest tower but we loved the thing we made and we also loved the process of making it. After the activity, we got to know that there was a pool where we could swim. A few of the boys went to enjoy it, and I was one of them. The water was very cold! Afterward, we had tea.

Later, we gathered for our evening discussion. We began by practicing Samatha meditation. Afterward, we talked about our cultures and discussed the major concerns facing society. We summarized these into six topics: Education, Environment, Forums, Digital, Community, and Gender. From these, we formed five smaller groups, with each group selecting a topic and beginning preparation for the final presentation in Bhutan.

Afterward, we had dinner. A bonfire was set up, and two local singers joined us. They sang their own Khasi songs in their native language, and we learned about their musical instruments: the Ka Ksing Shynrang (which they call the male drum, played only by males and made from jackfruit wood) and the Ka Ksing Kynthei (the female drum, played by females).

We even learned a beautiful Khasi taunt used for teasing people: "Lang tylli lang teh, lang tylli lang the, ba la teh ha tdong uksew, Nga phah kylli pham treh, phan sa ioh da u shyrehew". The meaning, they explained, was that if you reject me, you will be tied to a dog's tail and end up with a toothless husband. After enjoying the music and singing with the local people, we went to our tents and slept.

During our two-day stay at the farm with zero connectivity, I realized that in our day-to-day lives, we are so focused on our cell phones that we often fail to look at our surroundings and become overly reliant on technology. The lack of network, however, forced us to avoid our phones, which allowed us to connect genuinely with the other students, enjoy the present moment, and truly appreciate our surroundings. This experience made us understand that life is perfectly manageable without the use of smartphones, and that removing this barrier naturally increases genuine human connection.



DAY 4: 25th October, 2025

We woke up and got ready this morning. Our luggage was loaded into a vehicle and taken to our bus. The people of IF Farms presented us with a thoughtful gift: pure honey from their farm and stickers, which were wonderful. We then trekked uphill to meet our bus and started our journey to Shillong city.

We arrived and explored the local market in Shillong, which was very crowded. After roaming there for some time with our guide, Grace, we returned to the bus. We then went to a garden like place which was very beautiful and had our lunch there. We then went to the Don Bosco museum and explored it. We then drove to our hotel and checked in.

About half an hour later, we were ready and headed to the Asian Confluence office. There, we learned about several development projects that are transforming North-East India into a major trade hub. Important regional initiatives, such as the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) in Bhutan, the Matarbari Deep Sea Port in Bangladesh, and a Semiconductor assembly plant in Assam, along with the

proposed Silchar-Sabroom-Matarbari road connection, were all highlighted as vital for the region's growth.

A particularly interesting development was the new rail link between India and Bhutan. Although the two countries are close friends, they currently lack a railway connection. Both governments are now collaborating to build a 69 km railway from Kokrajhar, India, to Gelephu, Bhutan, which will significantly boost regional connectivity.



We also heard about Meghalaya's nursing exchange scheme, which includes Japanese language training for nurses. Additionally, 13 agricultural products from North-East India have recently received GI (Geographical Indication) tags. The region is also progressing toward becoming a green hydrogen hub,

with India's first pure green hydrogen plant already operating in Assam.

After the session, we had dinner at the Asian Confluence office and spoke with members of the organization. Afterward, we returned to our hotel to rest.

Overall, this day was incredibly informative, providing extensive knowledge about the current and planned developments aimed at improving connectivity and trade in the North-East and its surrounding regions.

DAY 5: 26th October, 2025



This morning, we woke up and travelled to Guwahati, where we arrived at the Royal Global University (RGU) campus. We met with Professor A.K. Buragohain, who provided us with fascinating insights into economics and how ancient scriptures can offer guidance on living a happy and peaceful life.

The main takeaway I appreciated from his talk was the discussion of 'Hasta Marga' and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. These are concepts we often hear, but I didn't fully grasp the deep meaning they carry until now. Professor Buragohain also shared insights about books he read in the 90s, such as "Small is Beautiful" by E.F. Schumacher. He also spoke about Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index and its crucial importance. A standout quote from Professor Buragohain was: "The driving force of a teacher is the learnings he gets from his/her students."

After the session, we went to explore the Mahababu Brahmaputra River Heritage center and after that we went to the city center mall. After that, we returned to the RGU campus and had dinner in the RGU hostel and then proceeded to the

conference room to complete our pending work. Once our tasks were finished, we returned to our rooms to rest.

DAY 6: 27th October, 2025



On this day, we began our journey from Shillong city to Bhutan by bus. The travel was long and tiring.

After reaching Jaigaon (the town bordering Bhutan), we walked to the Immigration Centre and completed the necessary formalities to obtain our permits. Once finished, we proceeded to the RIGSS centre (Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies), where we were welcomed and then we attended a seminar about the institute and the history of the India-Bhutan Summit.

Following the seminar, we travelled to the CST campus (College of Science and Technology), where we would be staying for the next two days until the summit concluded. We then checked into our rooms to rest after the long day of travel.

DAY 7: 28th October, 2025

This morning, we woke up and travelled to the RIGSS hostel for breakfast before proceeding to the RIGSS center itself. We began our day with an online meeting featuring Mr. Rabssel Dorji, the Chief of Communication on GMC. He focused his

discussion on the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC), an initiative spearheaded by His Majesty The King of Bhutan.

He highlighted that Bhutan's strategic location is crucial, positioning the country as an emerging economic corridor between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Despite



being a small country, Bhutan possesses great inherent strengths, including the enlightened leadership of His Majesty The King, sustainable resources, and a focus on green energy. The vision for GMC is to build a city that is spiritually mindful, economically prosperous,

and environmentally sustainable. Following His Majesty The King's Diamond Strategy, GMC would be established as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), operating with its own autonomous executive, legislative, and judicial systems under the motto: "One Nation, Two Systems Policy." GMC is also planned to be one of the most secure places, with strict laws designed to ensure the safety of its residents, even when traveling alone. To realize GMC as an SAR, His Majesty The King has granted GMC authorities the power to incorporate global best practices and policies to attract international investors. Crucially, out of the 2,600 square kilometers designated for GMC, 70% of the area will remain covered in forests. GMC's development is concentrated on eight core industries: Spiritual, Health, and Wellness, Education and Knowledge, Agri-tech and Forestry, Green Energy and Tech Industrial, Finance and Digital Assets, Aviation and Logistics, Tourism.

After the meeting, we had lunch at the RIGSS center. After that we went to visit Milarepa and enjoyed the beautiful view from its top floor. We then returned to RIGSS center and then we attended a session with Vice Chancellor Mr. Chewang Rinzin, engaging in an interactive discussion where we learned about leadership

and the importance of being humble. He also suggested several books for us to read. After the session, we went to visit to the Phuentsholing town's local market and did some shopping and returned to the center.



After returning, we had our dinner there. Then we returned to the CST campus. We quickly freshened up and then took a tour of the CST campus with all the participants. After roaming around and enjoying the campus for a while, we returned to our respective rooms and rested.

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DAY 8: 29th September, 2025



This morning, we woke up and went to the RIGSS hostel for breakfast. Afterward, we immediately began working with our groups to finalize the presentations on our selected topics.

Our team focused on the theme of the Environment, specifically addressing concerns in agriculture in both India and Bhutan. We introduced our solution: an AI prototype model designed to eliminate middlemen. This model would directly benefit farmers by ensuring they receive a fair price for their produce, while also allowing consumers to purchase goods at cheaper rates. Our proposed system also addressed the crucial issue of traceability, enabling consumers to verify the source and freshness of the products they buy. Furthermore, the model would assist farmers with climate change adaptation by providing guidance on optimal planting times (since historical time slots are no longer reliable) and offering early weather alerts to allow them to take proactive measures to protect their crops.

We presented our work to a distinguished audience, which included principals from various schools and colleges in Bhutan, other esteemed Bhutanese guests, and a representative from the Indian Embassy.

Following the presentations, we were awarded participation certificates by Dasho. This was followed by excellent cultural performances from both the Bhutanese and Indian students. We also took time to celebrate the birthdays of the IBYS students and mentors whose birthdays fell in October and November.

Finally, we took many photos with everyone to preserve the beautiful memories and the wonderful time we all spent together during the summit. After the closing ceremony, we returned to the CST campus to rest.



DAY 9: 30th October, 2025

On this day, all of us from India departed from Bhutan at 4:00 AM Bhutanese time, saying goodbye to our Bhutanese friends who had made our journey so memorable. The Bhutanese students gifted every Indian participant with a souvenir and a beautiful, handwritten note. These items will forever remind me of the nine cherished days I spent with every IBYS participant during the summit.

During our long journey back toward Bagdogra Airport, I was dropped off in front of my college, as it was directly on the route. There, I said my final goodbyes to my Indian friends as well. Before dropping me, Shedra sir gifted me a beautiful badge of India and Bhutan flags which was amazing.

With this, our beautiful, nine-day journey came to an end.

Conclusion

The IBYS 2025 summit profoundly helped me to forge strong bonds, gain valuable knowledge and confidence, and create beautiful memories. I left Bhutan

profoundly transformed, carrying with me a newfound sense of purpose and a commitment to making a positive impact, no matter how small. The knowledge and perspective I gained during these ten days have been unparalleled, and they will serve as a guiding compass in the years ahead.

My deepest gratitude goes to the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP), the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), the India-Bhutan Foundation (IBF), and Pallavan Learning Systems (PLS) for making this extraordinary experience possible. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Choki Sir, Sigey Ma'am, Choden Ma'am, Shedra Sir, Thupten Sir, and all the dedicated organizers who worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my Bhutanese and Indian friends, whose warmth and companionship made us feel like family by the summit's end. I would also like to acknowledge my college friends, Biswajit, Sudiksha, Debabrata, and Sudipta, whose continuous support was instrumental in helping me secure this opportunity.



SONAM WANGCHUK

Introduction

The Bhutan–India Youth Exchange Program 2025 was an immersive experience designed to strengthen the partnership between young Bhutanese and Indian changemakers under the shared values of sustainability, mindfulness, and innovation.

This program brought together students from both nations to explore themes like environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and the future of mindful innovation. Through interactive sessions, field visits, dialogues with experts, and cross-cultural collaboration, we developed a deeper understanding of how two nations with shared geography and heritage can co-create sustainable solutions for tomorrow.

Day 1 – Orientation and Foundation of Collaboration

Our journey began with introductions and orientation. The atmosphere was charged with curiosity and anticipation as Bhutanese and Indian participants met for the first time. The organizers welcomed us with warmth, explaining the objectives and structure of the program, emphasizing that the essence of the exchange lies in collaboration and empathy.

We discussed how Bhutan and India share not only borders but also centuries of cultural, spiritual, and environmental interconnectedness. The morning sessions covered the overview of our week-long itinerary, safety protocols, and thematic group formation — *Environment, Education, Community, and Media*.

We also reflected on the role of youth diplomacy, understanding how the next generation can bridge regional gaps through innovation and communication. The

day set a strong foundation for trust, teamwork, and friendship among all participants.

Day 2 – Arrival at Mawlang Village and Art Outreach

On the second day, we traveled to Moflong Village for the *Art Outreach Camp*. The journey itself was an adventure — winding roads, green landscapes, and the smell of the monsoon earth. Upon arrival, we were welcomed by our hosts who immediately made us feel at home.

Throughout the day, we engaged in community-based activities blending art, storytelling, and environmental education. The camp focused on *art as an instrument for sustainability* — demonstrating how creative expression can raise awareness about environmental challenges.

We painted murals with environmental themes, interacted with local artisans, and discussed traditional methods of farming and water management. The evening ended around a campfire, where we shared stories about our hometowns and discussed our hopes for a greener, more connected South Asia.

Day 3 – Cultural Night and Deep Cultural Immersion

The third day began early with a traditional local breakfast — *Potaro*, a rice-based delicacy cooked in a special clay pan. It was simple yet delicious, a reminder of how food carries culture.

We then went hiking through the beautiful Moflong landscape — crystal-clear streams, dense forests, and a peaceful breeze that made us feel like we were walking through a painting. The hike fostered teamwork and collective spirit, as some led from the front while others encouraged those behind.

At noon, we had lunch by a riverside — an incredibly peaceful and reflective moment that felt almost spiritual. Later that evening, we gathered for a night performance by two singers from Amaflan Village. They sang traditional *Amaflan folk songs* — soulful, melodic, and deeply rooted in the land’s history.

We learned a few words in their local dialect like “*Langte li langte, pala treha udungso*”, and explored their instruments — hand-crafted drums, local string instruments similar to guitars, and wind flutes used in their performances. The session became an unforgettable cultural immersion that deepened our appreciation for indigenous art forms.

The night concluded with reflections about how culture and nature co-exist, and how traditional music keeps environmental harmony alive in communities.

Day 4 – Journey to Shillong and the Asian Confluence Session

Our fourth day marked our departure from Moflong and arrival in Shillong City. After a heartfelt goodbye to our hosts, we gifted them a *Tashi Khadar* — a Bhutanese symbol of gratitude and respect.

We traveled by a traditional Shillong city bus, made mostly of wood and steel — a creative local engineering solution that reflected sustainable material use. It was a fun and nostalgic ride.

After lunch, we attended a dialogue at Asian Confluence, a policy think-tank promoting regional cooperation between South Asia and Southeast Asia. The session introduced us to the *Third Space* framework — connecting people with policy through community-led initiatives.

We explored discussions around the Act East Policy, focusing on opportunities in agriculture, forestry, tourism, hydropower, and renewable energy. The speakers emphasized that South Asian countries share common challenges — from climate

change to resource management — and that collaboration across borders is key to shared prosperity.

This session gave me a broader understanding of how regional integration, policy coordination, and youth innovation can drive mindful and sustainable development in our region.

Day 5 – The Buddha Economy and Sustainable Thinking

We started our day with a symbolic gesture — gifting our host a Tashi Khadar before leaving for Royal Global University. After arriving, we attended a lecture by Dr. A.K. Buragohain, the Vice Chancellor.

He introduced us to the concept of the Buddha Economy, linking the philosophy of *Right Livelihood* with modern innovation. He explained that Bhutan's *Gross National Happiness (GNH)* concept embodies these teachings, showing the world that true progress integrates economy, environment, and spirituality.

His lecture emphasized that innovation must be mindful — *technology should serve humanity, not replace it.*

Later, we visited the Brahmaputra Heritage Museum, where we explored historical artifacts, ancient furniture, and preserved cultural items that showcased Assam's rich heritage. The day ended with a lively stroll through the Shillong Market, ending with laughter over pani puri and shared stories.

This day reminded us that sustainability must be rooted in values, not just vision.

Day 6 – Arrival at College of Life and Technology

We departed Royal Global University early in the morning and journeyed toward the College of Life and Technology, where we stayed in the campus guesthouse. The

road trip was filled with music, laughter, and collective exhaustion — a mix that made the long hours lighter.

We had lunch midway before arriving around 4:00 PM. After immigration formalities for our Indian friends, we were welcomed by the college coordinators.

An orientation session introduced us to our schedule for the week, and participants were divided into five groups — Community, Environment, Education, Media, and Innovation. Each group was tasked with developing a collaborative Bhutan–India project aligned with environmental mindfulness.

In the evening, after dinner, we had dance rehearsals and informal discussions. The sense of community was growing stronger; it felt less like an exchange and more like a family united by purpose.

Day 7 – The Gelephu Mindfulness City and Bilateral Understanding

We began our morning with breakfast at RIGSS Coordination Hall in Phuntsholing. The first session was led by Mr. Rabtsel Dorji, Chief Communication Officer of Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC).

He elaborated on the vision of GMC — an initiative integrating tradition with innovation, investment with spirituality, and growth with sustainability. His presentation on mindful urbanism illustrated how Bhutan aims to build a future-ready city without losing its cultural and environmental roots.

After a tea break, we visited Melaraypa Lhakhang, a serene temple that provided a moment for reflection and gratitude. After lunch, we met the Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan, who spoke about the evolution of Bhutan–India relations — tracing it from the first kings to the modern treaties.

We ended the evening touring Phuntsholing town, exploring local markets, and later returned for dinner and informal project discussions. The College of Science and Technology hosted us for a short campus tour led by their Chief Councillor. That night, participants shared personal reflections and brainstormed how our projects — particularly *GreenChain* — could evolve beyond this program.

Day 8 – Final Reflection and Project Presentation

The final day was dedicated to reflection, creativity, and presentation. The morning began at RIGSS Coordination Hall, where all groups finalized their projects. My group, *Environment*, included Sri, Kirtana, Amrita, and Paladin.

We proposed *GreenChain* — a mindful AI-powered agriculture ecosystem connecting farmers, markets, and consumers between Bhutan and India. It promotes *traceable food supply chains*, *eco-certification*, and *AI-based crop management* for sustainable production.

We also introduced the Daily Rail Initiative — a sustainable food logistics network linking Bhutan and India through rail-based agri-transportation, reducing food waste and carbon footprint.

After lunch, we prepared for our final presentation. Our group presented first in front of principals, education officers, and students from the College of Science and Technology. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with appreciation for our practical and innovative approach.

The evening featured cultural performances, music, and celebration — including birthday surprises for participants. It was the perfect emotional closure to a transformative journey.

Overall Reflection and Learning Outcomes

1. Collaboration Beyond Borders

This program showed how Bhutan and India can leverage their complementary strengths — Bhutan’s mindfulness and environmental ethics with India’s technological and infrastructural innovation — to co-create sustainable ecosystems.

2. GreenChain as a Shared Vision

The GreenChain project symbolizes *collective innovation*. It merges AI, life sciences, and environmental awareness into a practical framework that could empower farmers, ensure traceability, and promote climate resilience.

3. Mindful Innovation and Leadership

We learned that sustainable leadership is not about dominance but harmony — leading with awareness, empathy, and purpose.

4. Cultural and Emotional Intelligence

Understanding the traditions, food, art, and music of our Indian counterparts allowed us to build deep, respectful relationships. Cultural intelligence is as vital as technical expertise.

5. Environmental Ethics and Life Sciences

Integrating life sciences into our environmental projects helped us explore areas like bio-fertilizers, seed genetics, and biodiversity restoration, showing how science can restore the balance between human progress and ecological preservation.

6. Personal Growth

This journey strengthened my communication, adaptability, and collaborative problem-solving skills. It also deepened my conviction that Bhutan’s philosophy of Gross National Happiness can serve as a guiding compass for the world.

Conclusion

The Bhutan–India Youth Exchange Program 2025 was not just a cross-cultural trip — it was a transformative learning experience. From lectures on mindful innovation to dancing under the stars of Moflong, every day reinforced one truth: sustainability is not a project, it's a mindset.

Through GreenChain and similar initiatives, we aim to continue the spirit of collaboration — using technology, life sciences, and mindfulness to build a sustainable and connected future for both nations.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the institutions and individuals who made the Bhutan–India Youth Exchange Program 2025 a truly transformative experience.

First and foremost, my sincere appreciation goes to the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP), India, and the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), Bhutan, for jointly organizing this remarkable initiative that brought together young leaders from both nations to learn, collaborate, and build a shared vision for sustainable development.

I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to the India–Bhutan Foundation for their generous funding support, without which this cross-border youth collaboration and learning opportunity would not have been possible. Their contribution continues to play a vital role in nurturing the friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

My gratitude also goes to Royal Global University, India, and the College of Science and Technology, Bhutan, for their warm hospitality and accommodation during the program.

Their coordination and facilities made our experience both productive and memorable.

A special note of thanks goes to the President of Gyalpozhing College of Information Technology (GCIT), *Madam President Audrey Low*, for her unwavering encouragement and belief in empowering students to represent GCIT on international platforms. I also extend my sincere appreciation to Mr. Ong and Assistant Academic Director Mr. Yonten for their kind approval and support of my official leave to participate in this summit.

I am equally thankful to all my lecturers and friends at GCIT for their consistent guidance, motivation, and moral support throughout this journey. Their encouragement gave me the confidence to learn, share, and represent both my college and my country with pride.

To every individual and institution who contributed — directly or indirectly — to making this program a success, thank you for shaping this journey of growth, mindfulness, and collaboration between the youth of Bhutan and India.

TASHI LHAMO

Beyond Boundaries: A Learning Odyssey

When I first heard that I was selected for the Indo-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) 2025, I felt both excited and anxious. The opportunity sounded extraordinary, but I couldn't help worrying about how well I would perform. I wondered if I would be able to communicate confidently, adjust to a new environment and represent my country and college with pride. Despite my worries, I reminded myself that such opportunities are rare and I promised to take advantage of the opportunity to learn, grow and challenge myself to become a better version of who I am. The journey began with our travel to Guwahati and it was truly an unforgettable experience. The plane ride was thrilling yet terrifying since it was my first time flying and my acrophobia nearly overwhelmed me. Somehow, I managed to stay calm and complete the flight safely. Visiting Royal Global University was one of the highlights of the day. The campus was modern, vibrant, and full of learning opportunities. As I explored the campus, I couldn't help imagining what it would be like to study there. During the introductory session, I felt shy and was hesitant to speak, which made me realize how much I need to work on my confidence and communication skills.

The next part of our journey took us to Shillong with our Indian friends. The landscape was breathtakingly beautiful, with greenery that reminded me of Bhutan. However, I found it difficult to blend in with my friends, at first because of the



language and cultural differences. That experience made me reflect on how important it is to open ourselves to other cultures and to develop global understanding. The visit to the Mawphlang Sacred Forest was a meaningful one; learning how the community

worships and protects the forest reminded me of Bhutan's spiritual connection with nature. Later that evening, we had a discussion on our perspectives of the world, which opened my mind to how differently people think and yet how similar our dreams are. We also hiked along the David Scott Trail, which was both enriching and adventurous. The scariest yet proudest moment was crossing a hanging bridge, which tested my fear of heights, but I managed to overcome it. We had a fun team-building activity where we built towers using marshmallows and spaghetti. Even though our tower failed to be the tallest one, the experience was filled with laughter and teamwork. During the reflection session, I realized how much I still need to improve in expressing my ideas clearly and meaningfully. When asked what I desired most in life, I said "*knowledge*", because I believe it is the foundation of personal and professional growth. That evening, I found myself fascinated by fish swimming in the nearby stream and even wondered what it might feel like to be one. It was a funny but peaceful reflection of how curious and thoughtful I had become through this journey.

As we moved on, we left the camp with mixed feelings, probably sad to leave the tranquil mountains and forests, yet excited for new experiences ahead. Our visit to the Don Bosco Museum was eye-opening, with its impressive displays of Northeast Indian culture and traditions. Later, we explored Police Bazar, which was crowded and lively, though the smell from the fish market nearly made me sick. Despite my exhaustion and sunburn, the day was full of laughter and learning. I realized how travel not only teaches us about places



but also about ourselves. Heading back to Guwahati felt strangely comforting, almost like returning home. Visiting the Brahmaputra River was an unforgettable experience; its vastness and calmness were breathtaking. The only downside was the intense heat, which made me miss Bhutan's cool weather even more. As dusk fell, seeing bats fill the sky gave the place an eerie but cinematic beauty. I bought a candle as a small souvenir, but the day ended on a sad note when I accidentally cracked my phone screen. Despite that, I went to bed feeling thankful for the laughter and the little adventures that shaped each moment. The following day we headed back to Bhutan and I was really excited throughout the journey, since it meant that I will be finally home.



The following morning began with the peaceful chirping of birds; a gentle reminder that I was home. We attended a session on the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC), which was incredibly enlightening. I learned about the *Diamond System* and the *One Country, Two Systems* approach, deepening my understanding of Bhutan's vision for

mindful progress. Visiting the Milarepa Tower (Sangye Minjur Ling) was equally inspiring, both spiritually and historically. Later, the



Vice Chancellor of Bhutan spoke about the strong bond between Bhutan and India, which filled me with pride and gratitude. In the evening, a funny moment occurred when I mistakenly handed over a 100-rupee note instead of 200 while shopping and everyone burst into laughter. It was a lighthearted end to a meaningful day of learning and connection. The closing ceremony of the IBYS Program was both joyful and emotional. We sang, danced, took photos and reflected on our

unforgettable journey together. Receiving my certificate was a proud moment, a symbol of all the learning, effort, and memories I had gathered over the days. Our group presentation didn't go perfectly; I spoke too long and got nervous when the bell rang, but we all laughed it off. It reminded me that mistakes are part of learning and that true growth comes from accepting and improving through them.



Finally, it was time to say goodbye. Our Indian friends left early in the morning, and watching them go was heartbreaking. After spending days traveling, eating, and sharing countless memories together, parting ways was not easy. But even as we went our separate paths, I knew the friendships and lessons we had formed would stay with me forever. Looking back, the IBYS Program 2025 was not just a journey across borders; it was a journey of self-discovery, courage and connection. I learned to face my fears, embrace new cultures, communicate better and appreciate the power of teamwork. It taught me that true learning happens not only inside classrooms but also through shared experiences, challenges and reflection.

From a youth perspective, this program also deepened my understanding of the Indo-Bhutan relationship. I realized that the friendship between our two nations is built on mutual respect, trust and shared values, something we, the younger generation, must continue to nurture. As Bhutanese youth, it is our responsibility to uphold this bond by fostering understanding, collaboration and goodwill. The friendship between India and Bhutan is not just a diplomatic tie; it is a living relationship that thrives through people-to-people connections. I now feel more determined to contribute to strengthening this friendship through learning, service and cultural exchange. The IBYS journey has truly been one of the most transformative experiences of my life, shaping me into a more confident, reflective and globally aware individual, ready to grow and serve both my nation and the friendship it shares with others.

TENDRAL ZANGMO

The fourth India–Bhutan Youth Summit, held from 22nd to 29th October 2025, brought together young participants from both nations with the shared aim of fostering cross-cultural understanding, leadership, and collaboration. This week-long program served as a platform for young minds to explore mutual values, exchange innovative ideas, and develop meaningful initiatives to address youth-related challenges. The summit not only strengthened the bond between the two neighboring countries but also provided participants with valuable experiences that shaped their personal and professional perspectives.

The summit's primary objective was to promote friendship and mutual learning among Bhutanese and Indian youth. It sought to nurture leadership, encourage innovation, and deepen appreciation for cultural diversity while highlighting the importance of education, environmental conservation, and sustainable development. Through visits, discussions, group activities, and project work, participants were given opportunities to learn by doing, to think critically, and to reflect deeply on issues that affect young people today.

On the first day, traveling from Paro to Guwahati filled me with excitement and curiosity. Exploring the vast and vibrant campus of the host university made me realize how physical and social learning environments can influence students' motivation and growth. I learned that true education extends beyond textbooks—it lives within spaces that value creativity, cultural exchange, and inclusiveness. The experience inspired me to imagine how Bhutanese colleges could create similarly dynamic learning spaces that nurture both academic and personal development. The second day at Mawphlang Sacred Forest taught me a powerful lesson about the connection between culture and conservation. Witnessing how local communities treat their forest as sacred made me realize that environmental protection is not only about laws and policies but also about deeply held cultural beliefs. I reflected on Bhutan's own traditions where nature is seen as the dwelling

of deities and understood that these cultural values are vital tools for sustainability. I came to appreciate that true conservation begins with respect and spiritual connection to nature.

On the third day, a group activity involving the construction of a tower using spaghetti and marshmallows seemed simple at first but revealed a profound lesson. Our team learned that the strength of any structure lies in its foundation. As we focused on building a solid base, our tower stood firm and eventually became the tallest. This experience made me see that success in life also depends on the strength of one's foundation—whether it be values, discipline, or knowledge. It changed my perception by reminding me that long-term achievement requires patience, preparation, and steady effort rather than quick results.

The fourth day brought an unexpected yet meaningful experience when I got separated from my group at Lew Duh Market in Shillong. Initially, panic took over, but I soon realized that calmness and problem-solving skills were far more useful than fear. Using what I knew about GPS navigation, I managed to communicate our location and reunite with the team. This incident taught me that staying composed in uncertain situations leads to clearer thinking and better decisions. It also reminded me that no knowledge is ever wasted, as even the simplest skills can become valuable in times of need.

On the fifth day, the session with Dr. A.K. Buragohain, Vice Chancellor of Royal Global University, reshaped my understanding of education and teaching. His humility and commitment to visiting classrooms despite his high position revealed that true teaching stems from passion, not authority. I learned that the role of a teacher is to ignite curiosity and inspire students to think critically rather than merely transferring information. This experience motivated me to adopt a student-centered approach in my future classroom, where learning is guided by curiosity, connection, and emotional engagement.

The sixth day was marked by a return journey that evoked a deep sense of belonging. As we crossed into Bhutan through the Phuentsholing gate, the familiar sights and faces filled me with warmth and gratitude. I realized that home is not defined by material comfort but by emotional connection and shared identity. This moment reaffirmed my appreciation for my country and deepened my understanding of what it means to belong.

On the seventh day, an audience with the Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan offered one of the most valuable life lessons. During his talk on the enduring friendship between Bhutan and India, he shared a metaphor that left a lasting impression: a fruitful tree bends as it grows taller. His message taught me that humility is the true measure of greatness. Success should not create distance between people but should inspire kindness, empathy, and service. This insight profoundly influenced my philosophy as a future teacher—I now see that genuine leadership lies in remaining grounded and compassionate, no matter how knowledgeable or accomplished one becomes.

Finally, on the eighth day, I had the privilege of working on and presenting Project Druk Disha, a joint Bhutan–India initiative focused on providing career guidance for youth. Collaborating with diverse participants taught me the value of open-mindedness and collective thinking. Initially, I feared that differing opinions might lead to conflict, but instead, our varied perspectives enriched the project. Presenting before school principals and RIGSS members was initially nerve-wracking, but the support from my teammates helped me gain confidence. This experience transformed my understanding of teamwork and leadership, teaching me that true collaboration is built on trust, respect, and shared purpose.

The summit as a whole offered countless lessons. I learned that education flourishes when it values diversity, that culture and nature are inseparable, and that success is rooted in humility, patience, and strong foundations. It also reminded me that calmness, curiosity, and collaboration are essential qualities for personal and professional growth. More importantly, the summit reinforced my aspiration to

become a teacher who not only imparts knowledge but also inspires passion, empathy, and lifelong learning.

In conclusion, the 4th India–Bhutan Youth Summit 2025 was a transformative experience that expanded my worldview and strengthened my sense of purpose. It deepened the spirit of friendship between the two nations and demonstrated how collaboration, cultural exchange, and experiential learning can shape compassionate global citizens. The lessons I gained—from leadership and teamwork to humility and belonging—will continue to guide my journey as an educator and as an individual committed to serving others with empathy and integrity.

ZENAB SABUNWALA

The first day unfolded with a quiet sense of anticipation and excitement. As we all gathered at the airport, coming from different corners of India, the initial introductions quickly gave way to genuine curious conversations. It was incredible to see how naturally we connected, despite coming from varied disciplines of design, engineering, history, and international relations. There seemed to be an unspoken curiosity binding us and everyone arrived with an openness to listen, learn, and share.

Once the inaugural ceremony began, there was a palpable sense of purpose in the room. The representatives from RGU spoke warmly about the vision behind the summit, emphasizing collaboration, mindfulness, and cultural exchange. It was inspiring to see how these ideas weren't just words on paper but principles already in motion through the people present.

As we introduced ourselves, the depth of each person's background became evident — not in titles or achievements alone, but in the way they spoke about their passions and aspirations. By the end of the day, the atmosphere had shifted from polite formality to genuine camaraderie. There was a sense that this wasn't just the beginning of a summit, but of meaningful exchanges that would linger long after it ends.

The next morning began with a sense of anticipation as we packed up and prepared for our journey to Shillong, where we were to camp for the next two days. The bus quickly filled with chatter, laughter, and spontaneous singing. The winding roads, misty air, and occasional glimpses of the hills outside made the journey feel a little cinematic.

Our stop at Mawphlang Sacred Forest was unlike anything I had seen before. We sat for lunch near a space that looked like it was an ancient *kund*, which was now

reclaimed by nature because there was grass and vegetation growing all over the steps and on the base as well. The locals told us about the forest's sacredness and their rule that absolutely nothing must be taken out, not a leaf, not a flower, or else bad luck would follow. Whether it is a clever form of conservation or a truth that the spirits do terrorise you if you step out of bounds and break their rules, it has ensured the forest's beauty remains untouched.

Eventually, a three-kilometre walk led to our campsite which turned out to be a network-free zone. When we realised our devices wouldn't work for the next two days, there was first disbelief, then relief. It is strange how dependent we have become on constant connectivity, how exhausting it is to always be reachable. In a world where being online has become survival and being offline is a privilege, it felt like we could breathe again.

As the evening settled in, we sat together and discussed how we each saw the world and what our ideal version of it might look like. Everyone had passionate opinions about issues that they feel the world needs to urgently look at, yet the foundation was shared: a collective hope for a better, more compassionate future. That night, under the open sky, the quiet seemed to echo that very possibility.

The nature we were constantly surrounded by reminded me of school. Where we were taught Lord Alfred Tennyson's *The Brook*, a poem filled with imagery of brimming rivers, tiny pebbles, and willow weeds and mallows. Our teachers wanted us to imagine what the poet must have felt, but for most of us, children of cities, it was a distant idea— words on a page rather than something real. I never truly understood the essence of that poem until I found myself in the mountains, walking the David Scott trail.

As a complete beginner, the trek was both daunting and exhilarating. The silence of the forest was alive and I realised how the river sounds magnanimous and the streams quiet and peaceful and the brooks actually babble and the trees do whisper. It was in that moment that Tennyson's words stopped being literature and

became life. I may not have been the fastest or the most skilled trekker, but I still made it and as a friend from Bhutan wisely said, “the key was consistency.”

Those sixteen kilometers were more than a hike; they were a journey in understanding. Walking together, helping each other across rough patches, and being in awe of the beauty together built a quiet camaraderie among us. It is in shared struggle, I realized, that genuine connection takes root, and here the struggle was hiking up the mountain! Later, as we sat discussing culture and identity, the Bhutanese participants spoke about their deep sense of belonging and balance, while the Indian participants reflected on the layered history and challenges of our own nation.

The day ended with folk songs sung around a bonfire, the air thick with laughter, music, and the warmth of shared experience. It felt like the kind of day that etches itself in memory, where learning, friendship, and wonder flow together, just like a brook.

Finally camping had come to an end, an experience I hadn’t anticipated would leave such a mark. There was something grounding about waking up surrounded by nature, disconnected from the world yet more connected to myself and others than ever before. As we hiked the three kilometres back again to our bus, I couldn’t help but feel a quiet sense of gratitude.

The journey to Shillong felt like a transition from the rawness of nature to the rhythm of the city. Shillong, though small, carries an undeniable charm. The markets buzzed with colour and life, and between the strong smells, vivid tastes and completely new landscapes, I found myself drawn to the city’s architecture. Buildings here respond so aptly to their context, perched on slopes, hugging contours, shaped by the hills themselves. Yet, the sight of apartment complexes being carved into these terrains also made me pause and think of how rapidly the world changes without us even noticing.

Later, at the Asia Conclave, this thought found resonance. The presentations on the Northeast's untapped potential revealed how the region is on the cusp of transformation. What struck me most was not just the data or projections, but the spirit of optimism that filled the room. The Northeast, long seen as peripheral, now stands as a space of opportunity of balance between growth and preservation.

The return to Guwahati now felt like a full circle, from exploration back to reflection. As we reached RGU, it was comforting to be greeted by the familiar warmth and hospitality that had welcomed us days ago. The conversations now carried a deeper understanding; we were no longer simply sharing experiences, but contemplating what they meant.

Listening to the Vice Chancellor of RGU speak, one idea stayed with me, the importance of balance. In a world rushing towards innovation and efficiency, it's easy to lose sight of where we come from. Yet, true progress lies not in abandoning tradition but in evolving alongside it. The talk made me reflect on how essential it is to merge the technical with the cultural, to design and think in ways that respect the past while preparing for the future.

Our discussions that day circled around this idea of how culture, sustainability, and technology must coexist rather than compete. It struck me that mindfulness, in its truest sense, extends beyond personal well-being; it is also about being conscious of our social and cultural environments. As we ended the day, I felt that the balance between modernity and meaning might just be the defining pursuit of our generation.

The journey to Phuentsholing was long, but by now, time on the bus had become something we cherished. What began as polite conversations on the first day had turned into shared laughter, inside jokes, and easy silences that needed no words. It's strange how quickly friendships can take shape when experiences are shared so intensely.

As we crossed the border, the contrast between India and Bhutan was immediate and profound. Just a few steps apart, yet worlds different—on one side, the familiar chaos of movement and sound; on the other, an almost meditative stillness. It was as if the air itself carried a sense of peace. Entering Bhutan felt like slowing down, not just in pace, but in spirit.

At RIGGS, we were welcomed with the warmth that Bhutan is known for. Their hospitality wasn't performative but deeply genuine, grounded in a cultural grace that made everyone feel seen and valued. The shift in atmosphere was more than geographical; it was emotional. As the day ended, I realised that travel isn't just about moving through spaces, it's about being moved by them.

Our days would begin earlier in Phuentsholing, with the constant disarray of the half hour time difference, we made it to breakfast. It is intriguing how much disorientation a mere thirty minutes can cause, while the time does not differ significantly there is always this false hope of having more time than you actually do! Back at RIGGS, we settled down for one of the most informative sessions on the up and coming Gelephu Mindfulness City. Mr Rabsal Dorji not only provided necessary insights on the process but also answered some of our critical questions straightforwardly; a refreshing approach in a world where people forget that less is more. We had the opportunity on the day to explore Phuentsholing, beginning from the Milarepa Lakhang.

Climbing those nine storeys for a view that breathtaking, was completely worth it! I found myself, yet again, wishing so hard that I could simply soak it all in to relive forever. The cute, dainty town of Phuentsholing was like entering a trinket shop, everywhere you look, something is catching your eye.

Like every other process, this one too needed a final output; which was going to be the proposal we put forward to try and at least make a dent in solving the global issues we are so passionate about. After rigorous brainstorming and ideating sessions our team came up with a design solution to address the prevalent issue of

the lack of community we go through in present days. It is truly inspiring how passionate young people are about issues affecting us globally, and the world just might be left in good hands.

After an eventful eight days filled with travel, discussions, exploring and learning new things it was time for the journey to finally end. As we were leaving to go back to our realities, the Bhutanese participants in a gesture of good will and friendship came to say goodbye by seeing us off and presenting small tokens as we parted ways. Eventually the border from Phuentsholing was crossed, final thank yous, hugs, the nostalgia of the trip, and promises of keeping in touch were said. The India-Bhutan Youth Summit was now officially closed.

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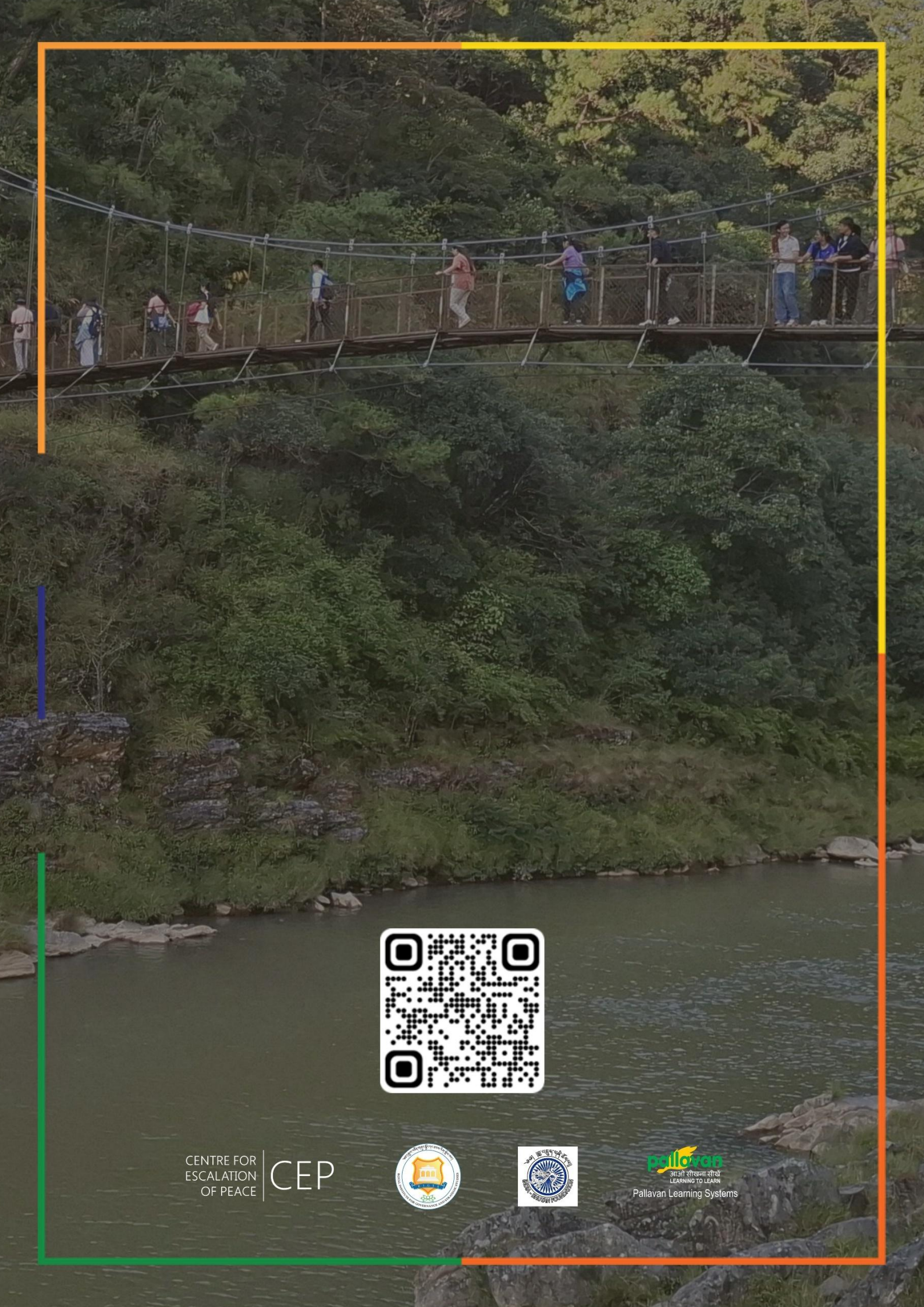
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