

3rd India-Bhutan Youth Summit

9 - 18 September 2024

in BHUTAN

PARTICIPANTS' INDIVIDUAL REPORT 2024



CENTRE FOR
ESCALATION
OF PEACE

CEP



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LEARNING TO LEARN

Pallavan Learning Systems

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ABOUT THE SUMMIT

[Centre for Escalation of Peace](#) (CEP), Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) and Pallavan Learning Systems (PLS) conducted the 3rd India-Bhutan Youth Summit from September 9-18, 2024. The first India-Bhutan Youth Summit was organised in 2018 to mark the 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The launch of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit came at an opportune time to celebrate the 50 years of friendship and partnership. The second summit was organised in 2019.

The main objective of the youth summit was to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the youth on the importance of building India-Bhutan friendship, and to create a pool of potential ambassadors of this special relationship in both countries who will carry forward the collaboration for many years to come. The summit sought to provide an opportunity for the youth to engage in meaningful conversations on various aspects of India-Bhutan collaboration and promote networking and bonding.

This year, the summit had participants from both countries congregate in the Kingdom of Bhutan. The 10-day programme was structured in a manner where learning experiences would incorporate a combination of exposure and adventure. It included an introduction to Bhutan, a three-day trek across the pristine land of Bhutan, interactions amongst the participants on core issues, and meetings between the participants and eminent persons in Bhutan. The participants also visited places of interest and interacted with people to gain a better understanding of the country and the aspirations of the citizens.

At the end of the summit, the participants were asked to share their experiences and reflect on the entire programme. In addition to giving detailed feedback on the summit, they were asked to submit a programme report detailing their individual journey during the summit. Also, in groups, they prepared a presentation and a project proposal on one of the most pressing issues surrounding the India-Bhutan relationship. In addition, they were asked to write an essay on 'what makes you an adult'. It is expected that the participants will go on to become successful spokespersons and ambassadors of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit community that will continue to grow over the years.



ABOUT THE ORGANISERS



Centre of Escalation of Peace, India

www.cepeace.org

The Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP) takes the view that peace is not just the absence of war. Peace cannot be taken for granted; constant effort is required to enhance it as an anchor in a sea of rapid and far-reaching strategic and socio-economic change. As such, peace must not merely be sustained, but escalated through various strategies & tactics akin to the pursuit of victory during war.

With that in mind, the CEP has continuously sought to create platforms and establish programs that encourage the free exchange of ideas across borders, with a distinct focus on empowering young minds. Its dialogues & activities revolve around three 'pillars of calmness', namely (i) Youth and Education; (ii) Trade & Sustainable Development; and (iii) Society & Culture.



Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies, Bhutan

www.rigss.bt

The Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) is a premier leadership institute and think tank established by His Majesty The King of Bhutan in 2013. The first of its kind in the country, RIGSS is an autonomous, not-for-profit institute to promote excellence in leadership and governance through training, discourse and research.

RIGSS offers a wide range of leadership training and assessment programmes for different sectors. It also carries out research on the accomplishments and future direction for governance. RIGSS courses and research work provide a comprehensive and analytical understanding of pertinent national issues, emerging trends, and challenges and opportunities for the country.

Besides leadership training and research, RIGSS organises public lectures by eminent speakers, policy debates and seminars and international symposiums. It also organises the Track-II India-Bhutan Dialogue (IBD) in partnership with the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP) in New Delhi, an effort to further strengthen India-Bhutan friendship and cooperation.



India-Bhutan Foundation, Bhutan

www.indiabhutanfoundation.com

The India-Bhutan Foundation (IBF) was established in 2003 during the visit of His Majesty The King of Bhutan (then Crown Prince) to India through an MoU signed between the Royal Government of Bhutan and the Government of India in recognition of the close ties of friendship and cooperation between the two countries, and inspired by a common desire to further the scope of this exemplary relationship. The Foundation aims to enhance people-to-people exchanges through activities in mutually agreed areas, in particular, in the educational, cultural, scientific, and technical fields. The Ambassador of Bhutan to India and the Ambassador of India to Bhutan are the Co-Chairpersons of the Foundation's Board of Directors.

The IBF, through its Trust Fund, finances proposals received from Bhutanese or Indian nationals for studies, research, educational activities, in-service training for citizens of Bhutan and India at institutions of learning located in each other's countries, exchange visits of scholars, poets, writers, journalists, artists, and other professionals, seminars, symposia, workshops, and support to non-governmental organizations in the two countries whose work contributes to achieving objectives of the Foundation.

IBF is the official sponsor of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) 2024.



Pallavan Learning Systems

Pallavan Learning Systems, India

www.pallavanlearningsystems.com

Pallavan Learning Systems (PLS) is an educational research organisation that promotes the philosophy of wholistic development, focusing on five areas: Cerebral, Emotional, Physical, Social and Spiritual. The Five Areas of Development emphasises the interconnectedness of all areas and focuses on learning how to learn so that all learners are able to actualise their potential. Since 2016, every year, the Five Areas of Development has been recognised by HundrEd, Finland as one of the most influential ideas in education in the world.

Pallavan Learning Systems has numerous years of experience working with schools and institutes operating in various settings – public and private, urban and rural, local and international – and catering to diverse groups of learners – 1.5 to 25-year-olds, learners with special needs, and disadvantaged youth. With the deep understanding of learners and conviction that education is the best route to self-actualisation, PLS continues to strive to make meaningful contributions to the global field of education.



ITINERARY

Day 1			
Date	From	To	Event
Monday September 09, 2024	12:00 PM	2:00 PM	Arrival at Bagdogra Airport
	2:00 PM	7:00 PM	Travel from Bagdogra Airport to Phuentsholing
	7:00 PM	7:30 PM	Reception at RIGSS Institute
			Welcome remarks by RIGSS Director
			Address by CEP Representative
	7:30 PM	9:00 PM	Brief Session on Bhutanese Etiquette by RIGSS
			Introduction and expectations sharing, Introduction to Learning Portal and daily individual reflections
	9:00 PM	10:00 PM	Welcome Dinner
	10:00 PM onwards		Retire for the Day
Day 2			
Date	From	To	Event
Tuesday September 10, 2024	8:00 AM	9:00 AM	
	9:30 AM	12:00 PM	Drive to Chukha Hydropower Plant
	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Visit to the Hydropower Plant
	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	Lunch at Chukha
	2:00 PM	5:00 PM	Drive to Paro
	5:00 PM		Check in Sinchula Villa, Paro
	6:30 PM	7:30 PM	Interaction with Shri Amitabh Kant
	7:30 PM	9:00 PM	Dinner at Mr Kapur's place
	9:00 PM onwards		Drive to hotel and retire for the day

Day 3			
Date	From	To	Event
Wednesday September 11, 2024	8:00 AM	9:00 AM	Breakfast
	9:00 AM	12:00 PM	Visit Rinpung Dzong and National Museum of Bhutan (TaDzong)
	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Drive to Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), Pangbisa
	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	Lunch at DGI
	2:00 PM	5:00 PM	Engagement at DGI - Campus Visit and interaction
	5:00 PM	6:00 PM	Drive down to hotel
	6:00 PM	7:00 PM	Briefing on Bumdrak Trek (preparation and sharing expectations)
	7:30:00 PM onwards		Dinner and retire for the day
Day 4			
Date	From	To	Event
Thursday September 12, 2024	7:00 AM	7:30 AM	Breakfast
	7:30 AM	8:00 AM	Drive to Sangchoekhor Monastery
	8:15 AM	2:00 PM	Sangchoekhor to Bumdrak (lunch on the way)
	2:00 PM	2:30 PM	Check in the Tents
	2:30 PM	3:00 PM	Welcome Tea
			Session 1 - Discussion Theme: Global Issues
	3:00 PM	4:00 PM	How do I see the World today? What are the issues and things that concern me and are relevant for our future? As a world citizen, what are some of my desires, hopes and expectations?
	4:00 PM	4:30 PM	Break
			Team Time (Get into teams to decide on a topic for team project to be presented at the programme closing)
	4:30 PM	5:30 PM	Ask participants for cultural show presentation for the last day (optional)
			Check in updates on Learning Portal
	5:00 PM	6:00 PM	Recess
	6:30 PM onwards		Dinner and Retire for the Day
Day 5			
Date	From	To	Event
Friday September 13, 2024	7:00 AM	8:00 AM	Morning circle and Reflective Writing Exercise (letter to self)
	8:00 AM	8:40 AM	Breakfast
	8:40 AM	10:30 AM	Visit Bumdrak Monastery and Other Sites

	10:30 AM	11:00 AM	Tea Break
	11:00 AM	12:30 PM	Session 2 - Discussion Theme: India-Bhutan Friendship
			India-Bhutan Friendship - Sharing about what Bhutanese participants know about India and vice-versa. Understanding the participants' knowledge and views of the respective countries. What are my views about my country? What do I think of the society, governance, politics, democracy, political parties, etc.? What makes me proud? What concerns me?
	12:30 PM	1:30 PM	Lunch Break
	1:30 PM	2:30 PM	Session 3 - Team Building Activities
	2:30 PM	3:30 PM	Session 4 - Discussion Theme: Opportunities for the Future
			What do I think about my future? What are my hopes and desires? What am I willing to contribute or strive for in order to bring about change? What help support / networking opportunities from this group can be of help?
	3:30 PM	4:00 PM	Tea Break
	4:00 PM	5:30 PM	Debrief and Getting into Teams for Group Presentation Discussion. Check in updates on Learning Portal
	5:30 PM	6:30 PM	Break and Network
6:30 PM onwards		Dinner and Retire for the Day	
Day 6			
Date	From	To	Event
Saturday September 14, 2024	6:30 AM	7:00 AM	Morning Tea and Packing
	7:00 AM	7:30 AM	Breakfast
	7:30 AM	11:00 AM	Hike to Taktshang
	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	Hike to Taktshang Cafe
	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Lunch at Taktshang Cafe
	1:00 PM	3:00 PM	Hike to Taktshang Base
	3:00 PM	5:00 PM	Drive to Thimphu and Check in Ludrong Hotel at Langjophakha
	6:30 PM onwards		Engagement with Indian Ambassador, followed by dinner
			Briefing for the next day Check in updates on Learning Portal

Day 7			
Date	From	To	Event
Sunday September 15, 2024	7:00 AM	8:00 AM	Breakfast
	8:00 AM	9:30 AM	Buddha Point (Kuensel Phodrang)
	10:00 AM	12:00 PM	Thimphu Tshechu
	12:30 PM	1:30 PM	Lunch
	1:30 PM	4:30 PM	Leisure
	5:00 PM	7:30 PM	Group Presentation and Report Preparation
	7:30 PM onwards		Dinner
Day 8			
Date	From	To	Event
Monday September 16, 2024	7:00 AM	8:00 AM	Dochula Pass
	8:00 AM	9:00 AM	Breakfast at Dochula
	9:00 AM	9:40 AM	Drive to Royal Takin Preserve in Thimphu
	10:00 AM	12:00 PM	Royal Takin Preserve
	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Lunch at the Royal Takin Preserve Cafe
	2:00 PM	3:30 PM	Group Presentation and Report Preparation
	4:00 PM	5:00 PM	Engagement with Eminent Members
	6:00 PM onwards		Closing Dinner hosted by MFA (cultural programme)
Day 9			
Date	From	To	Event
Tuesday September 17, 2024	7:00 AM	8:00 AM	Breakfast
	8:30 AM	10:00 AM	Group Presentation
	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	Individual Reflections Sharing
	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	Packing and Loading
	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Lunch Break
	1:00 PM onwards		Participants Depart
Day 10			
Date	From	To	Event
Wednesday September 18, 2024	6:00 AM	7:00 AM	Breakfast at RIGSS Coronation Hostel
	7:00 AM	12:00 PM	Indian participants depart from RIGSS
	12:00 PM	4:00 PM	Indian participants depart by air from Bagdogra Airport
End of Program			



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

SLN	Name	Nationality	College/University
1	Aswathi Alappat	Indian	Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India
2	Bal Bdr Gayalal	Bhutanese	Gedu College of Business Studies, Gedu, Bhutan
3	Dathatreya B	Indian	Regional Institute of Education, Mysore, India
4	Jesna Stephan	Indian	St. Stephen's College, Delhi, India
5	Jewel James	Indian	Rajagiri School of Engineering and Technology, Kochi, India
6	Jigme Lhendup	Bhutanese	College of Science and Technology, Phuentsholing, Bhutan
7	Kezang Tshoki Lhamo	Bhutanese	Norbuling Rigter College, Paro, Bhutan
8	Kuenga Norbu	Bhutanese	Royal Thimphu College, Thimphu, Bhutan
9	Kuenga Wangmo	Bhutanese	Samtse College of Education, Samtse, Bhutan
10	Muktansh Shah	Indian	Anant National University, Ahmedabad, India

11	Passang Dorji	Bhutanese	College of Natural Resources, Punakha, Bhutan
12	Ritesh	Indian	National Academy of Event Management & Development, Delhi, India
13	Roshna Gurung	Bhutanese	Jigme Namgyel Engineering College, Samdrup Jongkhar, Bhutan
14	Sarika	Indian	Daulat Ram College , Delhi, India
15	Saswata Kumar Dash	Indian	Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar, India
16	Shacha Wangmo	Bhutanese	Paro College of Education, Paro, Bhutan
17	Sonam Wangmo	Bhutanese	College of Language and Culture Studies, Trongsa, Bhutan
18	Sonam Yangchen	Bhutanese	Sherubtse College, Trashigang, Bhutan
19	Sukheth Kallupalli	Indian	Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India
20	Tsering Jigmath	Indian	Elizer Joldan Memorial College, Leh, India
21	Tshewang Gyeltshen	Bhutanese	College of Science and Technology, Phuentsholing, Bhutan
22	Yashika Yadav	Indian	Chandigarh University, Mohali, India



INDIVIDUAL REPORT FROM THE PARTICIPANTS





ASWATHI ALAPPAT

Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India



Introduction

India and Bhutan have been steadfast neighbours, engaged in rich political, economic, and cultural exchanges for centuries. This enduring bond has fostered a mutually beneficial relationship, mainly through diplomacy and collaborative development projects.

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit plays a pivotal role in advancing this partnership, ensuring it flourishes for generations to come. In its 2024 edition, the summit brought together twenty-two participants, eleven from each country, offering them a platform

to engage deeply with one another's cultures. Hosted alternately between India and Bhutan, this year it was Bhutan's turn to showcase its heritage and hospitality.

Being selected for this summit was a true honour. My familiarity with Bhutan had been limited to geography classes, where I learned of the majestic Himalayas, or the occasional mention of India's neighbours. Growing up, a Thangka hung on a wall at home—a memento my father brought back from a visit to Bhutan decades ago—yet it was only here, during the summit, that I truly grasped its significance. These ten days gave me a depth of understanding I could never have gained otherwise.

The summit allowed us to immerse fully in Bhutanese culture—from learning about policy-making and foreign affairs to touring hydropower facilities, experiencing traditional festivals like the 'Tshechu,' visiting museums, enjoying Bhutanese cuisine, and trekking through its landscapes. I now feel as if I have captured a complete picture of Bhutan. We interacted with distinguished figures, including the Ambassador of India to Bhutan, the Foreign Minister, and the Director of The Royal Academy. From the vibrant energy of Thimphu's city lights to the tranquil, cloud-wreathed mountains of Bumdrak, every moment was an enchanting experience from the very first step across the India-Bhutan border.

Perhaps my most valuable learnings came from my Bhutanese peers, who patiently guided us through the nuances of Bhutanese customs and etiquette. Our conversations were essential for developing a deeper appreciation of each other's cultures. As we discussed everything from income taxes and marriage traditions to music, films, and festivals, we not only gained fresh insights but also dispelled some misconceptions about each other's ways of life. Experiencing Bhutan through this "insider lens"—learning Dzongkha phrases, following cultural etiquette, and emulating Bhutan's core values—was an experience that no book or classroom could have offered.

As young people who will shape the future of both nations, this summit provided us with a vital platform to address global issues from the perspective of youth. Through three formal sessions, we explored pressing topics like gender equality, mental health, technological innovation, and climate change. Chaired by mentors like Choki Wangchuk Sir, Thupten Sir, and Dasho Chewang Rinzin, these sessions not only sparked thought-provoking discussions but also prompted deep self-reflection. They highlighted the importance of becoming a future leader and the need to begin a ripple of change by first working on oneself.

I left Bhutan profoundly transformed, carrying with me a newfound purpose and a commitment to make 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 organisers who worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Finally, I am grateful to my Bhutanese and Indian friends, whose warmth and companionship made us feel like family by the summit's end.



09/09/2024, Day 1: Namaskaram and Kuzu Zangpo!

Reaching Bhutan, Introductions and RIGSS

I woke up excited and nervous. It was my first time being selected for an event such as a Youth Summit, and moreover going to another country alone seemed very daunting. I had never expected to be selected, but it was a pleasant surprise. Packing and leaving for the trip from my hostel and not from home was difficult to manage alone but I was determined to make the most of this opportunity.

The first IBYS participant I met was Dathatreya Ramanujam, who was in the same flight as me. We had a good conversation about Bhutan, our expectations from the summit and also about our personal experiences with college, education and trips.

Reaching Bagdogra, I got to meet the rest of the participants. The bus journey to Phuentsholing was eventful, with all of us getting an opportunity to bond informally. Coming from different parts of India, seeing different perspectives and varied languages spoken was interesting. We played charades, atlas and sang which helped us bond and set the enthusiastic tone for our trip. Playful banter and arguments kept us entertained on the long journey; the most memorable and heated argument was whether beetroot was a fruit or a vegetable.



At the RIGSS institute, we were warmly welcomed by Director Dasho Chewang Rinzin, and we met our Bhutanese counterparts. They were very warm and it was easy to talk to them. All my worries about fitting in seemed to have disappeared as I talked to the hospitable participants.

In the orientation, Dasho Chewang Rinzin briefed us about the history of India-Bhutan relationships with religious exchange dating back to the 8th century. It was fascinating to hear about the close collaboration between India and Bhutan, and I felt proud of my country for having supported Bhutan on its path to modernisation. The current project of Gelephu Mindfulness city and Prime Minister Narendra Modi receiving the order of the Druk Gyalpo showed us the enduring collaborative spirit between the two countries and made us aware of our responsibility to carry forward the spirit. The briefing about Bhutanese etiquette was useful as it made us aware of norms followed in monasteries.



Over dinner, we got to bond more informally with the Bhutanese participants. I learnt my first Dzongkha word 'Ema Datshi' there as I inquired about the spicy, cheesy dish I enjoyed so much. It was amazing to see how food brings different people together and how it is so bonding.



After dinner, we retired to the RIGSS Coronation Hostel, but not before a chat about the day's proceedings. We reflected on the entire day's proceedings, starting from our plane journeys, and the session we had at RIGSS, which brought a sense of closure to the long, hectic but so very exciting day.

10/09/2024, Day 2: Forming Bonds through Fire and Water

Paro, Chukha Hydropower Plant and Evening with Mr. Amitav Kant

I woke up looking forward to my first full day in Bhutan. After breakfast, we had a short introduction session. To help us remember each other's names, we were told to introduce ourselves with an adjective starting with the same letter as our names. This exercise helped us to remember everyone's names, and throughout the trip, we used this to remember names. It was a light-hearted way to help us recall names from different cultures, which not only carry cultural significance but also reflect identity.



After this, we got on a bus ride to Chukha. The participants were mixed in the bus, so it was a good opportunity to interact. We listened to Bhutanese, Hindi, and English songs, so each of us found some songs to sing along to. I really loved some Bhutanese songs, which I immediately added to my music playlist.

Once we reached the Chukha Hydropower plant, we were shown a short presentation on the history, workings and technical aspects of the plant. Being a literature student, I found the technical aspect difficult to understand, but it was still quite interesting to

learn about the inner workings of a dam. I think the most appreciable part of the presentation was how it also included the challenges the dam faced such as damages to the spillway gate, siltation and stator failures. It was not a glorification of modernity, but a holistic picture of the dam with the issues it faces, especially in times of natural disasters like floods.

It was a novel and exciting experience to get to see in person the deep underground structures with turbines, transformers, and control panels. This experience really proved to me why dams are considered to be architectural marvels. The dam also signifies the deep and mutually beneficial bond between India and Bhutan. I was especially interested in the huge mural paintings of the stages of Lord Buddha's life there, which our Bhutanese friends so kindly explained to us. The mixing of aesthetic intricate paintings and hydropower technology of heavy machinery was stunning to see. The huge underground tunnels with the four turbines, generating huge amounts of electricity are overseen and blessed by the colourful paintings of Lord Buddha and Goddess Tara. I was greatly stunned and fascinated by the enormity of the structure. The entire place thrummed with the tangible energy of the Wangchu River.

The drive from Chukha to Paro was breathtaking with lush valleys, high mountains covered with clouds and the occasional town. We also got to see the Chhuzom where Wangchu River meets the river.

After a short rest at the Sinchulla Valley Hotel, we left for an interaction with Shri Amitav Kant at Mr. Arun Kapur's house. It was a cold and dark evening, but turned warm and cosy not just because of the bonfire waiting for us, but also because of the warm reception we got.

Mr. Kapur talked at length about Amitabh Kant's achievements, which was very inspirational to hear. As Mr. Kant himself said, his life had many ups and downs, but

he never allowed it to put him down and he made the best of every situation. Mr. Kant's first IAS posting was in Kerala, my native place, so I was familiar with many contexts he spoke of, especially his contribution to forming cooperates for fishing communities. More than didactic, the session was very informal with Mr. Kapur giving us important life lessons to carry back home. He prompted us to never be agents of status quo, but agents of change. As youth who will enter the workforce and form tomorrow's society, it is imperative that we do not hesitate to turn away from norms. I will never forget Mr. Kapur's concept of changing the world, starting with the most basic unit of 'pixel', which represents the individual.

After the discussion, we had opportunities to engage personally with everyone and have a delicious bonfire dinner. As the fire warmed us on a cold night, we all gained further insight into both countries and also into ourselves and the futures of our countries.



11/09/2024, Day 3: Cultural and Pedagogical Learnings

National Museum, Ta-dzong and Druk Gyalpo Institute

We woke up to a sunny, clear morning and had breakfast facing a beautiful view. After breakfast, we got some free time to write our reflections. Writing down my thoughts till now, I could not believe we had been here for only two days. It felt like a longer time had passed. We all sat together in the hotel lobby, figuring out the portal system and discussing our time till now. Many apologies to the poor hotel WIFI, which tried its best to provide net access to all twenty-two of us accessing it at the same time.



Then, we visited the National Museum of Bhutan. Upon entering, our Bhutanese friends were more than eager to tell us more about the museum exhibits. The museum boasted of a beautiful collection of masks used for masked dances such as the Drametse Nga Chham. It was fascinating to learn that each mask signified something, such as the monkey mask, which signified shrewdness. The twelve animals of the Bhutanese Luna Calendar were also represented in masks. The masks and elaborate costumes reminded me of Kathakali, the classical dance theatre of Kerala.

We also got to interact with an artist who was painting live in the museum studio. His paintings of the Goddess White Tara were stunning, and to see his work in progress was a great experience. We also got to see paintings on Bhutanese traditional paper called 'Deh- sho'. It was amazing to note the cultural similarities between India and Bhutan, seeing the mask of 'Shinje Chhogyel' the God of Death resembles Yamaraja, the counterpart in Indian culture. The deity Goddess Tara also represents a link between India and Bhutan, since the earliest images of Tara were found in the Buddhist monastic complex in Ellora Caves in Maharashtra and she is widely believed to be a form of Goddess Durga.

The museum also had an extensive Natural History section on the endangered species of flora and fauna in Bhutan such as the White Bellied Heron and the Black Necked Crane. There were glass cases of Bhutan's endemic species of butterflies, and I learnt that Bhutan's national butterfly was Ludlow's Bhutan Swallowtail. I believe that it is important to learn more about a country's flora and fauna as it tells one about the true, natural pulse of the country away from the cities and human settlements.

We visited the Ta-dzong next. Ta Dzong used to be a fortress but was later converted into the National Museum. We had seen many traditional Bhutanese style buildings, but we had not gotten an opportunity to enter one till now, so it was a novel experience. It was astonishing to learn that the entire complex, built of wood and stone was constructed without the use of a single nail. As I have always enjoyed museums, I was excited to see artefacts dating back to prehistoric times such as hunting stones and clay pots, medieval bronze tea sets, and traditional cooking utensils. It was quite interesting to see the 'patangs' (knives) and the different traditional costumes of the different Bhutanese groups.

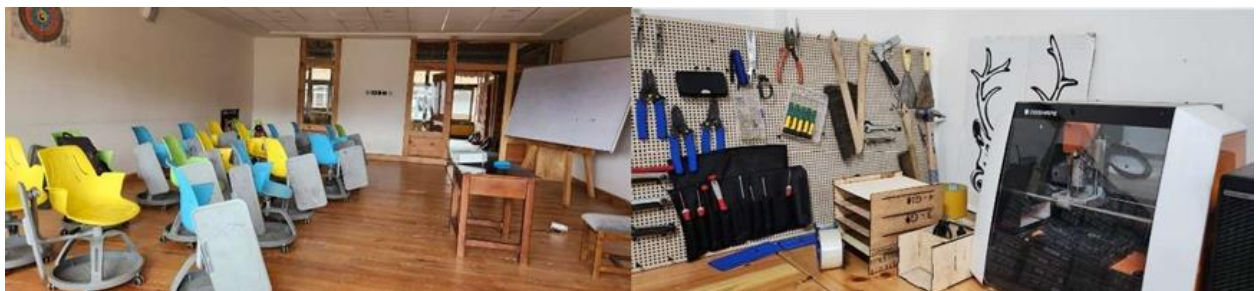
After we were awed by the cultural heritage at the National Museum, we were taken to the Druk Gyalpo Institute next. As we were supposed to have our lunch there, we entered the dining hall with hundreds of curious eyes focused on us. We got to sit in any free seat, which resulted in us being mixed in with the school students with whom we could interact over lunch. The students were very smart and easy to converse with. I learnt how to say “My name is Aswathi” from a little seventh grader there called Kuenga Yangdon, and I taught her how to say the same in Malayalam. She told me about their exercise before lunch and dinner- how a random student is chosen by lottery to speak about a specific topic in English or Dzongkha.

She said she had last spoken about her favourite sport in this exercise. It was refreshing to talk to young school students with so much enthusiasm and hope.



Finishing up lunch, we were taken around the school in groups by a ninth grade student guide. My guide was called Sherab Lamo, a lively and polite girl who patiently showed me around the school. It was hilarious and astonishing to learn that she had learnt Hindi solely from watching cartoons. She showed me around the library, Dzong, and the classrooms.

Seeing the extensive collection in the comfortable library, I was tempted to stay back and read. I also got the opportunity to sit in a class, in which Chandra Deo sir, an Indian teacher was making the students listen to Dzongkha songs. I enjoyed the songs and interacting with sir, who told me of his many positive experiences teaching here in Bhutan. It inspired me to take up teaching, and maybe someday come back to Bhutan and teach there.



In our briefing regarding the Bhutanese Baccalaureate, it was a joy to learn that the curriculum was based on a survey of the Bhutanese people asking them what they want their child to learn in school. Most educational systems, especially in India, tend to ignore other aspects of self, such as spiritual and emotional, so the Bhutan Baccalaureate seems very holistic. As teacher Dechen told us that Bhutan, also known as ‘Baeyul’ or the ‘hidden land’ represents the innate potential that an individual has to strive towards. The process of learning is for both students and teachers, and the aim is not just developing good citizens, but citizens who will contribute back to society. Keeping traditions, modernity and holistic development in mind, the Bhutan Baccalaureate hopes to help the country prosper.



Till now, I think that the times I enjoyed the most were the bus journeys. We got to interact with everyone and learn about the other culture. We asked questions and discussed topics from governance, marriage norms, family, schooling, etc. A cultural intermixing came about as we not only talked, but also danced and sang various Indian and Bhutanese songs. It was truly admirable how the Bhutanese students were so familiar with Bollywood songs, perhaps more familiar than some of us Indians. They were so enthusiastic and ready to learn anything new. They taught us some local Dzongkha songs, and we tried our best to repeat the words properly. The trip was

made so memorable because of these long bus rides that the organisers also graciously allowed us to have this much fun on.

12/09/2024, Day 4: Walking the Talk

Starting Bumdrak Trek, Campsite, First Session

At 7 am, we left for the trek on the bus. We reached a monastery, which was the starting point of the Bumdrak trek. I was both excited and apprehensive about the trek. I had been on a few treks before, but not at this high of an altitude. Led by Bal, we did an exercise he created called 'Mussa', in which we metaphorically take out our hearts using magic, make them bigger to be braver and then put them back in. It really boosted our morale and made us feel more mentally ready to take on the trek. We started the trek with great enthusiasm.



The trek was the biggest learning moment for me on such a personal level. It tested my endurance and patience, but the most important quality highlighted was teamwork, without which we would never have finished the trek. We owe a lot to Bhutanese friends who supported us throughout. The trek was a meditative experience for me, as I was reduced to just thinking about the immediate present, where to place my next step and focusing on my breathing. It was exhausting, but the rewarding experience outweighed it all. I got to see the flora and fauna described in the National Museum exhibits and enjoy the pure air.



We stopped for lunch in between at a monastery. The rain caused us to eat inside the rooms, overlooking cloudy, lofty mountains. It was a beautiful view enjoyed to the fullest with the tastiest food.

We reached the campsite by around 4 pm, after almost 8 hours of walking. The campsite was located above the clouds in a meadow-like area. We were welcomed with momos and hot tea.

After freshening up in our tents, we participated in the first formal session of the summit with Choki Wangchuk sir, the theme of which was Global Issues. We were asked three questions-

1. How do you view this world?
2. What is the one national or global issue that keeps you up at night?
3. What are some of the expectations you have from the world?

It was engrossing to hear everyone's answers, as we got to hear 22 different perspectives. The issues pointed out were violence, mental health, global warming, gender equality, and corruption. I view the world by extending the philosophy of J.S. Mill. He says that an individual's actions are fine until they harm other individuals. Discarding this anthropocentric view, I would like to extend the scope. I add that an individual's actions are fine until they harm other individuals, nature and the individual themselves. Nature is a vital part of a person's immediate environment and the self is just as important to care for and develop good habits. In these times of countries caught in this rat race of capitalism and economic growth, it becomes vital to stay connected to nature and the self.

Choki sir concluded by highlighting the importance of becoming role models and becoming the change we wished to see in the world. He added that before becoming a leader of the masses one should attain leadership of the self and become the best version of ourselves. We were all inspired and hoped to make some real changes to the world.



After a hearty dinner, there was a game night with all trekking groups coming up with a game for everyone to play.

13/09/2024, Day 5: Social/Self Reflections

Letter to Self, Bumdrak Monastery, Second and Third Sessions

The day started at 7 am, with some exercises led by Sigey ma'am. A good stretch was needed after yesterday's trek as well and it helped us participants bond. We took turns adding a movement to the exercise sequence, which ended up in a funny group-composed exercise.



Our first activity of the day at 8 am was to write a letter to ourselves six months into the future. We were expected to set some goals and trace a roadmap of our expected development in six months. It was a lovely idea because the summit pointed out many things that I lacked in, which I really wanted to improve upon. I added advice from Dasho, Choki sir, Sigey ma'am, and Thupten sir, and I greatly enjoyed writing the letter. I made a roadmap for my goals- identifying areas I lacked, realistic methods I can use to improve, and how I see myself achieving them. I hope that six months into the future, I will have incorporated my learnings from this summit and I will be on the road to becoming a better and more holistic personality.



Dasho chaired the second official session of the summit. We were asked four questions-

1. What do you know about the other's country?
2. How well do you know your own country?
3. What are concerns you have about your own country and what makes you proud about your country?
4. What opportunities and challenges can be expected between India and Bhutan going forward?

The conversation took a light-hearted tone when participants talked about the funny misconceptions, they and people around them had regarding the other country. On a more serious note, it showed how little the other, especially Indians knew about Bhutan, despite Bhutan is such a special neighbour. The Bhutanese school curriculum contains parts of Indian history, but Indian textbooks do not talk much about Bhutan and other neighbours, which I hope changes. The session showed us a clear picture of both countries as participants talked candidly about the best and the worst parts of their countries.

We also got a brief idea about Bhutan's history and politics in this discussion. It was heartwarming to see how much the Bhutanese respect, adore and support their King from the bottom of their hearts. We got to know about the unique Bhutanese way of living which encompasses all spheres of life, from eating to talking. I learnt about how much the Bhutanese value friendship with India, and we all discussed ways to further collaborate in education and technology. We also talked in detail about the four pillars of the Gross National Happiness Index which are, conservation of nature, preservation of culture, good governance and sustainable development. This was very interesting to know about in detail. Contemporary issues included social media, mental health, migration, and China as threats to Indo-Bhutanese friendship.



After the lunch break, we went to the nearby Bumdra monastery. The serene and ancient place was a true wonder to behold. We paid our respects and saw with awe the stone which is believed to have the footprints of a hundred thousand Dakinis.



After the short visit, we proceeded to the next activity, a team-building activity. It was a game involving eight groups of three, who race to grab a book placed in the centre of a circle. The twist is that each of the three has to work together in harmony as they can only perform one action and depend on other teammates. The activity promoted teamwork, clear communication, and active listening skills. My team included Suketh and Tashi. Although we did not win, it was a good learning experience and a fun

activity, as many of us were hoarse from shouting names and directions.

Soon, we had our third formal summit session with Thupten sir next. Sir asked us to consider three questions-

1. What are your hopes and desires for the future?
2. What are you willing to contribute to bring change?
3. What help or support networking opportunities from this group can be of help to you?

This session was more personal than the other ones, as we got to know everyone's personal motivations and backgrounds. It showed us how much our past experiences affect our aspirations for the future. I believe it brought us all together and also traced our path in the future. I felt it was important that we use the platform IBYS has given

us to make and maintain connections. Coming from different fields, but finding common goals across borders, this is a great opportunity for future collaborations.

The session ended with fixing topics for the group presentation. We were given five topics, each of which we were allotted based on our personal preferences. I was allotted the topic of 'Development and Livelihood'. The night ended with a jovial bonfire around which we sang and danced till late. The fire burnt bright despite the rain, even when we had to rush to the main tent when the rain got too intense. The muddy tent remained our disco stage till late as we danced and sang away our last night at camp

14/09/2024, Day 6: Through the Tiger's Eye

Return from Bumdrak, Taktsang Monastery and Dinner at the Indian Embassy

The last day at the camp started off early. After breakfast, we had to say bye to all the camp workers who had done such an amazing job of caring for us, even baking us a cake at one point. Dasho gave them tokens of appreciation from all the participants and from the RIGSS.

I really enjoyed my time at the campsite, and like many others did not want to leave. It had been the site of many discussions, dances and decisions for the future.

After taking group photos, we reluctantly started our descent. Climbing up was exhausting, but going down was equally if not more physically taxing for me. Repeatedly using a certain set of muscles hurts a lot. Due to frequent rains, the ground was muddy and slippery, added to by the moss and wet leaves. I slipped and fell twice, both very hilarious incidents especially since on my first fall, Datha who came to help me up, also slipped and fell. My water bottle took my fall as the perfect opportunity to finally execute its escape plan, and began rolling downhill. It would

have rolled off the edge completely if Suketh had not caught it. As a joke, we began keeping bets to see who would make it to camp without falling and who would fall how many times. More than falling, it was more important to get back up, dust the leaves and mud off, continue on with vigour to immediately seek the medic to treat injuries.

The view was beautiful with ‘melting’ trees as we called trees with green vines dripping off branches, flowers, mushrooms in woods and we even got to see some Nepal Grey Langurs.



I had a very funny and mischievous experience at the Ugyen Tshe temple. A serious looking lama came face to face with me while being followed by our Bhutanese friends and said something in Dzongkha to me, and went away smiling while others behind him laughed, much to my bewilderment. I asked someone and was told that he said, “You can’t understand anything I say, can you?”. This experience humanised lamas for me, seeing their humour sense and how free they can be with people.

Trekking some more, we reached the Taktsang Monastery, known as the Tiger’s Nest. Photos could do no justice to the spectacular view of the monastery built on a steep cliff. A waterfall near it added to the mystique of the place. I was excited to see a place of such high significance, but sadly, due to time constraints, we were not able to enter. We enjoyed the view and took pictures instead.



We stopped at Taktsang Café for lunch, which also had a beautiful view. We continued down and finished the trek. The trek truly was a team-building exercise. We learnt to support and motivate each other through difficult moments and pick each other up.

After a quick freshening up at the Ludrong Hotel, we were hosted for dinner by the Indian Embassy in Bhutan. I was shocked by the scale of it all, as we got to meet very high officials and present our viewpoints and results of our camp discussions. It was an honour and a great opportunity. Ambassador Shri Sudhakar Dalela gave us a short overview of the India-Bhutan friendship over the years, placing importance on the friendship treaty of 2007 which promised perpetual peace and friendship between the two nations.

I thought that one of the most important ways to ensure friendship is to enable cultural exchange. Most Indians and Bhutanese might never visit the other's country, but forming a positive image of the neighbouring country can be done through spreading music, films, and performances especially traditional arts and dance. Since most

Indians are unaware of Bhutan's culture, I want to find some way to change that. The Indian embassy organises many events such as talks on yoga, ayurveda and Indian classical music at the Nehru Wangchuk Cultural Centre. I wish something similar could be done in India.

Over dinner, we had the opportunity to talk to IFS embassy officials who listened to us with much patience, and we got to know about their life experiences. I got to learn more about the policy-making side of the relationship and the actual work that goes behind this. It was fascinating and inspirational to get to see the workings of an embassy, which felt like a little piece of India in Bhutan. We returned with much to ponder over and with much need for rest after a long day.



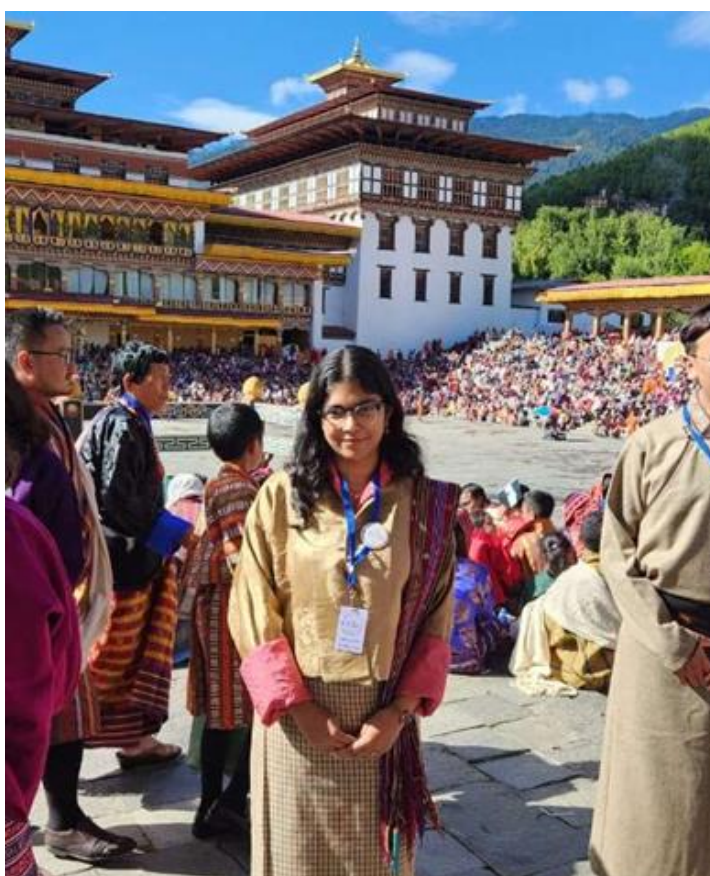
15/09/2024, Day 7: Festivity in the City

Thimphu Tshechu, Buddha Dordenma and Night out in Thimphu City

The day began with excitement because we were going to go to the Thimphu Tshechu held at Tashichho Dzong. After a short breakfast, our generous Bhutanese friends lent us their traditional costume 'kira' for us Indian girls to wear. I felt deeply honoured to wear the national dress. It was very comfortable to wear and I enjoyed every second of it. I felt like I blended in the Tshechu more wearing a kira.



The kaleidoscopic colours of the festival looked brighter against the serene blue sky and the green mountains that the dzong faced. Festival goers wore their finest



traditional clothes, which was a sight to behold in itself. The most interesting aspect of the festival was the 'Atsaras' who are clownlike figures who represent the witty and playful part of the festival yet remind people to remain rooted in the original goal of the festival. Getting to see the Atsaras dancing and coming up to the audience was an experience in itself. The Atsara reminded me of the Vidushaka

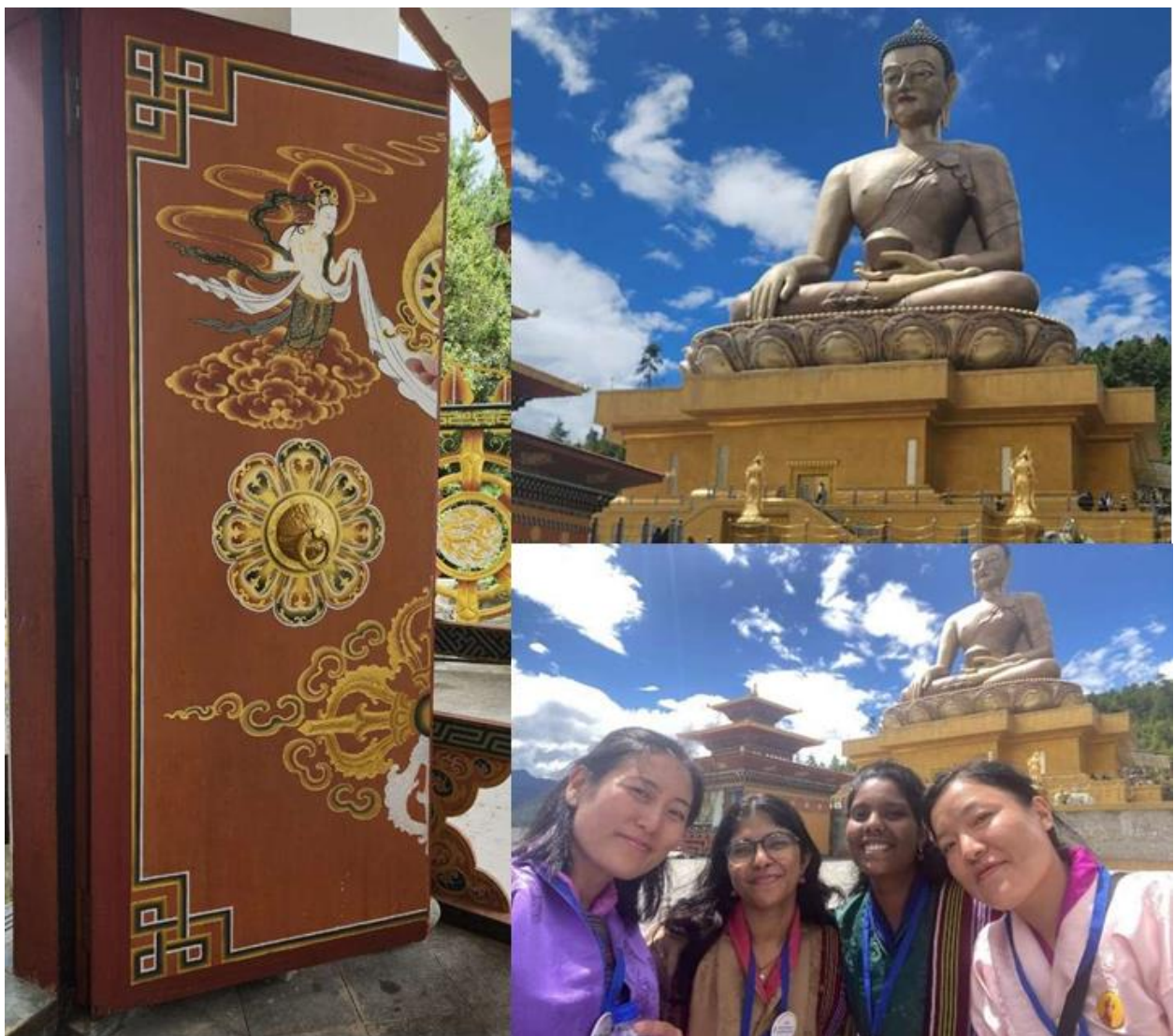
figure in Sanskrit plays, a jester figure who uses wit to cross societal conventions and speak of truths that other characters conventionally cannot speak of.

The masked dancers were enchanting to watch. Seeing all the masks from the National History Museum come to life was mesmerising. The sounds of the instruments such as flutes, horns, drums and cymbals combined to create a symphony that the dancers swayed to. It was an almost meditative experience with the rhythmic music and dance.



It was a little sad that we couldn't spend more time watching the dances, as we had to move to our next destination, the Buddha Point.

The Buddha point refers to the great Buddha Dordenma, a huge statue of Buddha. We went inside and saw the temple, which housed many statues and paintings. Our Bhutanese friends told us about the significance of paintings depicting Buddha's life story, and we saw the temple, prayed, and prostrated ourselves. I felt very peaceful and happy seeing places such as these where one could just pray in silence. It was a good change after the noise, colour and activity of the festival.



We returned soon to the hotel for lunch and group discussion. My group included Muktansh, Lhaksam and Sonam Wangmo. Our topic was Development and

Livelihood, in which we hoped to somehow connect the handicraft industry in both countries and make sure that the profit goes to the people actually producing these goods. We worked shortly on our presentation.

Then, from 4 pm to 9 pm, we had some leisure time to roam the city of Thimphu. All this time, we had seen the city from the bus window, so it was exciting to see it up close. Also, getting to explore the city with our Bhutanese friends who knew the place so well made it even more fun.

The city was in full festivity mood due to the Tsechu, with the Thimphu Tshechu Fest music performances, food stalls, and stalls selling other craft items. The main roads going through the city were also blocked due to the festival, so the road was adopted by the people. I remember how nice it was to see the road in front of the Thimphu clock tower filled with children playing and people drawing on roads and skating; the road had taken on a life of its own. We stood watching the pulse of the city, and Muktansh took the opportunity to write 'IBYS 2024' on the road. It was freeing to get to explore the city on our own terms. We split up into smaller groups to save time. My group visited many handicraft stores and we stopped to sample Bhutanese 'pani puri' and 'bhel puri' which they called 'chatpatey' which was much spicier than the Indian version, but delicious all the same. Unwilling to buy an umbrella despite heavy rain, we insisted on running, using our jackets and even sharing umbrellas with strangers. I was excited for the opportunity to try more Bhutanese cuisine such as *bathub* and *ja thuk*, which were the perfect soupy noodles one could ask for on a rainy day such as today.



I enjoyed every second of it, and also felt a tug of home while buying souvenirs for family and friends. My life back in Chennai was left so far away, almost forgotten in the whirlwind activities of this summit. Laden with gifts, stomachs full and spirits high we returned from the city. My legs still ached from the Bumdrak trek. Many of us still walked funny, limping and groaning when faced with stairs. We all teased each other and supported each other downstairs. It's nice to think of how the trek was still teaching us to look out for each other.

We had some time before sleeping to work on group projects and to perform some cultural performance. We decided to dance to a Bhutanese song "Cham Cham" with simple steps from both Bhutanese and Indian dance styles. Having great choreographers from both countries it was a quick job. I am not a dancer in any way, having struggled in school dance classes and never dancing anywhere but oddly enough, I wanted to dance here. I enjoyed the sense of unity I felt dancing with

everyone. Our Bhutanese friends especially the girls danced so well! Their hand gestures were so beautiful and graceful. Our Bhutanese friends also gifted us with various souvenirs to remember them by, which we promised to treasure. Tired, happy and feeling content with the day, I went to bed.

16/09/2024, Day 8: Preserving Memories

Dochula Pass, Royal Takin Preserve, Interaction with Dasho Sonam Kinga and Closing Dinner at MFA

After a quick breakfast, we started towards Dochula Pass. We were told about how this place commemorates the soldiers who bravely fought against the insurgents in 2003. It was heartwarming to know that this place was built not only for the fallen Bhutanese soldiers but also for their Indian counterparts and to maintain peace and friendship between the two countries. The day was cloudy, which blocked out the view, but that gave the place a more serene feel. It was a beautiful experience to practice our group dance in such a symbolic place, with the cloudy backdrop, and other tourists cheering us on and clicking our pictures.



With each passing day, we felt more like a close-knit group than the day before. I knew it was going to be hard to leave. We enjoyed the view, took pictures and departed for Royal Takin Preserve. There, we got to see Takin, the national animal of Bhutan along with other species such as blue goats. It was meaningful to see how much a country values their national animal and is taking steps to preserve them. We had lunch at Takin Café, in which I got to taste some delicious and warm Thukpa.



After a short stop at the hotel, we departed to interact with Dasho Sonam Kinga. As Dasho is an academician, he provided a different outlook on India-Bhutan relationship as compared to our previous interactions with officials. I thought his

views were candid and unfiltered. The session which criticised and painted a more realistic picture of India-Bhutan relationships made me reminiscent of my college classes. He talked of the early beginning of India-Bhutan relationship, but noted that despite the centuries of closeness, there still persists mutual ignorance. This was something that we discovered in our sessions, and something that bothers me. Many of our misgivings about the other country were solved through dialogue and we learned new things.

I think the most important thing said was the maintenance of mutual non-interference, especially in the case of China. As the common neighbour and economic superpower, China cannot be ignored, but both must exercise a policy of caution. The session was very informal and interactive, as we had some tea and chatted with Dasho.



The discussions were wrapped up as we moved to the Foreign Ministry for the closing dinner for IBYS 2024 at Terma Linca Resort Spa. Many important dignitaries were present, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Director of RIGSS. It felt surreal that I got to share a table with people with so much experience and wisdom.



Choki Wangchuk sir gave a brief overview of our journey here which reminded me how many things I had done since coming here, even though it felt like I just reached Bhutan yesterday. As Yashika and Norbu shared their reflections from the participants' side, I felt proud that they spoke so well about our time here. The summit truly had been a platform for us youth to have meaningful dialogues and finding solutions to global issues. We have learned and unlearned so many things here. From life lessons and technical presentations to real-life experiences of cuisine, culture, and treks, I gained so much insight into the two countries, as did I.

Receiving the IBYS certificates was the most awaited event of the evening, but it was also physical proof that the summit had ended. I was happy and proud of myself for completing the summit.



As exciting as the dinner was, it also felt bittersweet since this was our last evening together. The highlight of the evening for me was the dances. First, the professional dancers took to the stage and danced with such grace and elegance. Then, it was our turn to perform the dance we had been rehearsing. We all had been stressed and hoped to put up a good performance in front of such important dignitaries. It was a great experience when the dance went well and symbolised our cultural collaboration, the spirit of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit.



After dinner, the professional dancers were called to the stage to dance again, in which we all joined. It was truly a special moment, to be dancing one last time with all the participants, IBYS organisers, and Dashos. This evening is a moment that I will cherish forever. As someone who has never danced, I danced so much on this trip, but only because I had such great company with which to dance. I heartily thank all the patient dancers who taught me the steps and made sure I felt included. The evening, which I secretly hoped would never end, like all good things, ended too soon. After reaching the hotel, we stayed up working on our group presentations, which proved to be a formidable task.



17/09/2024, Day 9: An Elegy on Parting

Group Presentation, Return to Phuentsholing and Karaoke Night

We started with a quick breakfast, and ran off to finish our presentations. The group presentation was a great learning experience as I got to see the innovative ideas for collaboration each group had in the five sectors- Education, Mental Health, Technology, Development and Livelihood and Diplomacy. It was fascinating to see

how the participants used emerging fields such as artificial intelligence to aid their projects, such as a learning portal and a mental health website.

After lunch, it was time to say bye to most of the Bhutanese participants who would leave for their colleges from Thimphu itself. It was heartbreaking to bid farewell to people whom we had spent so much time with, who took care of us, and taught us so many new things. With hugs, handshakes, and bright smiles hiding heavy hearts, we set off by bus from Thimphu and went back to Phuentsholing. The bus ride was uncharacteristically silent, but the road to get back home was still long. We witnessed our last sunset in Bhutan from the bus. It was radiantly golden as if Bhutan was blessing us with happiness and success one last time on our way home.



Reaching back to RIGSS Coronation Hostel was a full circle moment for us. Coming back to the first place we reached on our entry to Bhutan made me realise how much I had learnt and changed over these ten days. We stayed in the same rooms as we had before, but we were almost family now. We left shortly to explore Phuentsholing city.

We entered a few souvenir shops, and met many Indians there who asked us about the summit, to whom we excitedly explained.



After an hour, it was time for karaoke night. I felt truly grateful to the organisers who let us have such fun experiences as well. Being a very shy person, somehow, I found it in myself to sing and dance in front of everyone. The sweetest moments were when Choden ma'am sang a song for us. Other organisers also graced us with their beautiful renditions of Bhutanese songs. It was a memorable night of singing and dancing and an apt end to the summit. I stayed up as I was reluctant to end the day.

18/09/2024, Day 10: In Valediction to the Vales

Leaving Bhutan, Final Goodbyes at Bagdogra Airport and arriving back to Chennai.

I woke up early to bid bye to Sonam Yangchen, Kuenga Wangmo and Jigme Lhendup, the last of our Bhutanese friends travelling with us who were leaving by bus. I went to send them off, helping them with their bags as we solemnly walked to their pick-up point. The early morning chilly breeze felt good as we waved them bye and walked back, now fully bereft of our Bhutanese family.

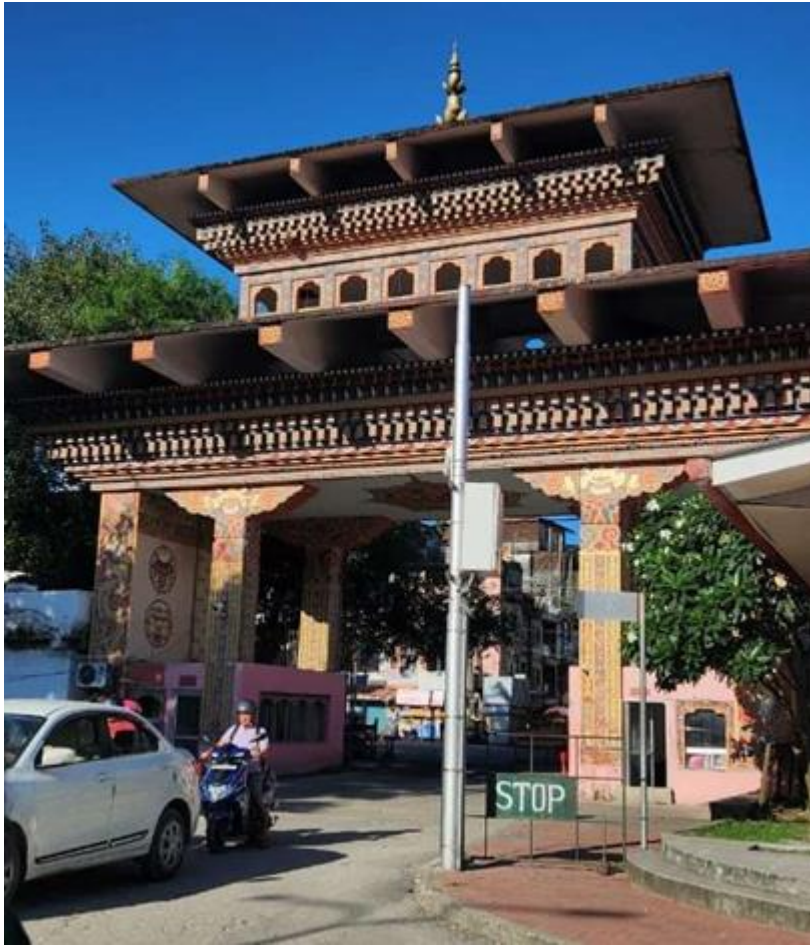
We packed up, and vacated the rooms after breakfast to embark on our last bus ride in Bhutan. We quickly reached the India-Bhutan border gate. Passing through the last checkpoint, I felt a twinge of sadness. Time had passed by too soon. All good things end, but linger on in memories forever. Now, back in India, I already missed seeing the traditional Bhutanese architecture and the cloudy mountains.

Reaching the airport, we bid bye to our beloved organising team of Choden ma'am and Thupten sir who had been so nice to us throughout the trip. I'll always remember Choden ma'am being our bus DJ and Thupten sir for his inspirational words and knowledge.

Slowly, time passed and one by one flights departed, taking away participants, splitting up our group irrevocably. It was hard to hold back tears, but I put up my best smile as I bid farewell. We all promised to meet up sometime. My flight also left soon, but I had the company of Suketh and Datha on my journey.

Coming back to Chennai and settling back into college life was difficult. I missed the chilly air, the lush green mountains and the amazing people I met in Bhutan. I had returned with a new found respect for the neighbouring country, its people and the nature there which has changed my whole outlook on life. I had gotten the opportunity to talk to such eminent personalities and learn from the very best. I'll remember what I learnt here, apply it in my life and spread my experiences back home.

So long Bhutan, I'll be back someday.



Key Takeaways

- Peace can be and should be escalated in a world in which war is always brewing. All issues are global issues in an interconnected world.
- Focusing on Gross Domestic Product alone cannot help a country progress. It is also important to focus on Happiness and quality of life of the citizens.
- Education should be tailored to preserve culture, prepare students for the modern world, and focus on creating good, just citizens who will contribute to society.

- Respecting, preserving, and learning about one's culture is vital, but it should also be integrated with modernity.
- Preserving nature should go hand in hand with technological progress. Change starts from 'pixels' that is, from changing the self.
- It is important to learn more about global issues and discuss them to get as many perspectives as possible.
- Health and education are the cornerstone of the development of a country. Teamwork involves mutual respect, understanding and coordination.
- Respect, perceptivity and willingness to adapt are important when exploring another culture. Songs, films and dance are the most effective ways to engage in cultural exchange.

Conclusion

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2024 was a transformative journey for me. It marked ten days of cultural experiences, learnings, insightful discussions, and forming meaningful friendships. The summit taught me how valuable the friendship between India and Bhutan is, and how much the two countries can learn from each other. There is much scope for future collaboration in fields such as education, technology, and development, which I hope will cement the relationship between countries further. Through meeting important dignitaries throughout the summit, we could interact and learn from the policy makers, diplomats, directors of esteemed institutions and scholars themselves about their views on India, Bhutan and their relationship.

I feel proud to have been part of such an initiative which promoted the importance of youth in solving global issues. As youth, we have a responsibility to correct existing flaws in society and create a better world for the future generations. This summit has provided me a space to think and address global issues that I feel are important, and to give possible solutions.

This summit has been a culturally rich experience. I never thought that I would feel such a deep attachment to Bhutanese culture in so short a while. Visiting museums, monasteries, Dzongs, wildlife preserves and the *tshechu* has left a deep impression on me. Getting such an opportunity to experience another culture in such a holistic way and with an insider's lens has been incomparable. I have gained even more respect for Bhutanese culture and people.

I owe this summit's success also to all the organisers, who have so graciously hosted us and helped us so much. Conversations with them have been so insightful due to their knowledge and experience. I would also like to highlight the participants, of which the Bhutanese participants have been ever-helpful, and so very generous hosts to us Indian participants. Conversations with them have helped give us a peek into daily life in Bhutan and have been the true cultural exchange as we exchanged songs, movies and dances from our cultures.

I hope that this initiative continues and many more youth ambassadors are given this platform to further India-Bhutan friendship and make a meaningful impact in the world.



BAL BDR GAYALAL

Gedu College of Business Studies, Gedu, Bhutan

Day 1: Inaugural Evening (9 September 2024)



The India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) 2024 began with a warm and collaborative spirit as participants arrived at Bagdogra Airport and travelled to Phuentsholing, Bhutan. This set the stage for an immersive cultural exchange. After settling in, the evening unfolded at the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) with a welcome reception, where Bhutanese participants were already gathered. The formal proceedings started with an address by Dasho Chewang Rinzin, Director of RIGSS, who extended a heartfelt welcome. He highlighted the enduring friendship between India and Bhutan, underscoring the pivotal role of mutual trust and cooperation, notably through India's ongoing support in Bhutan's five-year development plans. Rinzin's address set the tone for the summit, aiming to build on this longstanding partnership.

Next, Choki Wangchuk from the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP) presented the various collaborative projects underway between India and Bhutan, including the Pallavan Learning Portal, a tool introduced to engage participants throughout the summit. The evening concluded with a vibrant dinner featuring a blend of Indian and

Bhutanese cuisine, which provided an informal setting for delegates to connect. Conversations flowed naturally, cultivating a positive atmosphere for the days ahead. As we retired to the RIGSS Coronation Hostel, excitement for the journey to come was palpable.

Day 2: Visit to Chukha Hydropower Plant and Talk with Amitabh Kant (10 September 2024)



The second day provided insights into Bhutan's natural beauty and economic aspirations. The morning began with introductory sessions that laid the foundation for meaningful connections, fostering a sense of community as we travelled to the Chukha Hydropower Plant. The journey itself was a scenic experience, preparing us for a day of exploration. Upon arrival, we learned about Bhutan's commitment to sustainable energy, as the hydropower plant not only fuels the region but contributes significantly to its economic stability. This resonated deeply with my interests in environmental sustainability. A lunch break allowed us to engage with peers and experts, turning mealtime into an enriching exchange of ideas.



After lunch, we continued to Paro, and later, we met with Shri Amitabh Kant, former CEO of NITI Aayog. His talk on sustainable development, economic growth, and innovation in the context of India-Bhutan relations was enlightening. Kant's emphasis on Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) model as a potential blueprint for balanced growth was particularly impactful. This session encouraged us to think about leveraging resources without compromising national well-being. We concluded the day with dinner hosted by Mr. Arun Kapur, Director of the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), solidifying the friendships forming within the group and sparking anticipation for what lay ahead.

Day 3: Cultural Exploration and Educational Insights at DGI (11 September 2024)

The third day was one of cultural immersion and educational inspiration. The morning began with a reflective writing session, allowing us to share views shaped by our diverse backgrounds. We then visited Rinpung Dzong and the National Museum of Bhutan at Ta Dzong. Acting as a guide for my Indian friends, I introduced them to Bhutanese history and culture, which further deepened my appreciation of

Bhutan's rich heritage. Each artefact told a story, providing a tangible connection to Bhutan's past.

In the afternoon, we visited Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI) in Pangbisa, where we received a warm welcome from students and staff. We shared lunch with the students, exchanging ideas and insights that broadened our understanding of each other's experiences. Touring the campus and learning about Bhutan Baccalaureate's unique approach to holistic education was inspiring. The DGI model, combining traditional and skill-based learning with mentorship, struck a chord with us all, showcasing the potential of education to develop well-rounded individuals. The day concluded with an evening stroll through the Paro market and a briefing on the upcoming Bumdra Trek, which filled us with excitement and anticipation.

Day 4: Trekking to Bumdra and Global Citizenship Discussions (12 September 2024)

On the fourth day, we embarked on a challenging yet rewarding trek to Bumdra. After a briefing with the medical team, we set off for Sangachhoekhor. Climbing the mountain presented physical and mental challenges, but the camaraderie within the group was incredible, with everyone supporting each other throughout. After reaching the midpoint and enjoying lunch with a view, we continued to Bumdra, where we were welcomed with refreshments. Following a brief rest, we participated in an insightful session on Global Citizenship, led by Ma'am Sigay and Thupten Tshewang Sir, who offered perspectives on our roles in addressing global issues. This was followed by light-hearted games, which ended the day on a high note.



Day 5: Reflecting on Aspirations and Future Collaborations (13 September 2024)

Day five began with a morning exercise session led by Madam Sigay Dem, followed by a self-reflection activity where we wrote letters to our future selves. The exercise prompted deep introspection and will serve as a reminder of our growth in six months. Breakfast was a chance to connect, and discussions turned to India-Bhutan relations. Participants shared their views on various topics, including environmental conservation, mental health, and the brain drain phenomenon. After lunch, we visited Bumdra Monastery, where a photography session captured the spirit of friendship.

The day also included a "Blindfold Game," which tested our teamwork skills and fostered deeper connections. We ended the day by forming project groups focused on areas like Mental Health, Education, and Development Work. This exercise was not only motivating but provided a platform to translate our ideas into actionable goals.



Day 6: Visiting Tiger's Nest Monastery and Meeting the Indian Ambassador (14 September 2024)

Day six was a blend of spiritual reflection and formal engagement as we visited the iconic Taktsang Monastery, or Tiger's Nest. Although we couldn't enter, our Bhutanese friends shared stories, adding depth to the experience. After a peaceful lunch, we returned to Paro before travelling to Thimphu. The day culminated in a dinner at the Indian Embassy, where notable guests, including the Indian Ambassador and the Director of RIGSS, joined us. This was an excellent platform for participants to present ideas on issues like mental health, sustainable development, and start-up innovation, fostering dialogue and insights that strengthened our commitment to future collaborations.





Day 7: Experiencing the Thimphu Tshechu Festival (15 September 2024)

The seventh day offered a festive immersion into Bhutanese culture at the Thimphu Tshechu Festival. The atmosphere was alive with colour, music, and the rich tradition of Bhutanese dance. The spiritual and communal energy was contagious, making this a deeply meaningful experience. Our visit to the towering Buddha statue at Buddha Point provided a moment of personal reflection. The day ended with a group presentation and report preparation session, where we collaborated to share our collective learnings and insights. This was a reminder of the power of teamwork, as everyone brought their unique perspectives to the table.

Day 8: Cultural Exchange and Project Presentations (16 September 2024)

On day eight, we visited Dochula Pass, a serene and scenic site that commemorates Bhutan's past battles. We rehearsed our Indian-Bhutanese dance performance there, celebrating our cultural exchange. The Royal Takin Preserve was a unique experience, deepening our understanding of Bhutan's commitment to biodiversity. Later, we met with Dasho Sonam Kinga, whose insights on the India-Bhutan relationship were

thought-provoking and inspiring. The evening ended with a closing ceremony at Terma Lingka, where we reflected on the summit's impact and our shared achievements.

Day 9: Final Day and Departure (17 September 2024)

The final day was filled with mixed emotions as we gathered for the last project presentations, showcasing our insights and proposed initiatives. Each project was a testament to the collaborative spirit that defined the summit. After an emotional farewell, we departed with memories, friendships, and a commitment to continue fostering the India-Bhutan partnership. The summit may have ended, but for many, this is only the beginning of a journey as change-makers, equipped to drive meaningful impact.



DATHATREYA B

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Day 1: Inaugural Evening (9 September 2024)

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) 2024 commenced with great enthusiasm as participants arrived at Bagdogra Airport, proceeding to Phuentsholing, Bhutan, for an immersive cultural experience. After settling in, the evening opened with a warm reception at the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), where Bhutanese participants had already gathered. The summit's first official session began with an address from Dasho Chewang Rinzin, Director of RIGSS, who warmly welcomed the delegates. He spoke of the enduring friendship between India and Bhutan, rooted in decades of trust and cooperation, especially through India's five-year plans. Rinzin highlighted the importance of continuing this tradition of partnership at the summit.

Following this, Choki Wangchuk from the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP) introduced ongoing collaborative projects between the two nations, specifically showcasing the Pallavan Learning Portal, a platform designed to engage participants throughout the summit. The evening concluded with a dinner that celebrated a blend of Indian and Bhutanese cuisines, serving as more than just a meal—it was an opportunity for delegates to acquaint themselves in a relaxed, informal setting. The night concluded with participants retiring to RIGSS Coronation Hostel, eager for what lay ahead.

Day 2: Chukha Hydropower Plant Visit and Discussion with Amitabh Kant (10 September 2024)

On the second day, participants journeyed to the Chukha Hydropower Plant, a prominent symbol of Bhutan's thriving energy sector. The scenic drive provided breathtaking views, leaving a lasting impression on the group. At the plant, participants received a detailed overview of its operations, gaining insight into the

critical role hydropower plays in Bhutan's economy. Discussions touched on the environmental considerations of large-scale energy projects, sparking thoughtful conversations about sustainable development. This visit enriched participants' understanding of how Bhutan's energy exports are vital both for its economy and for neighbouring countries like India.

That evening, the group engaged with Shri Amitabh Kant, former CEO of NITI Aayog, in a lecture on sustainable development, economic growth, and innovation within the India-Bhutan context. Kant's perspective on Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) model as a global framework for balanced growth resonated strongly. He discussed Bhutan's potential to leverage its natural resources while remaining committed to well-being. Dinner, hosted by Mr Arun Kapur, Director of the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), offered participants a chance to reflect on the day, further strengthening friendships and connections.

Day 3: National Museum Visit and Druk Gyalpo's Institute (11 September 2024)

The third day opened with an introspective reflection session, allowing participants to document their experiences thus far. This pause set the tone for a culturally enriching visit to the National Museum of Bhutan at Ta Dzong. The museum's distinctive architecture houses exhibits on Bhutan's history, spirituality, and biodiversity, with particular emphasis on traditional Bhutanese masks that reflect the nation's spiritual and artistic heritage. The mythical Takin, Bhutan's national animal, also captivated the participants, offering a unique perspective on the country's natural heritage.

Later, the group visited the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), where they were warmly welcomed by students and staff. This wasn't just a tour; it was an immersion into DGI's progressive educational model, blending academics with skill development and

mentorship. Participants found the institute's holistic approach inspiring, as it prepares students to contribute meaningfully to society. In a lively Q&A session, participants engaged with students, discussing the challenges and possibilities of this innovative educational approach. The evening concluded with a relaxed stroll through Paro market, allowing participants to absorb the local culture before a briefing on the upcoming Bumdra trek.

Day 4: Bumdra Trek (12 September 2024)

Day four saw participants embark on the challenging yet rewarding trek to Bumdra. Following an early breakfast, the group set off from Sangachhoekhor, fully briefed by the medical team and guides on the altitude and physical demands of the trek. The experience was physically and mentally demanding, but camaraderie flourished as participants supported one another. By early afternoon, the group paused for a scenic lunch, and by late afternoon, they reached their destination, greeted with warm refreshments. The evening's formal session focused on Global Citizenship, with insightful contributions from facilitators Ma'am Sigay and Thupten Tshewang Sir. Discussions were thought-provoking, encouraging participants to consider their roles as global citizens. The day ended with dinner and light-hearted games, rounding off a challenging yet fulfilling day.

Day 5: Team-Building and Reflection (13 September 2024)

On the fifth day, morning exercises led by Madam Sigay Dem energised participants, combining fitness with team-building exercises. This was followed by a reflective activity where each participant wrote a letter to their future self, capturing their thoughts and aspirations, and mapping out a six-month personal development plan. Over breakfast, conversations delved into the enduring India-Bhutan friendship, sparking discussions on topics ranging from cultural values to shared governance

structures. Participants addressed contemporary challenges, including economic disparity, mental health, and the 'brain drain'. Despite these challenges, a sense of pride in their countries and a shared commitment to progress united the group. The afternoon was spent at Bumdra Monastery, capturing the scenery in a photography session and enjoying the "Blindfold Game," which tested teamwork and communication. Later, the group formed project teams, each focused on topics like mental health, education, and diplomacy, marking the beginning of their journey towards creating impactful solutions. Dinner concluded the day with renewed purpose and anticipation for the future.

Day 6: Visit to Tiger's Nest Monastery and Dinner at the Indian Embassy (14 September 2024)

Day six brought participants to the iconic Taktsang Monastery, or Tiger's Nest, perched dramatically on a cliffside. Though Indian participants couldn't enter, their Bhutanese companions shared insights into the monastery's history and significance. Following lunch with stunning views at the Taktsang Café, the group travelled to Thimphu, where the day culminated in a dinner hosted by the Indian Embassy. Here, participants engaged with Ambassador Mr Sudhakar Dalela and other dignitaries. Presentations on mental health, start-up innovation, and sustainable architecture from participants highlighted the breadth of ideas generated during the summit. The evening provided valuable networking opportunities, strengthening the relationships built over the week.

Day 7: Thimphu Tshechu Festival (15 September 2024)

By the seventh day, the summit had entered a celebratory phase, with participants experiencing the vibrant Thimphu Tshechu Festival, known for its colourful mask dances and rhythmic music. This immersive experience offered profound cultural

insights as participants observed the significance of the dances and their deep roots in Bhutanese spirituality.

The group then visited the majestic Buddha Point (Kuensel Phodrang), with panoramic views of the Thimphu Valley. Following a group discussion at Ludrong Hotel, participants were divided into interest-based teams to brainstorm future collaborative projects. The day concluded with a rehearsal for a cultural performance blending Indian and Bhutanese elements, symbolising the unity between the two nations.

Day 8: Closing Ceremony and Project Presentations (16 September 2024)

The eighth day began with a visit to Dochula Pass, a stunning site with 108 chortens and sweeping views of the Himalayas, offering a moment for reflection. Afterward, participants visited the Royal Takin Preserve, tying in with the summit's environmental themes. Returning to the hotel, they presented their final projects, demonstrating their dedication to solutions in areas such as mental health, education, and entrepreneurship.

A highlight was the discussion with Dasho Sonam Kinga on India-Bhutan's strategic relationship, which underscored the importance of cultural ties and mutual respect in South Asian stability. In the closing ceremony at Terma Lingka, CEP's Choki Wangchuk summarised the summit's achievements. Heartfelt reflections from Yashika Yadav and Kuenga Norbu underscored the significance of international cooperation and youth engagement. The ceremony ended with certificates and a cultural performance, celebrating the friendships formed over the week.

Day 9: Final Day and Departure (17 September 2024)

The final day was filled with mixed emotions as participants presented their projects one last time, showcasing diverse solutions and their commitment to making a difference. After the presentations, participants shared a sense of accomplishment and the bittersweet feeling of parting. As they made their way to Phuentsholing, they reflected on the friendships, experiences, and collaborative efforts they had shared.



From Uncertainty to Belonging: The Magic of Bhutan Begins

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Introduction



The India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) has been a remarkable platform for fostering cross-cultural dialogue, leadership development, and collaboration between the youth of India and Bhutan. As one of the participants, I had the unique opportunity to engage in thought-provoking discussions, immersive experiences, and meaningful

interactions that deepened my understanding of both nations' shared values, history, and future aspirations.

This report encapsulates my personal journey at IBYS, highlighting the lessons learned, the friendships forged, and the transformative experiences that have inspired me to embrace my role as a future leader. From insightful sessions with eminent personalities to unforgettable treks and cultural exchanges, the summit has enriched my perspective on the importance of unity, peace, and leadership in addressing global challenges. Through this experience, I have not only grown as an individual but have also strengthened my commitment to fostering stronger ties between India and Bhutan.

DAY 1:

The Start of Something Extraordinary: Friendship, Peace, and New Beginnings

Monday, 9 September 2024

Getting selected for this opportunity feels surreal—like living in a dream. When my parents and I were filling out the application form, none of us imagined it would lead here. The day I got the call confirming my selection, I was in disbelief. It took me a couple of days to fully absorb the news and realise that, yes, I had made it! Moments like these truly make me believe in the power of the word impossible, which, when broken down, says, “I’m possible.” This is one of those rare instances where that phrase feels utterly real.

Finally, the day arrived to board the flight to Bhutan. I was fortunate to meet four fellow participants and Choki Sir at the Delhi airport—a reassuring and supportive start to the journey. One of my earliest cherished memories is of Ritesh fixing the zipper on Yashica’s bag with nothing but his hands, while the rest of us stood around in awe, witnessing this small act of camaraderie.

Even as I sat on the plane, I couldn't help but wonder if it was all just a dream. I even pinched myself a couple of times—yes, I really did that—to make sure it was real. And it was!

After landing, we met more participants from different states, and it was amazing how quickly we all became friends. The long drive to Phuentsholing was filled with laughter and banter. We began by introducing ourselves and quickly moved on to playing games like Atlas and Antakshari. One of the most unforgettable moments was our light-hearted debate over whether beetroot is a fruit or a vegetable—a surprisingly heated topic that left us all laughing and bonded.



Reaching Phuentsholing felt like stepping into another world. We were greeted warmly by our new Bhutanese friends and the organising team, who emphasised the significance of the India-Bhutan relationship and how we, as youth, could foster leadership and friendship to strengthen these ties. One interaction that particularly stood out was meeting Mr. Chewang Rinzin, Director of RIGSS. He surprised me by speaking in Malayalam, my native language, and his affection for Kerala and India made me feel instantly at home. It was a beautiful reminder of the bond we share and inspired me to contribute towards the betterment of our motherland, India. With each conversation and shared experience, we realised how much we had in common. I had

arrived with a few lingering doubts—would I fit in, would I be able to make friends? But all my apprehensions vanished as we became a close-knit group, almost like a family. We were ready to support each other, whether it was facing challenges or simply sharing a smile.



Staying in a hostel for the first time is a new adventure in itself. I’m excited to use this experience to grow—becoming more independent, reflecting on myself, and working on my weaknesses.

As someone who usually spends a lot of time on my phone, I’ve decided to go tech-free for these ten days. I want to immerse myself fully in the natural beauty around me, engage in deep conversations, and soak in every moment of this experience without distractions.

The quote, “Not only war, but peace can be escalated,” has been resonating with me ever since I heard it. It’s a reminder to see the world differently, to believe in the power

of peace as a transformative force. I hope to carry this perspective with me and share it with others because our generation needs to grasp the importance of peace for a safer and better future. I'm looking forward to learning and growing throughout this journey and using this experience to inspire others.

DAY 2:

Bridging Worlds: Hydropower, Heritage, and Heartfelt Conversations

Tuesday, 10 September 2024



Today was truly extraordinary—a day that expanded my understanding and opened up new horizons in ways I hadn't expected. We kicked things off with a fun icebreaker game designed to help us remember each other's names. The twist was that we had to add an adjective to our name starting with the same letter, making it easier to recall everyone. It turned out to be so entertaining that soon enough, we were all addressing each other by our quirky adjectives!

Later, experiencing a hydropower plant firsthand was like stepping into a whole new world. I had never been to one before, so the excitement was palpable. The day began with an informative briefing on the intricacies of hydropower generation, followed by a guided tour of the plant. Donning an engineer's cap and walking through the vast, humming machinery felt surreal—like I was living a scene from a movie!

One of the most striking aspects of the plant was its blend of technology and tradition. As we walked through the facility, I was mesmerised by the illustrations of Buddha's life adorning the walls. It was a beautiful testament to the Bhutanese way of integrating cultural values and spirituality into every aspect of life, even in the most unexpected places like a hydropower plant. This experience left me in awe of how deeply rooted cultural respect is in Bhutan, even amidst technological advancement.



But the day didn't end there. Our bus ride to Mr. Arun's place turned out to be another highlight. We spent hours driving through stunning landscapes, but what made it truly special was the company. I got to know my Bhutanese counterparts better, and we bonded over everything from travel stories to cultural quirks. There's something magical about sharing a long bus ride with friends—it's as if the winding roads and endless conversations knit us closer together.

When we arrived, we were warmly welcomed by Mr. Amitabh Kant and his wife. This gathering around a crackling campfire, under the crisp night sky, turned out to be one of the most impactful sessions I've ever attended. As the cold night air enveloped us, we introduced ourselves and shared our stories, connecting on a deeper level. The fire's warmth seemed to fuel the energy of our discussions.

Several key takeaways from that evening resonated deeply with me and have left a lasting impression:

1. Be a Person of Change, Not Someone Who Upholds the Status Quo: It's easy to go with the flow, but real impact comes from challenging norms and striving to make a difference.

2. Stay Grounded in Who You Are: No matter where life takes you, remember your roots and let your true self guide your journey.
3. Master the Art of Communication: Good communication is the bridge to understanding and connection. It's not just about speaking but also about listening and empathising.
4. Give Back to the World Before It Asks: We often wait for a sign or a need to act, but the greatest contributions come from proactively offering our best, without being prompted.
5. Be That Pixel of Change: Just like every pixel contributes to the clarity of an image, each one of us has a unique role in creating a clearer, brighter picture for the world.
6. Always Be Optimistic: Life is full of challenges, but focusing on the positive not only helps us grow but also inspires those around us.
7. Embrace the World of AI and Gen AI: Understanding emerging technologies is crucial. They are reshaping our world, and it's vital to be informed and prepared for the future they bring.

This discussion around the campfire was more than just an exchange of ideas—it was a powerful reminder of the importance of lifelong learning and the impact one person can make. It reinforced my belief that true growth happens when we step out of our comfort zones, explore new perspectives, and continuously seek to inspire and uplift others.

Today's experiences have left me more inspired and motivated than ever. I feel energized to take these lessons forward, to not just be a witness to change but an active part of it. As I reflect on the day, I'm filled with gratitude for these moments of learning, connection, and inspiration. They have shaped me in ways I hadn't imagined, and I'm excited to see where this journey leads next.

DAY 3:

A Journey Through Bhutanese Culture and Visionary Education

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

Today was an awe-inspiring day as we immersed ourselves in the rich heritage and progressive vision of Bhutan by visiting the National Museum and DGI. Each experience was a journey into the heart of Bhutanese culture and the future of education.

Our first stop, the National Museum, was nothing short of mesmerising. I've always been drawn to art, so stepping into a space filled with meticulously crafted drawings and paintings was like walking into a dream. Every piece seemed to have a soul, whispering stories of Bhutanese deities like White Tara and Green Tara, and capturing the essence of gods, goddesses, and even demons. The attention to detail was incredible—each brushstroke and colour choice brought these divine figures to life, portraying their narratives and significance in Bhutanese culture.



Our Bhutanese friends were invaluable guides, explaining not only the art but also the intricate meanings behind the masks used in Thechu, a traditional Bhutanese dance. They introduced us to symbols of Bhutanese identity, like the national animal and bird, and shared fascinating anecdotes, such as how a raven once guided Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, leading to the unification of Bhutan. Their stories and passion deepened my appreciation for their culture. It was one of those moments when I wished I could pause time to soak it all in—every painting; every artefact seemed to have a thousand stories to tell.

Reluctantly, we left the museum and headed to DGI, where we were greeted by a sea of eager young faces. As we settled down, I found myself surrounded by students from various classes, each bursting with curiosity and a warm smile. Sharing lunch with them, I felt a genuine sense of welcome and camaraderie. What struck me most was their openness and enthusiasm—they were eager to share their world with us and learn about ours.

DGI itself was a revelation. Divided into groups, each led by a student guide, we set out to explore the campus. My group was guided by Karma Zangmo, a Grade 9 student who left a lasting impression. Karma was poised, articulate, and incredibly insightful. She shared how different deities, a testament to the harmonious blend of spirituality and education in Bhutan symbolically protected the four corners of DGI.

One of the most profound lessons Karma imparted was about the ethos of DGI: “Everyone gets an equal opportunity. It’s not just about academics but about holistic development.” DGI focuses on nurturing five areas of growth—social, cerebral, emotional, spiritual, and physical. It’s a model that I believe should be adopted in schools worldwide. It made me reflect on the narrow focus of many educational systems, which often overlook the importance of developing well-rounded individuals.

The visit to DGI’s Fab Labs was another highlight. These creative spaces allow students to explore diverse skills, from painting and sculpture to woodcutting, laser cutting, and 3D printing. The possibilities seemed endless! It was inspiring to see young minds experimenting and learning beyond the traditional classroom setting. This hands-on approach not only fosters creativity but also instils confidence and a sense of agency in the students.



Later, we attended a presentation that delved deeper into DGI's philosophy. Their mission, encapsulated in the phrase "Education should create persons of substance," resonated deeply with me. The aim is not merely to produce academically successful students but to nurture individuals who are thoughtful, responsible, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to society. The Bhutan Baccalaureate, with its emphasis on holistic assessment, and the innovative 'motherboard' platform were concepts that expanded my understanding of what education can be.

The day left me feeling inspired and hopeful. Bhutan's approach to education and culture is a beautiful blend of tradition and innovation, and it made me reconsider what's possible within our own systems. As I reflect on today, I'm filled with admiration for the values that Bhutan upholds and a renewed determination to bring some of that spirit into my own life and community. It was a day that not only expanded my knowledge but also touched my heart and broadened my vision for the future.

DAY 4:

A Trek of Triumph and Transformation!

Thursday, 12 September 2024

Today was, without a doubt, one of the best days of my life! It was the day I faced and conquered one of my greatest fears—the three-day trek in Bhutan. Before arriving here, I was both excited and anxious. This was my first trek ever, and the thought of climbing steep trails and enduring hours of continuous walking was intimidating, to say the least. But as I stood at the starting point, all packed and ready, I felt a rush of determination. It was time to embark on this adventure, ready or not!

We split into groups, and I was fortunate to have a wonderful friend from my team by my side, which instantly made the journey feel a little less daunting. Before the trek began, our dear friend Bal came up with a solution: “MUSSA,” a small activity designed to motivate us to give our best and, in his words, help us transform our "chicken hearts" into something much bigger.

At first, I tried to keep up with everyone, pushing myself to walk faster and match their pace. But soon enough, my body started to protest. I felt uneasy and had to call for the medic. Thankfully, everything checked out fine, but I was advised to take it slow. The medic and our guide gave me a piece of advice that became a turning point for me: “Embrace your journey at your own pace. It’s not about how fast you go but about moving steadily and confidently in your own rhythm. Slow progress is still progress. Stay focused, and you’ll reach where you need to be.” Those words hit home, not just for the trek but for life in general. I realised that it's okay to take my time, to grow and learn at my own pace, and to appreciate every step of the journey.

My Bhutanese friend was truly a pillar of support throughout the trek. He stayed by my side, encouraging me every step of the way, while familiarising me with the



terrain. His constant motivation and reassuring presence helped me feel more at ease. At one point he even offered to carry my bag so that I could walk more comfortably, always ready to lend a helping hand. When the journey got tough, he would literally hold me up, making sure I didn't fall behind. What touched me most was his unwavering faith in me—he genuinely believed I could do it, even when I had doubts. That belief, more than anything, gave me the strength to keep going. For that, I am deeply grateful.

My other Bhutanese friends were equally incredible—they didn't just offer help; they infused the journey with joy and energy. They kept me company, shared stories, sang songs, and cheered me on, chanting, "Jesna, you can do it!" Their unwavering support made all the difference. They could have easily raced ahead, but they chose to stay with me, turning what could have been a struggle into a celebration of friendship and perseverance.



With their encouragement, I found my own rhythm, and step by step, the trek that once seemed impossible became a series of achievable milestones. Gradually, I picked up the pace, applying all the advice they gave me. Before I knew it, I was among the first to reach our destination! It felt surreal. Those who had seen me struggle earlier came up to congratulate me, expressing how proud they were to see me finish so strong. Their words and smiles were like a warm embrace, reminding me that I wasn't alone in this journey. What started as a daunting challenge turned into one of the most uplifting and empowering experiences of my life.

This trek was more than just a physical journey; it was a testament to the power of perseverance, community, and self-belief. It taught me that no challenge is insurmountable if you have the right mindset and support system. It was a transformative experience that I will carry with me forever, reminding me that we all have the strength to conquer our fears and rise above them.



After the trek, our evening was spent in profound reflection and dialogue. We gathered around, sharing our thoughts and insights on a wide range of topics—mental health, climate change, social inequality, peace, education, and the bonds of brotherhood. These discussions were not just intellectually stimulating; they were soul-stirring. They reminded us of the immense responsibility we carry as young leaders to bring about meaningful change in the world.

One particular moment that stood out was when Dasho shared his thoughts with us. He spoke candidly about his greatest fear—being misunderstood—and his disdain for hypocrisy, for those who don't practice what they preach. He emphasised the importance of nurturing the “Mahatma” within ourselves, becoming role models who lead by example and make a positive impact, no matter how small. His words resonated deeply, reminding me of the importance of authenticity and living by the values I hold dear.

The evening of introspection and dialogue was a beautiful conclusion to a day filled with personal triumph and collective growth. It honed my listening skills, broadened my perspectives, and inspired me to take actionable steps towards the change we all wish to see in the world. As I reflect on today's experiences, I feel grateful and empowered, more determined than ever to embrace every challenge and opportunity that comes my way. This day will forever be etched in my memory as a reminder that with courage, friendship, and the right mindset, anything is possible.

DAY 5:

A Day of Stars, Serenity, and Strengthening Bonds

Friday, 13 September 2024

Today began in the most unexpected yet magical way. I randomly woke up at 4 in the morning, and despite the chill in the air, I felt an inexplicable pull to step outside my tent. As I took in the crisp, fresh air and looked up, I was greeted by a breathtaking sight—a sky full of stars! It may sound trivial, but for someone who grew up in Delhi, where pollution blankets the night sky, seeing even a handful of stars is a rare delight. But this sky was alive with a glittering constellation of stars, each one more dazzling than the last. I felt like a child again, awestruck and humbled by the beauty of the universe above me.



Standing there, enveloped in that peaceful silence, I realised just how much of the world is still left for me to explore. It struck me how narrow my perspective had been and how much I yearned to expand my horizons. There's so much beauty, so many experiences waiting beyond the familiar routines of life. This moment under the starry sky was more than just a visual treat; it was a profound reminder to embrace the unknown and to seek out new adventures wherever they may be.

By 7 a.m., we were ready for a short but invigorating exercise session. Surrounded by the pristine beauty of the mountains, 3000 meters above sea level, with a panoramic view that seemed straight out of a dream, I felt refreshed and alive. Afterwards, we participated in a thought-provoking session where we wrote letters to our future selves. I truly believe this exercise will inspire positive changes in me. It made me realise the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness, which are essential tools for personal growth in today's fast-paced world.

The day continued with captivating discussions, where we shared our thoughts on our countries—our pride, our concerns, and the complexities of the India-Bhutan relationship. We delved into topics like community vitality, the importance of preserving cultural heritage, the emphasis on learning English and its impact on Dzongkha, and the challenges of self-sustainability and unemployment. We talked about India-China relations, the refugee crisis, and the unique bond between India and Bhutan, which we likened to that of elder and younger brothers. It was a deeply enriching exchange of ideas, one that reinforced the values of tolerance, acceptance, and mutual respect.

One of the things I admire most about Bhutan is the genuine care and concern people have for one another. It was truly inspiring to hear about how the King himself visits the border areas, meeting people face-to-face rather than issuing commands from a distance. This hands-on leadership is a powerful testament to the unity and compassion that defines Bhutanese society. We also discussed the potential of Asia to lead by example, envisioning a world that looks to our continent for guidance and inspiration.



Later in the day, we embarked on a serene and soul-stirring visit to the Bumdra Monastery. Helping each other reach the top, we finally stood together at this sacred place, feeling a profound sense of calm and devotion as we offered our prayers. The tranquillity of the monastery, set against the backdrop of the mountains, left a lasting impression on me. It was a moment of inner peace and reflection, one that I will cherish forever.

After returning, we lightened the mood with a blindfold game, which was not only fun but also a great exercise in trust and teamwork. Even though my team didn't win, the laughter and camaraderie we shared made it a memory I'll hold dear. It was yet another way to strengthen the friendships we've built here, making me grateful for the incredible people I've met.

Our discussions later that day focused on aspirations, future goals, societal change, and the importance of networking. It was another opportunity to reflect on our roles as future leaders and how we can contribute meaningfully to society. The bonds we've formed here are so special, and I'm determined to keep these connections alive. As we

grow and step into roles of responsibility, I hope we can come together—not just as individuals but as a united community—to foster a unique and lasting India- Bhutan relationship.

The day ended with a joyful campfire. We sang, laughed, and danced, sharing stories and dreams under the open sky. Even when the rain tried to dampen our spirits, we refused to let it get in the way. We simply moved closer together, our voices rising in song, our laughter echoing through the night. The rain, instead of being a spoiler, became a part of our celebration, strengthening our bond even more.

Today was a day of profound realisations, heartfelt connections, and cherished memories. It reminded me of the beauty of simple moments, the power of human connection, and the importance of stepping out of my comfort zone to embrace all life offers. As I drifted off to sleep that night, I felt a deep sense of gratitude for the experiences, the people, and the beautiful journey I am on.

DAY 6:

A Day of Adventure, Discovery, and Deepened Friendships

Saturday, 14 September 2024

Another day in Bhutan, and yet another treasure trove of memories! I had thought that trekking uphill would be the hardest part, but I soon learned that going downhill was an entirely different challenge, especially with the rain making the path slick and treacherous. Every step demanded focus and balance. But once again, my dear friend reminded me that nothing is impossible. With a positive mindset, mindfulness, and determination, we could overcome any obstacle—slippery slopes included!

We started the descent last, with the wonderful organisers supporting me every step of the way. They motivated me, offered their hands, and gave me the encouragement

I needed. As my friend and I found our rhythm, we gradually caught up with the rest of the group, allowing ourselves to truly soak in the experience. At first, I was haunted by a nagging fear: "What if I fall?" But my friend never left my side, patiently watching over me, and offering help whenever needed. I did slip a few times, but rather than fear or frustration, those moments have become cherished memories—small testaments to resilience and friendship.



Our path led us through several monasteries, each visit bringing a sense of peace and rejuvenation. The monks' holy words were kindly translated by our Bhutanese friends, and as we walked, I was enveloped by the purity of nature—the fresh mountain air, the sound of flowing streams, and the tranquil beauty of the landscape. These serene moments grounded us, and finally, we reached Taktsang Monastery—Tiger's Nest—the crown jewel of the trek.

Taktsang is, without a doubt, one of the most awe-inspiring places I have ever seen. As an Indian, I was amazed at how this architectural marvel was constructed on the cliffside. Childhood dreams came true as I saw a waterfall, something I had always longed to experience. Unfortunately, we couldn't explore the interior of Taktsang due to time constraints—a small regret that now fuels my desire to return to Bhutan someday. This unfinished chapter has only intensified my motivation to relive these incredible memories, and, of course, to step inside Taktsang on my next visit.

After our visit, we made our way to a beautiful café with a stunning view of Taktsang. It was the perfect way to reflect on the day, sipping tea while marvelling at the majestic monastery in the distance. Our descent afterwards was swift, and before I knew it, we were among the first few to arrive back—a testament to how far I had come, both physically and mentally, since the start of the trek. These memories—of overcoming fears, building resilience, and deepening friendships—are ones I will always hold close to my heart.



The adventure continued as we arrived in Thimphu, yet another picturesque city, alive with the vibrant energy of the Tshechu festival. After a much-needed rest, we made our way to the Embassy of India for another insightful and important session. I felt incredibly fortunate to meet the ambassador and his colleagues, and to have the opportunity to share my experiences and thoughts about the summit and the future of India-Bhutan relations. This session was yet another enriching learning experience, offering deeper insights into Bhutan's areas of development, the mindfulness city initiative, the 12th Five-Year Plan, healthcare systems, and the ongoing collaboration between India and Bhutan.



One of the highlights of the day was meeting the ever-inspiring and ever-youthful Mr. Arun Kapur. His energy and positivity are contagious, and being in his presence felt

like a breath of fresh air. He exudes an optimism that lifts everyone around him, and I left the meeting feeling even more motivated and inspired.

As the day drew to a close, I couldn't help but reflect on the wealth of knowledge, experiences, and personal growth that this journey has offered me. Each day in Bhutan has been a chapter filled with learning, exploration, and connection, and today is no exception. My heart is full, my mind is buzzing with new ideas, and I feel so fortunate to be part of this extraordinary adventure.

DAY 7:

A Day of Culture, Reflection, and Celebration

Sunday, 15 September 2024

After the whirlwind of adventures and a packed schedule, today was a welcome respite—a day to relax, reflect, and absorb the beauty of Bhutan in a more peaceful way.

The day began with a special experience: I had the privilege of wearing the traditional Bhutanese dress, Kira, for the very first time. It felt incredibly comfortable and elegant, and my Bhutanese friends, ever so kind, helped me put it on. It was a beautiful moment of cultural exchange, where I felt deeply connected to the place and its people.

Wearing the Kira, we set off for the famous Tshechu festival, a sight that left me utterly mesmerised. The explosion of vibrant colours, the intricate traditional dresses, and the lively atmosphere felt like stepping into another world. Our Bhutanese friends walked us through the significance of Tshechu—explaining the meaning behind the sacred dances, songs, and rituals performed. I learned that Tshechu is not just a festival; it's a time when people seek forgiveness from the gods for their past misdeeds, a

profound reminder of spiritual growth and the importance of reflection. Being part of such a sacred event made me feel both humbled and honoured.



Next, we visited the breathtaking Buddha Point—a place that felt as serene as it was awe-inspiring. The painting of Buddha, adorned with intricate paintings, each told a story that unfolded the journey of the enlightened one. Our friends patiently explained the meaning behind each image, deepening my understanding of Buddhism and the teachings it offers. Standing there, overlooking the peaceful hills and gazing at the magnificent Buddha statue, I felt a deep sense of calm wash over me. Buddha Point has easily become one of my favourite spots in Bhutan—a sanctuary of peace that I hope to revisit in the future.

Back at our base, it was time to shift gears and get back to brainstorming for our group project. We were working on a meaningful initiative to raise awareness and support for those struggling with mental health challenges. Every member of the group brought something unique to the table, whether it was a fresh perspective or a personal story. There was a sense of fulfilment as we all worked towards something larger than ourselves—something that could make a real difference.

As the day moved forward, we ventured into the heart of Thimphu to explore the city in the midst of the Tshechu celebrations. The streets were buzzing with life—crowds filled with joy, laughter, and excitement. We stuck together, weaving through the bustling energy of the festival, making sure not to lose each other in the festive chaos. I couldn't resist indulging in a little shopping, picking up a few local treasures that would forever remind me of this vibrant culture. We ended the evening with a delicious dinner, savouring both the flavours of Bhutan and the companionship of my friends.



Just when we thought the day was winding down, we realized with a shock—we hadn't prepared for our closing ceremony dance! With little time left, we quickly gathered and pulled together a performance, deciding on a Bhutanese dance with an Indian twist. Learning the steps was such a fun, spontaneous process. We laughed at our mistakes, cheered each other on, and bonded even more over this shared moment of creativity. The experience of preparing that dance together became one of the highlights of the day.

As the night came to a close, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of gratitude. Today had been about more than just sightseeing or ticking off activities—it was about being part of something special, immersing myself in Bhutanese culture, and building memories with friends I will cherish forever.

DAY 8:

Unity in Diversity: Celebrating Bhutan's Heritage and Friendships

Monday, 16 September 2024

Today was another breathtaking experience as we ventured to Dochula Pass, a historical landmark that not only showcases Bhutan's natural beauty but also honours its brave soldiers. Built to commemorate the bravery and sacrifices of the fourth king and the soldiers who perished during the 2003 battle against Assamese insurgents, Dochula Pass is a place that resonates with history and reverence. I learned from my Bhutanese friend that there are 108 *chortens* arranged in three layers at the pass: the first layer has 45 *chortens*, the second 36, and the topmost 27, all encircling the main chorten. It's a peaceful place where we were able to reflect on Bhutan's rich heritage while taking in the stunning views.



We took pictures, soaked in the tranquil ambiance, and even practiced our closing ceremony dance—a moment filled with laughter and excitement, which added an extra layer of fun to the day.

After Dochula, we visited the Royal Takin Preserve, where Bhutan has taken care to preserve its national animal, the takin, along with other endangered species. This visit

highlighted Bhutan's deep empathy and concern not just for its people, but for nature as well. Walking through the zoo with my friends, we shared stories about the species and learned even more about Bhutanese culture through our conversations. It was a beautiful example of Bhutan's commitment to harmony with nature.



However, today also brought our first bittersweet moment. Our dear friend Passang, who had been so caring, helpful, and loving throughout the journey, had to leave because of an exam. Saying goodbye to him was incredibly difficult—it hit me that we were getting closer to the end of this journey, and soon, we'd all have to part ways. The thought of saying goodbye to the rest of my friends became even more daunting after Passang's departure.

With heavy hearts, we returned to the hotel and shifted our focus to preparing for our group projects. Our goal was clear: to spread awareness and support for people facing mental health issues, aiming for a future led by positive minds. It felt empowering to work together with such a clear sense of purpose.

Later in the day, we had a session that truly inspired us, led by Dasho Sonam Kinga. He opened a vibrant discussion about the relationship between India and Bhutan, exploring the incredible opportunities we have to strengthen our bonds. One powerful insight was when he emphasized that Bhutan engages with other countries out of survival, while India's engagement is driven by its well-being and prosperity.

Dasho Sonam emphasised that the relationship is mutually beneficial, showcasing the strength of our ties. He addressed the misconception that India provides security for Bhutan, reminding us that Bhutan has its own military and operates independently. This understanding is essential for both nations as we navigate the future together. His insights encouraged us to see the importance of fostering understanding and cooperation between our countries.

The discussion was not just thought-provoking; it was uplifting and empowering. We left the session feeling motivated and inspired, ready to take actionable steps towards maintaining and enhancing this valuable relationship as future leaders. Dasho Sonam's vision and encouragement reinforced our belief that through collaboration, we can achieve great things for both India and Bhutan.



After this thought-provoking session, we headed to our closing ceremony dinner, where we had the honour of meeting the Minister of Foreign Affairs and several other

eminent personalities, including Mr. Arun Kapur, who captivated us all with his calm demeanour, perseverance, and deep knowledge. Two participants, Yashica from India and Norbu from Bhutan, delivered moving speeches about our shared experiences, the friendships we'd built, and the lessons we had learned. It was heartwarming to see how far we had all come in just a few days, and how much this journey had changed us for the better preparing us to become great leaders in the future.

To top it off, we performed the dance we had prepared with our Bhutanese friends. The energy was electric as we danced, smiled, and celebrated our time together. The evening ended with a stunning cultural program by the Lhayé Lugar Group, who taught us traditional Bhutanese dances. We joined in, dancing, singing, and laughing together. As we moved to the rhythm, it felt like a beautiful culmination of our shared memories, our deep bond, and the incredible time we had spent together.

DAY 9:

A Day of Bittersweet Farewells

Tuesday, 17 September 2024

Today was a day that tested my emotions in ways I never expected. The morning was filled with excitement as we geared up for our group presentations, a culmination of days filled with intense brainstorming, collaboration, and passion. Every team was eager to showcase their ideas, but there was also an underlying awareness that this was the last time we'd all be together on this incredible journey.

My group had chosen mental health—a topic so close to my heart and one that has become increasingly urgent in today's fast-paced world. Jigme, Sonam, Yashika, and I shared insights from our respective countries and cities, highlighting both the challenges and the opportunities to address these challenges. We crafted solutions that could begin with individual action and ripple outward, sparking change at a national

level. Standing there with my teammates, I felt so proud of what we had accomplished. These conversations weren't just academic exercises—they were the seeds of something greater, ideas that could genuinely make a difference in the world.



After our presentation, I was deeply inspired by the other groups who addressed topics like education, technology, diplomacy, and development. Every idea was thoughtful; every solution was actionable. It was clear that we had come to Bhutan not only to learn but to leave with the tools and motivation to spark positive change. I couldn't help but think that we, this diverse group of young leaders, have the potential to reshape our communities in positive ways.

But then came the most challenging part of the day—saying goodbye. As the reality of parting set in, memories from the past days flooded my mind: the long bus rides filled with laughter and singing, the challenging yet unforgettable trek, the deep, late-night discussions, the breathtaking beauty of Bhutan's mountains and monasteries, and the special bond we formed through it all. I hadn't realised how close we had become until that moment. It hit me like a wave—I wasn't just leaving behind new friends; I was leaving behind a family.

I wanted to express how much each of my 21 new friends meant to me, so I wrote personalised, handwritten cards for each of them. It was my small way of thanking them for every shared experience and moment of kindness and support. When I arrived in Bhutan, I was filled with uncertainty, unsure of how I would connect with everyone. But now, leaving felt like a part of my heart was being left behind.

As we stood there, hugging and saying our final goodbyes, I could feel my emotions welling up, and by the time I boarded the bus, the tears I had been holding back came pouring out. The bus ride back was quiet, each of us lost in our own thoughts, replaying the memories we had created. I couldn't stop crying, overwhelmed by the profound impact this summit had on me.



That evening, in the midst of all the sadness, we found one final opportunity to celebrate. We ventured into Phuentsholing city for a night filled with laughter, music, and joy. We sang our hearts out at karaoke, reminisced about our favourite moments, and enjoyed a beautiful dinner together. It was the perfect way to cap off such a transformative journey.



But that night, as I lay awake in bed, I couldn't sleep. Knowing it was my last night in Bhutan, which had become a second home to me, left me feeling nostalgic and profoundly grateful. This adventure, which began with anticipation and uncertainty, ended with a heart full of memories and a deep sense of connection. As I reflected on the journey that started at RIGSS and led to these unforgettable moments, I knew that Bhutan would always hold a special place in my heart.

Conclusion

As I reflect on this extraordinary journey in Bhutan, my heart overflows with gratitude for the unforgettable experiences, the deep bonds we've forged, and the invaluable lessons we've embraced. Each moment—from our first meeting at RIGSS to the bittersweet farewell in Thimphu—has profoundly enriched my understanding of cultural appreciation, collaboration, and the beauty of acceptance and celebration. I never anticipated how deeply connected I would feel to Bhutan and its people. The hospitality and love shown by my Bhutanese friends were truly heartwarming, and I never once missed my family back home. Instead, we became a new family—caring for, supporting, and motivating one another, becoming pillars of strength. This sense

of unity, built on shared experiences and genuine camaraderie, is a gift I will carry with me always.

The insightful discussions with Dashos and esteemed personalities, the breathtaking trek to Bumdrak, and our meaningful interactions throughout the IBYS Summit have woven together a tapestry of life-changing memories that I will forever treasure. These experiences not only broadened my horizons but also reinforced the truth that, despite our diverse backgrounds, our shared values and aspirations can harmoniously unite us.

As I move forward, I am eager to carry these insights into my future, inspiring myself and others to foster connections that transcend borders and create positive change. This journey may be coming to an end, but our collective pursuit of understanding, unity, and peace is just beginning. Together, we can build a brighter, more inclusive world, driven by the values and lessons we've shared during this incredible journey in Bhutan.





JEWEL JAMES

Rajagiri School of Engineering and Technology, Kochi, India

Day 1: Inaugural Evening (9 September 2024)

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) 2024 commenced with the arrival of participants at Bagdogra Airport, followed by a scenic journey by bus to Phuentsholing, Bhutan. Bhutanese participants gathered at the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), where the summit formally began at 9:00 PM with a welcome reception. Dasho Chewang Rinzin, Director of RIGSS, warmly welcomed all delegates, underscoring the importance of fostering sustainable bilateral relations, cross-cultural dialogue, and the longstanding India-Bhutan friendship since 1958. He acknowledged the enduring support of the Indian government through initiatives like the five-year plans and the shared values of trust and commitment between the two nations.



The evening featured a presentation by Choki Wangchuk from the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP), highlighting collaborative projects between India and Bhutan. Delegates were introduced to the Pallavan Learning Portal, designed to enhance daily engagement during the summit. The night ended with a welcome dinner that blended Indian and Bhutanese culinary traditions, allowing participants to network informally before retiring at the RIGSS Coronation Hostel.

Day 2: Visit to Chukha Hydropower Plant and Interaction with Amitabh Kant (10 September 2024)

The second day began with a drive to the Chukha Hydropower Plant, a key part of Bhutan's energy sector, offering breathtaking views of the country's natural landscape. At Chukha, participants received an overview of hydropower generation, the plant's operations, and its economic significance for Bhutan. Discussions on sustainable development and the environmental impact of large-scale energy projects provided a deeper understanding of Bhutan's energy exports to neighbouring countries. Following a lunch of traditional Bhutanese cuisine, the group continued to Paro.

In the evening, delegates met with Shri Amitabh Kant, former CEO of NITI Aayog, who addressed Sustainable Development, the Education System, Economic Growth, and the future of India-Bhutan collaboration. His insights into harnessing resources for balanced development aligned with the Gross National Happiness Index resonated with the delegates. The day concluded with a networking dinner hosted by Mr. Arun Kapur, Director of the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), before retiring to the hotel.



Day 3: National Museum and Druk Gyalpo's Institute Visit (11 September 2024)

The third day started with a reflective session, where participants documented their experiences thus far. This was followed by a visit to the National Museum of Bhutan at Ta Dzong. The museum's mask gallery and exhibits on Bhutan's cultural heritage, biodiversity, and spirituality fascinated participants, particularly the intricate craftsmanship of Bhutanese masks and the mythical Takin, Bhutan's national animal. At the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), participants were warmly welcomed by students and staff, who guided them on a tour showcasing the school's unique educational philosophy. The DGI emphasises skill development, mentorship, and the Bhutan Baccalaureate system, all designed to cultivate contributory citizens. Participants engaged in Q&A sessions about DGI's innovative model, which combines academic learning with skill-based development. The day concluded with an evening stroll through Paro's market, followed by dinner and a briefing on the upcoming Bumdra trek.



Day 4: Bumdra Trek (12 September 2024)

The fourth day began with a 7:00 AM wake-up and breakfast before participants set off for Sangachhoekhor. Upon arrival, they were greeted with refreshments and introduced to the medical team and guides for the trek. Divided into small groups, participants supported each other as they tackled altitude challenges, reaching the midpoint by 1:20 PM for a lunch break before continuing to their destination by 4:26 PM. They were welcomed with tea, coffee, and dumplings upon arrival and settled into their tents.

In the evening, a session on Global Citizenship encouraged participants to discuss global issues and their roles in the international community, with insights from Ma'am Sigay and Thupten Tshewang Sir. The session concluded with an address from Dasho Chewang Rinzin, followed by dinner and games, bringing a relaxed end to the day.



Day 5: Team-building and Reflections (13 September 2024)

The day began with a group exercise led by Madam Sigay Dem, fostering fitness and camaraderie. Afterwards, participants engaged in a self-reflection exercise, writing

letters to their future selves outlining their motivations and goals, and drafting a six-month roadmap for personal development. Breakfast was followed by a discussion on India-Bhutan friendship, with participants sharing insights into each nation's unique qualities, such as Bhutan's focus on Gross National Happiness and environmental conservation, and India's cultural diversity.

The afternoon featured a team-building "Blindfold Game," promoting trust and collaboration, with awards given to standout teams. Later, participants discussed their aspirations, ranging from political careers to societal reforms. Many highlighted goals for cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and enhanced education, focusing on making meaningful contributions to their communities.

Day 6: Visit to Tiger's Nest Monastery and Dinner at Indian Embassy (14 September 2024)

After breakfast, participants visited the iconic Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest), a revered site in Bhutan. Although Indian participants could not enter, Bhutanese companions shared their experiences afterwards. The group enjoyed lunch at Taktsang Café before returning to Thimphu in the evening.

A formal dinner at the Indian Embassy in Thimphu allowed participants to present their views and engage in discussions with notable guests, including Ambassador Sudhakar Dalela and Dasho Chewang Rinzin. Presentations covered a wide range of topics, from mental health to sustainable development, and concluded with a video on collaborative issues between India and Bhutan.



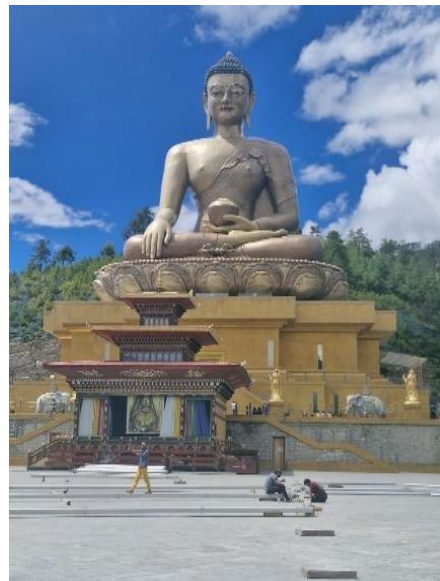
Day 7: Thimphu Tshechu Festival and Cultural Exchange (15 September 2024)



Participants enjoyed breakfast and attended the vibrant Thimphu Tshechu Festival, witnessing colourful mask dances and traditional music. Later, a visit to Buddha Point (Kuensel Phodrang) offered sweeping views of the Thimphu Valley, where participants shared personal reflections.

After lunch, participants engaged in discussions about project ideas in their interest areas, which were divided into five groups: Mental Health, Education, Technology and Start-ups, Development, and Diplomacy and Politics. Each group then rehearsed

a collaborative cultural dance symbolising the bond between India and Bhutan, wrapping up the evening with excitement for the final day's events.



Day 8: Group Presentations and Summit Closing Ceremony

The final day saw each project group present their ideas on key themes including Mental Health, Education, Technology, Development, and Diplomacy. The Mental Health group, for example, recommended integrating mental health education in schools, while the Diplomacy group presented ideas for strengthening bilateral ties. The summit closed with a ceremony at Terma Lingka, where Mr. Choki Wangchuk summarised the key discussions and outcomes. Reflections from participants highlighted the value of international cooperation in addressing global challenges. The Hon'ble Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs delivered an inspiring address on youth empowerment, followed by an award ceremony recognising each participant's contributions.

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit was an enriching experience, promoting dialogue, collaboration, and cultural exchange. Participants left inspired to bring forward the lessons learned into their personal and professional lives, fostering unity and cooperation on a global scale.





JIGME LHENDUP

College of Science and Technology, Phuentsholing, Bhutan

Introduction

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) 2024 proved to be an extraordinary experience, one that allowed me to broaden my understanding of the shared heritage, values, and aspirations of our two nations. Over nine days, we engaged in a series of thought-provoking discussions, participated in meaningful exchanges, and forged friendships that I am confident will last a lifetime. Through various activities, interactions with prominent leaders, and exposure to Bhutan's unique landscape and culture, I developed a greater appreciation for the bond between Bhutan and India and an enhanced sense of purpose as a future leader.

Day One: Inaugural Evening at RIGSS

On 9 September, we were warmly welcomed by Dasho Chewang Rinzin, Director of the Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS). His insights underscored the significance of staying in Bhutan to contribute to its development, a sentiment that deeply resonated with me. His emphasis on time management through the Eisenhower Matrix and the Pomodoro Technique gave me practical tools to approach my goals more effectively. Meeting our Indian counterparts for the first time over dinner set a positive and collaborative tone for the summit.

Day Two: Chhukha Hydropower Plant and Meeting with Amitabh Kant

Our journey to the Chhukha Hydropower Plant was not just an exploration of Bhutan's clean energy initiatives but also a profound reminder of the country's commitment to sustainable development. Later, listening to Amitabh Kant emphasise the importance of adaptability and effective communication in an evolving world was both inspiring and thought-provoking. His reflections on Bhutan's Gross National

Happiness model reinforced my belief that our small nation has much to offer as a global role model for balanced growth.

Day Three: Exploring Culture and Education

The day began with a visit to the National Museum, where exhibits celebrating Bhutan's rich biodiversity and artistic heritage reminded me of our responsibility to preserve these cultural and environmental treasures. At the Druk Gyalpo's Institute, I learned about the Bhutan Baccalaureate, an educational model based on holistic development and inspired by Buddhist philosophy. This model encourages students to cultivate five key aspects: spiritual, social, physical, cerebral, and emotional, aiming to produce individuals of substance and resilience.

Day Four: Trekking to Bumdrak

Our trek to Bumdrak at 3,800 meters was challenging, yet the camaraderie and mutual support among the participants made it a truly uplifting experience. Upon reaching our destination, we held discussions on the issues of mental health and climate change, reflecting on the urgent need for collective action to tackle these challenges. This experience reminded me of the difference between being a 'human being' and truly embodying humanity through meaningful actions.

Day Five: Reflections and Team-building

The day began with a letter-writing exercise to our future selves, a moment of introspection that encouraged personal growth and a commitment to ongoing development. Engaging in a team-building activity, we practised effective communication and teamwork, valuable skills for any future leader. Our discussions about India-Bhutan relations highlighted the opportunities and challenges facing our

nations, particularly in the realms of hydropower, education, and environmental conservation.

Day Six: Taktsang Monastery and Indian Embassy Visit

Our visit to Taktsang Monastery, with its breathtaking views and serene atmosphere, was an inspiring experience, reinforcing the depth of Bhutan's spiritual heritage. Later, the evening at the Indian Embassy in Thimphu provided a platform to discuss our experiences and potential areas for collaboration between our nations. Hearing from various dignitaries further enriched our understanding of the shared values that underpin our bilateral relationship.

Day Seven: Thimphu Tshechu Festival

Attending the Thimphu Tshechu Festival was a vibrant immersion into Bhutanese culture. The dances and ceremonies left a lasting impression on me, as they symbolised Bhutan's deep-rooted spirituality and commitment to tradition. A visit to Buddha Point followed by a group discussion on mental health, education, and development reminded me of the importance of balancing cultural preservation with progress.

Day Eight: Closing Ceremony and Project Presentations

Our final day of formal activities included a visit to Dochula Pass, a location of historical and spiritual significance, and a presentation of our group projects. The evening's closing ceremony, attended by distinguished guests, was a celebration of our newfound friendships and achievements. It was an honour to meet Dasho Sonam Kinga, whose insights on the India-Bhutan relationship inspired us to contribute to a future of collaboration and peace.

Day Nine: Farewells and Final Reflections

The last day of the summit was bittersweet, filled with both pride in our shared accomplishments and sadness as we prepared to part ways. The bonds we formed and the knowledge we gained will remain with me as I continue my journey. Reflecting on the summit, I feel a renewed sense of purpose to contribute to Bhutan's progress and foster our relationship with India, confident that our shared vision will continue to flourish.

Conclusion

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit was an unforgettable experience that enriched my understanding of both my country and the enduring bond we share with India. As I move forward, I am inspired to uphold the values of peace, cooperation, and sustainability, and to work towards a future that honours our shared heritage. The friendships and insights gained during the summit have instilled in me a sense of optimism and responsibility, and I am excited to play my part in strengthening the ties between Bhutan and India.



KEZANG TSHOKI LHAMO

Norbuling Rigter College, Paro, Bhutan

9th September

The summit commenced with a warm welcome from the RIGSS Director, which set a positive tone for the days ahead. The address by the CEP Representative highlighted the programme's broader objectives, helping us gain clarity on the journey to come. A brief session on Bhutanese etiquette was insightful, offering a deeper appreciation of the cultural values and norms. The introductions and sharing of expectations helped forge initial connections among the teams. The welcome dinner provided a relaxing space to engage in meaningful conversations and reflect on the experiences that awaited us. I retired feeling optimistic and well-received.

10th September

Our visit to the Chukha Hydropower Plant was an eye-opener, illuminating Bhutan's commitment to sustainable energy. It was fascinating to learn about the plant's operations and its role in the national economy. The scenic drive to Paro was a peaceful interlude that allowed for reflection on the morning's insights. The evening engagement with Mr. Shri Amitabh Kant was truly inspiring; his thoughts on development and innovation expanded my perspectives. Dinner at Mr. Kapur's home, filled with enriching conversations, made me feel warmly welcomed, leaving me intellectually stimulated and grateful for the interactions.

11th September

Today was extraordinary and emotionally impactful. After a calm breakfast, we visited the National Museum of Bhutan (Ta Dzong), where the breathtaking views and serene landscape left me in awe. It was my first time seeing such a beautiful place, and I found myself completely absorbed by the surrounding beauty.

The atmosphere was lively as we travelled to Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI) in Pangbisa, singing and laughing together. It was heartwarming to witness everyone opening up, forming bonds that made the day even more meaningful. Arriving at DGI was awe-inspiring; I felt a mixture of admiration and longing, wishing I could study in such a beautiful setting. Learning about the Bhutan Baccalaureate School's collaboration with the Royal University of Bhutan was fascinating, and the experience of meeting and engaging with DGI students was thoroughly enjoyable. I ended the day feeling deeply grateful for these experiences, filled with memories I'll cherish.

12th September

Today was a day of profound reflection and growth. After an early breakfast, we set off for Sangchoekhor Monastery, and the hike from Sangchoekhor to Bumdrak was both challenging and rewarding. Seeing some of our Indian friends experiencing hiking for the first time and persevering despite the difficulties was inspiring. Our Bhutanese friends offered support with warmth and generosity, which I found incredibly touching. The serene views along the trail enhanced the appreciation for nature's beauty, and lunch amidst such surroundings felt refreshing.

Upon reaching Bumdrak, we checked into our tents and were welcomed with comforting tea. A deeply thought-provoking session on global issues followed, where we reflected on our roles as global citizens and shared perspectives on challenges like climate change, inequality, and peace. The discussions that evening reminded me of the significant impact small actions can have on shaping the world.

13th September

Today was a day of self-reflection and meaningful connections. We began with a reflective writing exercise, and as I wrote a letter to myself, I felt an emotional surge,

realising how much belief I have in my own potential. I also wrote short messages to friends, promising myself to send them letters in the future. This exercise made my goals feel tangible, transforming dreams into promises.

In the following discussion on India-Bhutan friendship, I reflected on my pride in Bhutan and the areas where I see room for growth. The team-building activity that came next was both challenging and enjoyable. We didn't win, but the experience strengthened our teamwork and communication. As the day closed, I was filled with a sense of optimism and gratitude for the support of the friends around me.

14th September

Today was both memorable and emotional. Rising at 4 AM, we hiked to catch the sunrise, celebrating Sangay's "birthday" in good spirits along the way. Despite the challenging hike, the support from my friends made it a rewarding experience, and the breathtaking sunrise filled me with gratitude for this moment.

As we continued towards Taktshang, the mood was joyous until I slipped and twisted my hand. The care my friends showed at that moment was heartwarming, and although I was in pain, their support made me feel deeply connected to them. Lunch at Taktshang Café was bittersweet due to my toothache, but the presence of my friends made up for it. In the evening, we met with the Indian Ambassador, reflecting on the importance of friendship between our nations. The dinner that followed was a warm gathering, filled with laughter and the deepening of connections.

15th September

The day was filled with excitement and meaningful exchanges. At the Thimphu Tshechu, the vibrant colours and traditional dances captivated us all, deepening my

appreciation for Bhutanese culture. The Buddha Point provided a moment of peace and reflection, a fitting end to a culturally rich day.

In the evening, we took our Indian friends to explore the local handicrafts. Exchanging gifts added a personal touch to our connection, and a dinner they kindly offered was a reminder of the warmth we shared. Returning to the hotel, we practised for tomorrow's cultural performance, enjoying the camaraderie and the shared joy of learning each other's dances.

16th September

Today was filled with poignant moments, marking the culmination of our journey. Our visit to Dochula Pass, with its stunning view and historical significance, made me realise the strength of the bonds we've created. Rehearsing our performance in this sacred space felt symbolic of the unity we'd built.

The Royal Takin Preserve visit reinforced Bhutan's commitment to conservation, and our interaction with Dasho Sonam Kinga was eye-opening. His insights on the complexities of India-Bhutan relations inspired me to consider my responsibilities as a young leader with a broader perspective. The closing ceremony at Terma Lingka celebrated youth empowerment and left me feeling inspired to contribute to positive change.

17th September

The final day was both a proud and bittersweet one. Our group presentation went exceptionally well, and the positive feedback from the mentors filled me with pride. Packing up, I already felt the weight of impending goodbyes. Lunch was a blend of laughter and sadness, as we realised the summit was coming to an end. Saying

goodbye to friends who had become like family was truly heart-wrenching, and as I left, I felt a deep longing to reunite with them someday.

Reflecting on this journey, I am immensely grateful for the friendships and lessons I have gained. The bonds we formed, the laughter we shared, and the insights we exchanged are things I will carry with me always. Although the programme has ended, my journey as a leader and my commitment to our projects has only just begun. Thank you, IBYS, for an unforgettable experience. I leave with cherished memories, a renewed sense of purpose, and the hope that our paths will cross again.



KUENGA NORBU

Royal Thimphu College. Thimphu, Bhutan

It is an immense honour to be a participant of what has been a truly inspiring and enriching Bhutan-India Youth Summit. Over the past 9 days, we have not only exchanged ideas, but we have also shared dreams and aspirations- dreams that reflect the deep bonds of friendship, cooperation, and mutual respect between the two nations.

For every participant, the summit has been more than just a gathering; it has been a platform for learning, a space to reflect on goals, and a reminder of the boundless potential of the youth. The knowledge I have gained, the ideas we have shared, and the friendships we have built will resonate far beyond the summit, shaping the future paths and forging new avenues of collaboration. This summit represents a collaboration between two nations that share a deep bond rooted in trust, mutual respect, and a common vision for a brighter future.

I will present a brief report on the everyday activities during the summit:



09/09/2024: A Warm Welcome and Inspiring Insights

Day 1 of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit began with a journey to Phuentsholing and a warm welcome at RIGSS Coronation Hostel. A meeting with Dasho Chewang Rinzin provided valuable insights into personal development and the summit's goals. Despite the long day, the experience left me feeling inspired and eager to participate.



10/09/2024: A Day of Learning and Connection

Day 2 of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit was a packed day filled with diverse activities. We began the day with an engaging icebreaker activity that helped us remember each other's names. The visit to the Chukha Hydropower Plant was a highlight, providing valuable insights into Bhutan's commitment to clean energy and sustainable development.

In the afternoon, we had the opportunity to interact with Mr. Amitabh Kant, a prominent figure in Indian governance. His insights on India-Bhutan relations,

economic development, and personal growth were invaluable. The day concluded with a dinner at Mr. Arun Kapur's place providing an opportunity for deeper connections among the participants. Mr. Arun Kapoor is a Director of Druk Gyalpo's Institute.

The day was a combination of technical exposure, cultural immersion, and personal interaction, leaving us eager to explore more of Bhutan's rich heritage and engage in meaningful discussions.



11/09/2024: A Deep Dive into Bhutan's Cultural Heritage and Educational Philosophy

Day 3 of the summit provided a deeper dive into Bhutan's cultural heritage and educational philosophy. We began the day with a visit to the National Museum of Bhutan, where we explored its rich history, diverse cultures, and stunning artifacts. The museum's exhibits showcased Bhutan's unique blend of spirituality, art, and nature.

We then visited the Druk Gyalpo's Institute, a renowned educational institution in Bhutan. The campus tour provided valuable insights into the institution's innovative curriculum, which focuses on holistic development and leadership. The Bhutan Baccalaureate, a unique educational program designed to nurture independent learners, was particularly impressive.

The day concluded with a visit to Paro Town, where we explored the local sights and prepared for the upcoming hike to Bumdrak.



12/09/2024: A Summit of Challenges and Connections

Day 4 of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit was a physically demanding yet rewarding day. We embarked on a challenging trek to Bumdrak, where we were greeted by stunning views and a warm welcome. The day also included a meaningful session on global citizenship, which sparked insightful discussions among the participants. We

reflected on the interconnectedness of the world and the challenges we face, sharing our hopes for a more peaceful and inclusive future.

The day concluded with a relaxing dinner and fun-filled games, providing a much-needed break from the day's physical and mental challenges. Overall, Day 4 was a memorable experience that fostered camaraderie, deepened our understanding of global issues, and left us inspired to make a positive impact.



13/09/2024: A Day of Reflection, Collaboration, and Celebration

Day 5 of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit was a day filled with a variety of activities that fostered personal growth, collaboration, and celebration.

The day began with a group exercise and self-reflection activity, followed by discussions about India-Bhutan friendship and our future goals.

In the afternoon, we visited Bumdrak Monastery, a serene and picturesque location, and participated in a team building activity that tested our teamwork and communication skills.

The evening was filled with laughter as we gathered around a bonfire, danced, and sang together. This festive atmosphere helped us unwind and celebrate the day's experiences.

The day was a memorable day that fostered personal growth, strengthened relationships, and set the stage for future collaborations. The activities and discussions allowed us to reflect on our experiences, set goals, and build a strong sense of community among the participants.



14/09/2024: A Day of Cultural Exploration and International Dialogue

Day 6 of the summit was a memorable day filled with cultural exploration and international dialogue. We began the day with an early morning visit to the sky burial

sites, a unique cultural practice in Bhutan. We then embarked on a challenging hike to Taktsang Monastery, a spiritual and cultural landmark.

After the hike, we enjoyed a delicious lunch at Taktsang Café and took in the stunning panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. We then returned to Thimphu and participated in a formal dinner hosted by the Indian Embassy.

The dinner provided a valuable platform for us to present our perspectives on various topics, including mental health awareness, collaboration and innovation, cultural exchange, and strengthening India-Bhutan relations. We also had the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with esteemed guests, including the Indian Ambassador and prominent figures from both countries.

The evening was a memorable occasion that allowed us to delve deeper into Bhutan's cultural heritage, strengthen our understanding of India-Bhutan relations, and network with influential individuals.



15/09/2024: A Day of Cultural Immersion and Celebration

Day 7 of the summit was a memorable day filled with cultural immersion and celebration. We attended the Thimphu Tshechu festival, a vibrant showcase of Bhutanese culture and spirituality. We also visited the iconic Buddha Point and explored the bustling Thimphu city.

In the evening, we participated in a cultural exchange, performing a dance that blended Bhutanese and Indian elements. I was to deliver a speech during the closing dinner organized by the Ministry of Foreign affairs and External Trade, sharing our experiences and insights gained during the summit.

Overall, Day 7 was a day of cultural exploration, celebration, and reflection, providing a fitting conclusion to our journey in Bhutan.



16/09/2024: A Day of Cultural Exploration and International Dialogue

Day 8 of the summit began with a visit to Dochula Pass, offering breathtaking views of the Himalayas. We also explored the Royal Takin Preserve, a unique wildlife sanctuary.

In the afternoon, we worked on our group presentations and interacted with Dasho Sonam Kinga, a distinguished Bhutanese figure. We discussed the intricate relationship between India and Bhutan, emphasizing the importance of shared security concerns.

The summit concluded with a vibrant closing ceremony, featuring speeches from key participants, a cultural performance, and an award ceremony. The event celebrated the achievements of the participants and inspired them to continue their journey as young leaders.



17/09/2024: A Farewell and a New Beginning

Day 9 marked the second last day of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit, leaving behind a tapestry of unforgettable experiences and friendships.

The day began with a final breakfast together, followed by presentations of the group projects. Each group showcased their innovative solutions to address pressing issues in both India and Bhutan.

The day concluded with a final lunch and heartfelt farewells. As the participants parted towards Phuentsholing, a sense of bittersweet nostalgia filled the air. However, the participants carried hope of reuniting in the future and continuing our journey of collaboration and friendship.

The summit was a transformative experience that fostered personal growth, strengthened relationships, and inspired us to make a positive impact. The memories and friendships created during this time will undoubtedly last a lifetime. The last day, which is on 18th was allocated to write reflections, report, and project proposal.



Here are a few key takeaways from the summit:

- **Shared security concerns:** The relationship between Bhutan and India is often described as special, unique, and time-tested, built on a foundation of trust, mutual respect, shared values, and a robust developmental partnership. While these elements are vital, Dasho Sonam Kinga points out notable cultural differences between the two nations. Though Buddhism originated in India, Bhutan received it via Tibet, not directly from India. Geographically, while Bhutan and India are neighbors, their landscapes differ significantly: India lies in the foothills, whereas Bhutan is nestled in the Himalayas. Additionally, the religious makeup of both countries underscores these differences, with over 90% of Indians identifying as Hindus and over 80% of Bhutanese as Buddhists. Despite these distinctions, it is the shared concern of security over China that remains the most critical factor in maintaining the strong relationship between India and Bhutan.
- **Sustainability and Development:** Both nations face the challenge of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. Bhutan's carbon-negative status and India's green energy initiatives are examples of how both countries can lead in sustainable development by sharing innovations in technology, energy, and policy.



- **Focus on Mental Health:** The importance of mental health is emphasized, particularly in the fast-paced, technologically advancing world. Both nations can leverage their rich cultural heritages and modern solutions to address mental well-being.

- Collaborative Potential in Entrepreneurship: The summit identified significant opportunities for collaboration in technology and entrepreneurship, with India's dynamic startup ecosystem offering inspiration for Bhutan. Key sectors include agriculture, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

- Educational Partnership: The educational partnership between India and Bhutan blends the strengths of both countries' approaches. India's education system, known for its competitive rigor and focus on academic excellence, offers opportunities in advanced fields like engineering, medicine, and research. In contrast, Bhutan's education, grounded in the Gross National Happiness philosophy, emphasizes holistic development alongside academics. The Bhutan Baccalaureate system is a prime example, prioritizing individualized learning and community engagement. The Bhutan Baccalaureate is an education system not only for Bhutan but from Bhutan; helping learners actualize their potential to become constructive contributory citizens of a just and harmonious society. This collaboration presents a unique opportunity to create a more balanced, student-centered education system. Joint efforts in teacher training, curriculum development, and exchanges can foster an educational framework that nurtures both intellectual and personal growth, preparing students for the complexities of the modern world.



- Youth-Led Future: The summit showcased the power of youth in driving future collaboration and innovation. The event served as a platform for learning, idea exchange, and fostering relationships that will guide future collaboration

- Technology and Policy Innovation: Both countries have the potential to set global standards by collaborating on innovations in technology, energy, and

policy. Joint efforts in expanding green energy, such as solar and wind, will help achieve economic growth without compromising the environment.

- **Strengthening Bilateral Relations:** The summit underscored the importance of deepening the relationship between India and Bhutan through cooperation across multiple areas, including diplomacy, culture, education, and economic initiatives. The nations' shared values and histories strengthen this bond.

- **"No change is too small, do your bit":** Dasho Chewang Rinzin emphasizes that even the smallest actions can make a difference. Positive change doesn't always require grand gestures; small, consistent efforts can have a lasting impact over time. Whether it's reducing waste, helping someone in need, or supporting a cause, every contribution counts. In a world where global issues can seem overwhelming, this mindset encourages individuals to take responsibility for their actions and understand that collective small changes can lead to significant transformation. Each step, no matter how minor, brings us closer to a better and more sustainable future.

- **The Role of Youth in Diplomacy:** The participants of the summit, representing the youth of both countries, are seen as the driving force behind future diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties. The summit is viewed as just the beginning of a new chapter of collaboration.

- **Lasting Impact of the Summit:** The friendships, ideas, and knowledge shared at the summit will have a long-lasting effect on future collaboration

between India and Bhutan, influencing sectors like entrepreneurship, education, and sustainability.

Thank you





KUENGA WANGMO

Samtse College of Education, Samtse, Bhutan

9th September 2024

If karma exists, then I must have done something wonderful in my life, for I had the incredible opportunity to be part of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2024 at the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) in Phuntsholing. The moment I stepped in, I felt a surge of happiness. Meeting my roommate, who was incredibly easygoing, was such a pleasant start to the summit. As I interacted with participants from the Royal University of Bhutan, my excitement grew, especially as I anticipated meeting the Indian participants later that evening. The highlight was meeting the Director of RIGSS, whose words of advice truly left a lasting impression. Sharing a delicious dinner with everyone, we engaged in lively conversations and bonded over shared experiences. Returning to the RIGSS hostel, I felt the stress from college and academics melt away. If the first day was this amazing, I could only imagine what awaited us.

10th September 2024

The day started with a joyful breakfast with newfound friends. The bus ride to Paro was unforgettable, filled with songs and laughter, creating lasting memories. The visit to Chukha Hydropower Plant was awe-inspiring, and I felt fortunate to learn about its operations and importance in Bhutan's sustainable energy efforts. Finally reaching Paro was like a dream, with its stunning beauty and fresh, invigorating air. Meeting Mrs. Amitabh Kant later that day was another highlight, as her insights into development and innovation enriched my understanding. Dinner was both delicious and nostalgic, bringing back memories of my village in Bumthang. As I settled into Sinchula Resort, I felt relaxed, happy, and grateful to be part of this summit.

11th September 2024

Today, I was thrilled to visit the Paro Museum. The day started with a delicious breakfast at Sinchula Resort, setting a positive tone. On the way, we shared stories of our cultures and academics, making the journey enriching and insightful. We sang Indian and Bhutanese songs on the bus, and my Indian friends patiently shared lyrics, which added another layer of joy. Arriving at the museum, I was captivated by the artefacts, paintings, and exhibits. Seeing portraits of our kings filled me with pride for the Wangchuck dynasty.

Our next stop was Druk Gyalpo's Institute, where we received a warm welcome from teachers and students. The tour of the beautiful campus and engaging conversations with students made me wish I had studied in such an environment. Learning about the Bhutan Baccalaureate and its progressive initiatives inspired me as a future teacher to be the best mentor I could be. The day ended with exploring Paro town with Indian friends and enjoying dinner at Sinchula Resort, leaving me filled with excitement for the upcoming trek.

12th September 2024

The day of the Bumdra trek finally arrived, beginning with a memorable breakfast at Sinchula Guesthouse. After a fun bus ride, we set off on the trek, carrying chocolates and in the best company. Despite being my first trek, I didn't feel tired; instead, I was energised by the laughter, songs, and stunning mountain scenery. Lunch with mountain dumplings was refreshing, and the anticipation of reaching the campsite kept us going. Arriving at Bumdra was a breathtaking experience, with a warm welcome and hot tea that made us feel at home. Dinner was delightful, and a discussion on global issues left me proud of the future leaders around me. The day ended with games and laughter, as we retreated to our camps, feeling fulfilled.

13th September 2024

The morning was beautifully calm, with hot water to freshen up, tea, and a reflective session where we wrote letters to our future selves. This was a deeply emotional exercise that allowed me to connect with my aspirations. A discussion on India-Bhutan friendship followed, broadening my understanding of both nations. We then visited Bumdra Monastery, capturing memories through photos and appreciating the peacefulness of the setting. Later, we played a blindfolded game that taught me the importance of teamwork and communication. The day ended with a campfire, dancing, and laughter, making me wish I could relive these moments.

14th September 2024

Today began with an early morning hike to the top of Bumdra with our Bhutanese friends, where we visited holy sites and felt incredibly blessed. The descent to Taktsang Monastery was easier, and the stunning scenery filled us with joy. Reaching Taktsang was a dream come true, and visiting the monasteries felt deeply meaningful. Lunch at Taktsang Café was a welcome reward after the trek. The evening held another memorable experience—dining with the Indian Ambassador, where we engaged in enriching conversations. Returning to the hotel, I felt overwhelmed with gratitude for the day's experiences.

15th September 2024

Today, we experienced the Thimphu Tshechu, with its vibrant colours and traditional dances, which brought me pride in Bhutan's heritage. Our visit to Buddha Point provided a serene setting for reflection, and our group discussions that afternoon allowed us to brainstorm for our final presentations. We later explored Thimphu, helping our Indian friends shop for Bhutanese crafts, and enjoyed a meal together in

town, deepening our bonds. Preparing a dance performance for the closing ceremony was another fun and meaningful activity, combining Indian and Bhutanese steps in celebration of our friendships.

16th September 2024

Excitement filled the day as we set off for Dochula, a place of immense beauty and spiritual significance. We took photos and recorded a dance video, and the energy was contagious. At the Royal Takin Preserve, we marvelled at the takins and enjoyed childhood nostalgia on the swings. Lunch was followed by an emotional farewell to one of our group members, Passang, and later, an inspiring session with Dasho Sonam Kuenga. That evening, we attended the closing ceremony at Terma Lingka, where certificates were awarded, and we performed our dance. The night ended with music, dancing, and heartfelt conversations, marking the end of a truly unforgettable summit.

17th September 2024

The final day arrived, and with it came a mix of pride and bittersweet emotions. Our group presentations were well-received, and our discussions were enlightening. Saying goodbye was heart-wrenching as we packed our bags and shared final farewells, hugging friends who had become like family. The bus ride back was quiet and reflective, filled with memories of our journey together. We spent the evening in Phuntsholing, singing and dancing one last time, knowing the summit had ended, but the friendships and memories we created would last a lifetime.

Reflecting on these ten days, I feel deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of IBYS 2024. The memories, lessons, and friendships forged have left an indelible mark on my heart. This journey has strengthened my resolve to contribute to a better world and has reminded me that, as young leaders, we have the power to bring about

meaningful change. Though the summit has ended, my commitment to this vision has only just begun. Thank you, IBYS, for the unforgettable experiences and the hope that we will meet again.



MUKTANSH SHAH

Anant National University, Ahmedabad, India

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) was a profound journey of personal growth, learning, and connection, combined with meaningful reflection on global challenges. From the outset, I was filled with excitement and a sense of responsibility. This was not only my first international trip but also a chance to represent my country in a forum for sharing, discussing, and debating ideas and perspectives.

Over the ten days, the summit enriched me with both intellectual and emotional experiences. Meeting participants from diverse backgrounds across India and Bhutan fostered a space for deep, meaningful connections. These bonds weren't only formed during formal discussions or presentations; they also grew through shared moments of joy, challenge, and reflection. Simple interactions, like playing a game of Ludo during the initial journey or discussing cultural beliefs during breaks, allowed us to connect on a human level, naturally breaking the ice.

The visit to Bhutan's Chhukha Hydropower Plant and conversations with engineers there highlighted the vital role this small nation plays in providing power not only for itself but also for parts of India. It was eye-opening to witness Bhutan's reliance on sustainable energy. However, the gender imbalance at the site raised important questions about the inclusion of women in higher education and professional fields—an area that I believe should be addressed to support Bhutan's progress across all sectors.

In Paro, meeting Mr. Amitabh Kant, the architect behind India's "Incredible India" campaign, was a highlight. His perspective on the importance of communication in shaping the future deeply resonated with me, particularly as someone who values simple yet impactful solutions. His insights underscored the power of storytelling and communication in our increasingly interconnected world.

The trek to Bumdrak transcended being merely a physical challenge, becoming a deeply personal experience. During the journey, participants shared their vulnerabilities, hopes, and fears, creating a space for emotional openness. It was here that Bal Bahadur Gaylal introduced the “OLELE” exercise, symbolising the expansion of one’s heart. This exercise became a metaphor for finding strength in difficult moments, and it resonated with me deeply. As we reached the summit, the breathtaking landscape heightened our sense of collective achievement and personal reflection.

During a discussion atop Bumdrak, we reflected on our roles as global citizens and considered how we could contribute to the world. For me, this question resonated with my vision for the future. As an architecture student, I am acutely aware of the impact of my work, not only on the environment but on the world at large. I shared my thoughts on how humanity’s capacity for cooperation is often used to create divisions rather than build bridges. I feel this needs to be addressed by fostering mutual understanding and collaboration across borders, cultures, and societies.

Bhutan’s emphasis on Gross National Happiness (GNH) inspired me to consider what truly matters in life—well-being, sustainability, and social cohesion. As an architect, the concept of GNH challenged me to think about how the built environment can contribute to happiness, sustainability, and societal well-being. Bhutan’s commitment to maintaining a carbon-neutral footprint while preserving its rich cultural heritage strengthened my belief that progress doesn’t have to come at the cost of tradition or the environment. I envision a future where architecture, rooted in sustainability, addresses the immediate needs of communities while fostering a balanced relationship with nature.

Another key moment of the summit was exploring Bhutan’s education system, particularly the Bhutan Baccalaureate learning approach at Druk Gyalpo’s Institute.

This system's focus on individualised learning paths that prioritise personal growth over standardised scores was refreshing. This holistic view of education aligns with my belief in "learning, unlearning, and relearning." However, I did wonder if focusing too narrowly on individual interests might limit students' breadth of experiences. Nonetheless, it inspired me to think about how education systems can be restructured to nurture well-rounded individuals who are not only skilled but also conscious global citizens.

As the summit progressed, discussions expanded to topics such as mental health, sustainability, and the role of AI in education. Mental health, in particular, is close to my heart, especially in developing nations like India and Bhutan, where societal expectations and rapid urbanisation can often cause mental strain. Bhutan's focus on happiness reminded me that mental health should be integral to any national policy aimed at well-being. I hope to collaborate with like-minded individuals in the future to promote this agenda.

Our group's project, focusing on empowering women through community development and safety initiatives, was inspired by situations in both India and Bhutan. We envisioned an organisation that would help women achieve economic independence through handicrafts, textiles, and sustainable business ventures. This idea stemmed from conversations with Bhutanese participants who shared the challenges faced by women in their communities. When we presented our proposal, we received valuable feedback to refine the initiative for greater impact. I am passionate about this cause and committed to seeing it through to fruition.

The summit also encouraged me to consider the future of technology in education, especially the integration of AI. While I recognise AI's potential benefits in supporting learning, I am cautious about its overuse, which could stifle creativity and critical thinking. AI should complement, not replace, the human elements essential to

education. This balance is something I, along with others, will continue to debate and explore in the years to come.

In the end, the India-Bhutan Youth Summit was not just about learning or networking—it was a journey of transformation. I left the summit not only with new knowledge but as a more confident and reflective individual. I feel empowered to take on leadership roles in future projects and carry a renewed sense of responsibility to make positive contributions to the world, particularly in sustainability, women's empowerment, and mental health.

This experience reinforced my belief that small, thoughtful actions can lead to meaningful change. I am eager to apply these lessons as I move forward in my career and life. Ultimately, the summit reminded me that we are all part of something larger than ourselves, and it is our responsibility to shape a world that reflects values of compassion, sustainability, and inclusivity.



PASSANG DORJI

College of Natural Resources, Punakha, Bhutan

9th September 2024

On the evening of the 9th, all Bhutanese participants arrived at the RIGSS hostel, gathering from various colleges across Bhutan, ready to meet our Indian colleagues. The formal proceedings of the summit began at 9:00 PM with a reception at the RIGSS Institute, where we were warmly welcomed by the Director of RIGSS, Dasho Chewang Rinzin. He spoke passionately about the role of each participant in fostering sustainable bilateral relations and cross-cultural understanding. His words underscored the long-standing friendship between India and Bhutan, dating back to 1958, highlighting significant events like the celebration of fifty years of friendship and India's support of Bhutan's Five-Year Plans.

Dasho's reflections on the shared spiritual heritage between our nations, especially the role of Guru Padmasambhava in building bridges, sparked a deep sense of respect within me. The insight reminded me that the bond between our countries is deeply rooted in spirituality, a connection that deserves appreciation and preservation. Reflecting on Dasho's example of the interdependency of Phuentsholing and Jaigaon, I realised how interconnected our lives are, often in ways we take for granted. His words were a call to view the world with open eyes and an observant heart.

10th September 2024

The day began with discussions on three intriguing topics: the rich heritage of Indian music, the enduring relationship between our two nations, and the global currency system. This exchange of ideas opened up fascinating conversations on cultural exchange, economic realities, and the strength of diplomatic ties. India's musical diversity symbolises its vibrant culture, while the longstanding friendship with Bhutan showcases our shared values and commitment to mutual support.

In the afternoon, we visited the Chhukha Hydropower Plant. Standing before this engineering marvel was awe-inspiring—a powerful testament to human ingenuity and Bhutan's dedication to clean energy. It was inspiring to witness the commitment of those who built and maintain this project, serving as an example of Bhutan's forward-thinking vision.

Later that evening, we enjoyed dinner at Mr. Kapoor's home, where I had the privilege of engaging with Mr. Amitabh Kant on education reform in Bhutan. The discussion was insightful, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities within our education system. Listening to his perspective was both humbling and inspiring, sparking in me a desire to contribute positively to Bhutan's educational growth.

11th September 2024

On the third day, we visited the National Museum of Bhutan, followed by the Druk Gyalpo's Institute. Stepping into the museum felt like a journey through time, offering a window into Bhutan's rich history. The collection of ancient tools, vibrant textiles, and religious paintings provided an immersive experience, each exhibiting a reminder of Bhutan's ingenuity and connection to the natural world. The museum's artefacts illustrated the harmony between people and nature, a theme that resonates in Bhutan's ongoing commitment to environmental conservation.

Our visit to the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI) introduced us to an inspiring educational model focused on "becoming a person of substance." Embracing a holistic approach, DGI nurtures students' academic, emotional, and social growth, embodying a balance of tradition and innovation. Through the mentor-mentee system, students receive personalised guidance, allowing them to develop in an environment of support and care. The experience reaffirmed my belief in the

importance of a balanced education system, though I recognise the challenges this approach may face in terms of resources.

12th September 2024

The trek to Bumdra was a journey filled with both physical and reflective experiences. Hiking along the winding trails with the stunning Bhutanese landscape as our backdrop, our conversations turned to the profound bond between India and Bhutan, discussing how global events impact our lives and societies. We also explored the complexities of the world we live in, reflecting on the power imbalances, global inequalities, and the continuous pursuit of peace and women's empowerment.

Reaching Bumdra, we paused to appreciate the tranquillity around us, discussing our individual perspectives as global citizens. The conversations were diverse, touching on topics like interconnected communities and the impact of multinationals on local economies. These reflections deepened my understanding of our shared yet complex world and reminded me of our responsibility to drive positive change. The experience highlighted the necessity of open dialogue in finding common ground and striving towards a just, equitable world.

13th September 2024

The morning started with exercises designed to foster teamwork, followed by a reflective self-letter exercise that encouraged deep introspection and goal-setting for the next six months. The process brought clarity to my aspirations and a sense of commitment to my personal development. Receiving these letters in six months will serve as a powerful reminder of our journey and growth.

Following the self-reflection, we had a thought-provoking discussion on the India-Bhutan relationship. Bhutan's commitment to sustainable practices, rooted in Buddhist values, serves as an inspiration. The integration of Vedic mathematics from India into the Bhutan Baccalaureate exemplifies how education can blend innovation with tradition. We then engaged in a team-building activity that underscored the importance of trust and communication. Being blindfolded and relying on teammates was initially daunting, but as we navigated the course, a deep sense of trust grew among us. The experience was a reminder that effective teamwork relies on clear, supportive communication.

14th September 2024

Our visit to Taktsang Monastery and the subsequent dinner at the Indian Embassy created an emotionally charged day. The breathtaking views from Tiger's Nest filled me with a sense of awe, and experiencing it alongside my Bhutanese friends fostered a profound spiritual connection. The shift to the formal dinner at the Indian Embassy later that evening was equally significant. Presenting my views alongside talented peers and esteemed guests like the Indian Ambassador underscored the importance of our discussions in shaping the future of India-Bhutan relations. The exchange was both humbling and empowering, reaffirming my commitment to furthering the collaborative spirit between our nations.

15th September 2024

Today, we embraced Bhutanese culture through the vibrant Thimphu Tshechu festival, followed by a visit to the Buddha Point. Watching the colourful masks and traditional dances was awe-inspiring, reminding me of Bhutan's rich heritage. Buddha Point offered a peaceful moment to reflect on the journey so far. In the afternoon, we collaborated on our group projects, delving into topics like mental health, education,

and economic start-ups. The collaborative dance rehearsal for the closing ceremony was an enjoyable blend of Bhutanese and Indian elements, symbolising the unity and friendship we had developed. The energy, joy, and cultural exchange made the day truly unforgettable.

16th September 2024

Our day began with a visit to Dochula Pass, where the serene stupas offered a moment of tranquillity and reflection. Practising our dance performance against this beautiful backdrop added depth to our experience, intertwining our cultural exchange with Bhutan's natural beauty. At the Takin Preserve, seeing Bhutan's national animal and blue sheep underscored Bhutan's dedication to wildlife conservation.

The evening's closing ceremony at Terma Lingka was a moving culmination of our time together. Presenting our group projects was a testament to our hard work and dedication. The honourable foreign minister's speech was inspiring, and receiving my certificate filled me with pride. The night ended with a cultural celebration, dancing with our Bhutanese and Indian friends, a heartfelt goodbye that marked the end of a transformative summit.

17th September 2024

The final day of the summit was filled with pride and bittersweet emotions. Our group presentations were a success, with each team showcasing insightful ideas. Saying goodbye was a deeply emotional experience as we shared our final meal, packed our belongings, and parted ways. The journey back was quiet, each of us reflecting on the memories we had made. Later, in Phuentsholing, we enjoyed one last dinner and karaoke session, cherishing the remaining moments together.

Reflecting on the past ten days, I am filled with gratitude for the friendships, insights, and personal growth fostered by the India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2024. The summit has reinforced my commitment to fostering collaboration between our nations, inspiring me to continue my journey as a young leader. I am deeply thankful for this opportunity, knowing that the relationships and experiences from this summit will remain with me always. As I return to my responsibilities, I carry forward the lessons learned and the belief that our actions can indeed shape a brighter, shared future.



RITESH R

National Academy of Event Management & Development, Delhi, India

9 September 2024

My journey from India to Bhutan began today. It was a momentous day for me as it was my first time travelling by plane. Never had I imagined that I would have such an opportunity at such a young age. Upon arriving in Bhutan, I was struck by how familiar everything felt; aside from the traditional Bhutanese attire, I hardly felt like I was in a foreign country. Bhutan exuded warmth and hospitality that made me feel instantly at home, and I found myself quickly connecting with Bhutanese and Indian friends alike.

One of the highlights was seeing Bhutanese architecture, which I'd only ever encountered in films. The beautifully crafted buildings resembled miniature palaces, each with unique designs. Meeting some distinguished people and learning about the origins of the India-Bhutan Youth Summit filled me with anticipation for the days ahead.



10 September 2024

Today, I visited the Chukha Hydro Power Plant with friends. This was a fascinating experience, revealing the complexities of power generation. Observing the massive machinery and learning about the need for specialised ear protection due to the loud

operating sounds gave me new respect for those working in such environments. I had the chance to meet Mr. Arun Kapoor and Mr. Amitabh Kant later in the day. Engaging with such knowledgeable individuals was humbling. Despite their achievements, they spoke to us with warmth and respect, which I found truly inspiring.

11 September 2024

Today's visit to the National Museum of Bhutan offered a deep dive into the country's rich history and heritage. Seeing ancient artefacts, learning about Bhutanese traditions, and discovering how Bhutan has carefully preserved its cultural treasures provided me with an invaluable perspective on Bhutan's journey. Later, at the Druk Gyalpo's Institute, I gained insight into Bhutan's education system, which has retained its cultural roots while evolving over time.



12 September 2024

This was a day of adventure as I embarked on a challenging mountain trek with my friends. Climbing nearly 1,000 metres proved tough, particularly when rain turned the path muddy and slippery. Despite the steep, exhausting journey, we supported one another and eventually reached Bumdrak Mountain. Reaching the summit brought a sense of achievement that words cannot describe.



13 September 2024

Today, we camped on Bumdrak Mountain, and morning and evening meetings focused on strengthening the bond between India and Bhutan. Through discussions, I came to appreciate the significance of our nations' friendship and the reasons it is so important to both countries.

14 September 2024

Our visit to the Indian Embassy in Thimphu allowed me to meet Mr. Sudhakar Dalela, the Indian Ambassador to Bhutan. We engaged in a meaningful discussion on ways to deepen India-Bhutan relations, and I had the honour of

sharing my views on an international platform for the first time. It was a moment of pride and one I will cherish forever.



15 September 2024

Today, I visited the grand Buddha statue in Thimphu with friends, gaining a deeper understanding of Buddhism and its significance in Bhutan. I also explored Thimphu's vibrant market and enjoyed some shopping, making the day both informative and enjoyable.

16 September 2024

Today marked the penultimate day of the Youth Summit, a significant moment not only because of the nearing conclusion but also because I received my certificate from Bhutan's Foreign Minister. This recognition at such a distinguished event felt like the greatest achievement of my life, an experience I will always hold dear.





17 September 2024

Today was filled with mixed emotions as it was the final day of the summit and the last time I would be with the friends I had made here. My time in Bhutan was unforgettable; I made many wonderful friends, especially from Bhutan, and will always cherish the memories we created. Through this summit, I learned that friendships can bridge any differences and bring people from diverse backgrounds together.

Reflecting on a moment of misunderstanding with a friend, I realised the importance of open communication. Misunderstandings can affect even the best friendships, so it's essential to address any concerns directly. With clear communication, any issue can be resolved, and bonds of friendship can be strengthened.

This summit has been an enlightening experience, teaching me lessons in friendship, resilience, and diplomacy that I will carry forward with me.



ROSHNA GURUNG

Jigme Namgyel Engineering College, Samdrup Jongkhar, Bhutan

Day 1: 9th September 2024

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2024 commenced with vibrant energy as participants from India and Bhutan gathered in Phuntsholing, Bhutan. Upon our arrival at the RIGSS (Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies) hostel, the Bhutanese delegates warmly welcomed us, instantly creating a sense of camaraderie. The evening's formal proceedings began at 9:00 PM with a reception at the RIGSS Institute, where the Director of RIGSS, Dasho Chewang Rinzin, delivered an inspiring address that highlighted the historical significance of India-Bhutan relations and underscored the crucial role of youth in nurturing and strengthening these ties. Dasho shared the achievements of the past 50 years of friendship between our nations and spoke of the importance of mutual trust, understanding, and collaboration.

Following his address, Mr. Choki Wangchuk, representing CEP, discussed ongoing collaborative projects between India and Bhutan, showcasing the positive outcomes of these partnerships. We were also introduced to the Pallavan Learning Portal, designed to enhance engagement throughout the summit. The evening concluded with a welcome dinner featuring a delightful blend of Indian and Bhutanese cuisine, providing an informal setting to connect with fellow participants. This enriching start to the summit filled us with excitement and anticipation for the days ahead.

Day 2: 10th September 2024

The second day began with high enthusiasm as we embarked on an exploration of Bhutan's commitment to sustainable energy. Our journey to the Chukha Hydropower Plant, a cornerstone of Bhutan's energy sector, offered us scenic views and a heightened appreciation for Bhutan's natural beauty. Upon arrival, we received a comprehensive tour of the facility, where we learned about the intricacies of hydropower generation and Bhutan's efforts in sustainable energy production. This

visit offered insights into Bhutan's resource management and the economic significance of electricity exports, particularly to India.

After a traditional Bhutanese lunch in Chukha, we journeyed to Paro, where we checked into Sinchula Villa. An engaging discussion with Shri Amitabh Kant, former CEO of NITI Aayog, followed. His insights on sustainable development, education, and economic growth stimulated our thinking on innovation's role in fostering bilateral relations. The day concluded with a dinner hosted by Mr. Arun Kapur, where we enjoyed a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere that encouraged deeper connections. This day underscored the collaborative spirit that defines India-Bhutan relations and fostered friendships within our group.

Day 3: 11th September 2024

Our day commenced with a tour of Ta Dzong and Rinpung Dzong, historical sites that illustrate Bhutan's rich heritage. Sharing this experience with Indian counterparts deepened their understanding of Bhutanese culture. Later, we visited The Royal Academy, where we were immediately captivated by the school's architecture and serene environment. Engaging in an ice-breaking session with the students offered us a window into their innovative teaching methods, particularly the Bhutan Baccalaureate (BB) learning model. This model, which prioritises physical fitness and emotional well-being alongside academic excellence, impressed me deeply.

I found the BB model's focus on a holistic approach to education inspiring and valuable, particularly as I had not prioritised sports in my own schooling. Meeting a young student who was considering forgoing an offer from Stanford University to pursue his business venture made a profound impact on me, highlighting the importance of setting ambitious and personal goals.

Day 4: 12th September 2024

Our trek to Bumdrak tested our physical endurance and resilience as we ascended from Sangchoekhor, encouraged by breathtaking views and a growing sense of camaraderie. Upon reaching Bumdrak, we were greeted by the sight of our tents nestled against the mountains, a testament to our collective determination and teamwork.

That afternoon, we engaged in a meaningful discussion on global issues, where participants shared perspectives on interconnectedness and the role youth can play in addressing pressing challenges. The evening brought us together around a campfire, where we exchanged stories and laughter, deepening the bonds we had been forming. This demanding but rewarding day left me feeling even more connected to our group.

Day 5: 13th September 2024

The day began with a reflective exercise of writing letters to our future selves, prompting personal introspection and goal-setting. This exercise allowed me to crystallise my aspirations and reflect on the person I strive to become. Later, we visited the Bumdrak Monastery, high in the mountains, where the peaceful surroundings connected me to a larger sense of purpose.

The day's discussions focused on the enduring friendship between India and Bhutan, emphasising the role of youth in maintaining these ties. Team-building activities in the afternoon fostered collaboration and understanding. Winning one of the activities, we were rewarded with books by Mr. Kapur, adding an extra sense of accomplishment to our day.

Day 6: 14th September 2024

Our trek to Taktshang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) was both challenging and rewarding, with the steep trail demanding perseverance. Reaching the monastery, perched on a cliffside, brought a deep sense of achievement and calm. Sharing a meal at Taktshang Café allowed us to relax and connect further with the group.

That evening, we met the Indian Ambassador, who shared valuable insights into the long-standing relationship between India and Bhutan. His words reinforced the importance of diplomacy and youth involvement in sustaining these ties. This meaningful day concluded with a sense of fulfilment as we reflected on the journey so far.

Day 7: 15th September 2024

Experiencing the Thimphu Tshechu, one of Bhutan's most vibrant festivals, was a powerful reminder of the value of cultural heritage. The colourful dances and rituals showcased Bhutan's rich traditions, emphasising the importance of preserving cultural identity.

Later, we visited Buddha Point (Kuensel Phodrang), where a massive Buddha statue stands against the stunning Thimphu Valley. The peacefulness of this location allowed me to reflect on my experiences throughout the summit. We also began working on our group presentations, where the bonds we had formed contributed to a productive and collaborative atmosphere. The day ended with a deeper appreciation for Bhutan and its people.

Day 8: 16th September 2024

Our visit to Dochula Pass, with its 108 stupas and scenic mountain views, was a moment of reflection and gratitude. The natural beauty and historical significance of the site emphasised the importance of preserving Bhutan's heritage. At the Royal Takin Preserve, we learned about Bhutan's national animal and the country's commitment to wildlife conservation.

The day's activities culminated in a closing dinner with senior officials, where we reflected on our summit journey and the friendships we had built. A cultural program added to the celebration, blending happiness with nostalgia as the end of the summit drew near.

Day 9: 17th September 2024

Our final day was bittersweet. Our group presentations went smoothly, with each team showcasing the unique perspectives and creativity we had developed throughout the summit. As we packed and prepared for departure, the sadness of parting was palpable. In just a few days, we had formed deep connections, and the thought of saying goodbye was difficult.

Reflecting on the summit, I realised how transformative this experience had been. From the challenging hikes to the insightful discussions, from the shared laughter over meals to the quiet moments of personal reflection, the summit expanded my understanding of the India-Bhutan relationship and fostered significant personal growth. I left with cherished memories, lasting friendships, and invaluable lessons that will guide me in the future.

Conclusion

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit was a deeply enriching experience, providing profound insights into the special relationship between India and Bhutan. Each day offered opportunities for cultural exchange, personal reflection, and collaboration, deepening my appreciation for my country and the bond it shares with Bhutan. This summit not only enhanced my understanding of global issues and leadership but also instilled in me a renewed sense of purpose to serve my country and contribute meaningfully to its future.



SARIKA S

Daulat Ram College , Delhi, India

The 3rd India-Bhutan Youth Summit, held from the 9th to 18th of September 2024, was an enriching and transformative experience for me, both as a student of history and as an individual. Centred on cultural exchange, diplomacy, and sustainable development, the summit brought together youth from both nations, fostering collaboration and understanding. This report outlines my journey, invaluable lessons learned, and an action plan to promote these insights on a broader level.

Arriving in Bhutan, we were filled with excitement and curiosity about what lay ahead. The opening ceremony set the tone for the summit, highlighting the shared historical and cultural ties between India and Bhutan. Key figures spoke on the importance of preserving these connections, especially in the face of modern challenges. I was struck by the deep interweaving of Bhutan's cultural identity and political stance—a theme that resonated throughout the summit.



The journey from Delhi to Bagdogra and then on to Phuentsholing introduced us to Bhutan's mesmerising landscapes, which I had long admired. A traditional dinner at the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) underscored Bhutan's commitment to cultural preservation, exemplified by its Gross National

Happiness (GNH) initiative—a philosophy that prioritises well-being over mere economic progress. This approach to balancing development with cultural identity left a strong impression on me, especially in terms of the enduring diplomatic ties between Bhutan and India, established through collaboration on five-year plans. The GNH approach inspired me to advocate for similar well-being-focused policies in India, especially in the environmental and social realms.

On the second day, 10th September, we visited the Chukha Hydropower Plant—a symbol of the strategic partnership between India and Bhutan. Bhutan's clean energy initiatives, especially its hydropower exports to India, underscored renewable energy's role in bilateral relations. The visit was enlightening, demonstrating Bhutan's success in sustainable energy production and its potential as a model for similar initiatives in India. This experience deepened my commitment to exploring India's potential for renewable energy partnerships with Bhutan and other neighbouring countries.

Interactions with influential figures, including Mr. Amitabh Kant and Mr. Arun Kapur, strengthened my resolve to pursue goals in education and governance. Their



emphasis on the importance of individual growth in driving societal change affirmed my belief that personal development is closely tied to national progress.

Immersive Cultural Experiences

Day three took us to the National Museum in Paro, where we explored Bhutanese history and culture. The

exhibits drew connections between Bhutanese and Indian traditions, particularly through shared spiritual figures, highlighting the rich, intertwined heritage of our nations. A visit to the Druk Gyalpo Institute showcased Bhutan's innovative Bhutan Baccalaureate programme, which nurtures not only academic success but also life skills and ethics. This holistic approach resonated with me, inspiring reflections on how similar educational reforms could benefit India.

The Power of Teamwork

On 12th September, the Bumdrak trek became a profound lesson in unity and collaboration. Our shared journey emphasised the value of teamwork, as we supported one another and worked together to overcome challenges. This experience reminded me of the importance of collaboration, not only on this trek but in life.

Later, I shared my thoughts on the need for global citizenship. In today's interconnected world, we can't afford to see ourselves solely as Indians or Bhutanese; modern challenges like geopolitical tensions, environmental crises, and technological advancements transcend borders. It was encouraging to see others echo these sentiments and share their concerns about AI's impact and mental health issues.



Reflections on India-Bhutan Relations

On 13th September, we awoke to a magical landscape that inspired reflection and reinforced my commitment to nature and global unity. In sessions discussing India-Bhutan friendship and future opportunities, I shared my thoughts on the potential for collaborative efforts to address global challenges, despite our differences. Issues like governance, corruption, and mental health were key discussion points, reinforcing my belief in the power of youth to create systems that prioritise transparency and fairness.





Cultural Immersion and Inspiration

On 14th September, the trek to Taktshang Monastery offered a powerful connection to Bhutan's cultural and spiritual heritage. Although unable to enter due to time constraints, the experience was profound. That evening, I shared my reflections on the significance of cultural collaboration in positioning South Asia as a region celebrated for its heritage. My interactions with distinguished figures, including the Indian Ambassador, strengthened my aspirations for a future in diplomacy.

On 15th September, donning the traditional Kira for the Thimphu Tsechu festival deepened my appreciation for Bhutanese culture. The vibrant mask dances showcased how cultural events serve as bridges between communities, while the handicraft markets in Thimphu underscored Bhutanese artisans' dedication to preserving their heritage. These experiences inspired me to advocate for safeguarding cultural heritage within my own context, especially in an increasingly globalised world.

Reflections on Diplomatic Balance

On 16th September, the visit to Dochula Pass highlighted the historic resistance of India and Bhutan against violent struggles—a powerful reminder of our nations' cooperation. This experience underscored my belief in the potential for ongoing collaboration between India and Bhutan. Later, a conversation with Dasho Sonam Kinga about Bhutan's diplomatic balancing act with India and China provided valuable insights into the importance of strategic equilibrium. These lessons reinforced my understanding of the complexities of international relations.

Summit Closing and Vision for the Future

On 17th September, the final day, I had the opportunity to present our group's project, *Himalayan Harmony*, which focused on India and Bhutan's potential to promote global unity through shared cultural philosophies. I introduced the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* from Indian culture and linked it to Bhutan's *Driglam Namza*. We proposed a multi-phased action plan including youth exchange programs, bilateral conferences on culture and diplomacy, and sustainable tourism policies.

After the presentation, I felt a profound sense of accomplishment, especially upon receiving praise from Chokhi Sir, a figure I admired throughout the summit. His calm and thoughtful presence inspired me over the ten days, and his words of encouragement meant a great deal.

The summit concluded on a nostalgic note as we bid farewell to Bhutan, reflecting on the personal growth I had experienced during this journey. Interactions with Bhutanese officials highlighted the respect and mutual trust shared between our nations.



Key Takeaways from the Summit

Cultural Diplomacy: The summit highlighted cultural heritage as a powerful tool for diplomacy, fostering stronger ties between nations and underscoring the importance of cultural preservation in a globalised world.

Sustainable Development: Bhutan's development model, which balances modernisation with environmental preservation, inspired me to study and promote well-being-centred governance.

Geopolitical Awareness: Bhutan's diplomatic balancing act between two powerful neighbours illustrated the importance of strategic neutrality and awareness of broader geopolitical dynamics.

Youth as Change-Makers: The summit reinforced my belief in the power of youth as active agents of change capable of influencing policies and shaping the future.

Action Plan Moving Forward

1. **University-Level Awareness Campaign:** Organise seminars at Daulat Ram College to share summit insights, especially on cultural diplomacy's role in India-Bhutan relations.
2. **Sustainability Workshops:** Collaborate with NSS to host workshops on Bhutan's GNH model, encouraging students to consider well-being alongside economic measures.
3. **Cultural Exchange Programs:** Propose student-led cultural exchanges between Indian and Bhutanese universities to foster mutual understanding.

4. **Quiz Competitions:** Organise a quiz on India-Bhutan relations through the Quiz Society, increasing awareness of our countries' diplomatic and cultural ties.

Conclusion

The 3rd India-Bhutan Youth Summit was a profound experience that broadened my perspectives personally and academically. Bhutan's approaches to diplomacy, sustainability, and cultural preservation will serve as guiding principles in my future endeavours. By promoting these ideas at my university and beyond, I hope to contribute to fostering stronger India-Bhutan relations and a more sustainable, culturally enriched future for all.



SASWATA KUMAR DASH

Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar, India

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2024, jointly organised by the Centre for Escalation of Peace, Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies, India-Bhutan Foundation, and Pallavan Learning Systems, marked the third chapter of this initiative, held from September 9 to 18, 2024, in Bhutan. Bringing together youth from both countries, the summit aimed to deepen mutual understanding and foster cross-cultural dialogue. Representing India, I felt privileged to participate in this 10-day summit, which provided a unique platform for discussions on various themes, including mental health, digital transformation, cultural diplomacy, education, and entrepreneurship. The summit was not just a platform for dialogue; it was a bridge to understanding Bhutan's rich cultural heritage.



*Participants at the Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies,
Phuentsholing*

The summit's sessions and discussions powerfully illustrated the importance of dialogue and collaboration in shaping the future of our nations. Key themes included global citizenship and the evolving India-Bhutan relationship. We began by reflecting

on the question, “How do I view the world?”—a session that encouraged us to consider our roles in addressing global issues. This led to discussions on global citizenship and what it truly means to be part of an interconnected world, aiming for a world rooted in peace, sustainability, and unity. We also explored our personal aspirations and the changes we want to see in society, recognising the power of the connections we built as potential support systems for our future endeavours.

As a student of education with a deep passion for culture and traditions, I focused on preserving ancient knowledge and cultural values, particularly through education. I believe it is vital for students to stay rooted in their heritage while embracing modern influences. My perspective centres on universal human values—happiness and prosperity are shared desires, yet society often prioritises wealth accumulation over spreading happiness. Inspired by the timeless stories of *Panchatantra*, I advocated for value-based education to nurture a compassionate, thoughtful generation. I envision myself as a global citizen, balancing ancient knowledge with the demands of globalisation and hoping to foster a world that prioritises brotherhood and peace. The Bhutan Baccalaureate offered valuable insights into education, presenting immense potential for India-Bhutan collaboration, particularly in economic partnerships, environmental initiatives, and mutual learning in education.

One of the most enriching aspects of the summit was the informal cultural exchanges outside of formal sessions. We strengthened our bond with Bhutan by sharing music, dancing to both Bhutanese and Indian songs, and experiencing Bhutanese cuisine. Exploring local markets allowed us to immerse ourselves in Bhutanese life, and witnessing the Tsechu festival’s vibrant mask dances left a lasting impression. The festival’s colours and energy deeply resonated with me as someone who cherishes Indian folk and classical dance.



Participants Discussing on Global Issues at Bumdrak

The discussions broadened my awareness of India's role not only within its borders but in the wider region. Bhutan's focus on Gross National Happiness offers a holistic model that values well-being over GDP, a model that India could incorporate into its own developmental strategies. During the summit, I was deeply impressed by the hospitality of the Bhutanese people and the harmonious relationship they maintain with nature, living proudly with a deep sense of national unity.



Participants Experiencing the Tsechu Festival



A majestic View of the Tiger's Nest Monastery, Taktsang

Learning about the Druk Gyalpo's Institute and the Bhutan Baccalaureate inspired me profoundly. The holistic approach at the Royal Academy, which prioritises academic, emotional, and spiritual growth, introduced me to the principles of cross-pollination and contextualisation in education. This experience has expanded my vision of education and reinforced my desire to contribute to a system that nurtures both intellect and character. Inspired by the DGI, our group project aims to create an AI-integrated educational platform that provides personalised learning pathways and curates resources based on each learner's current knowledge and goals.

Additionally, the summit was an opportunity to meet and engage with eminent personalities whose insights on leadership, education, governance, and geopolitical relations deeply influenced me. This experience was memorable, marking my first trip outside India. The three-day trek through Bhutan's stunning landscapes, especially our visit to Bumdrak and the cliffside Taktsang Monastery, was both breathtaking and spiritually profound.

I am sincerely grateful for this experience and would like to thank the India-Bhutan Foundation, Centre for Escalation of Peace, Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies, and Pallavan Learning Systems. I am especially grateful to the mentors and leaders who generously shared their wisdom and inspired me to think critically about the future of India-Bhutan relations.



IBYS 2024 Participants at India House, Thimphu



Participants in front of 108 Stupas at Drochula Pass

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit has significantly shaped my perspective and aspirations. Their respect for nature and focus on Gross National Happiness resonate

deeply with my values, motivating me to advocate for values-based education. The Bhutan Baccalaureate and its progressive approach to education have encouraged me to explore ways to blend cultural heritage with modern educational practices.

Overall, the summit has been life-changing. It allowed me to contribute to meaningful discussions and learn from my peers. I am now inspired to foster collaboration through youth-led initiatives, believing that the future of diplomacy lies in our hands. Together, we can build a bridge between our cultures, share knowledge, and work towards common goals, ensuring the legacy of friendship and partnership between our nations continues for generations to come.



SHACHA WANGMO

Paro College of Education, Paro, Bhutan

Day 1: 9th September 2024

I began my journey to Phuentsholing with a mixture of excitement and nervous anticipation. While I was eager to learn and meet new people, I felt apprehensive about representing my college. It was my first visit to Phuentsholing, and travelling as the only female in a group of men heightened my unease. However, my fellow travellers were respectful and friendly, challenging my assumptions and reminding me not to let fear cloud my judgment.

Upon our arrival at RIGSS, we were introduced to our Indian counterparts, who provided us with unique cultural insight. While we Bhutanese hadn't formally greeted one another after hours together, we warmly welcomed our Indian friends with handshakes and introductions. This moment highlighted how cultural norms, like greetings, shape our interactions and revealed how cultural differences add depth to our connections.

Day 2: 10th September 2024

The next day brought challenges, starting with adjusting to new dishes at breakfast. I quickly realised the importance of embracing unfamiliar experiences, as my reluctance led to discomfort on our long journey. Our visit to the Chhukha Hydropower Plant was something I had eagerly anticipated, having studied hydropower principles extensively. Yet, the reality of being in a loud, confined underground space made me anxious. While safety precautions were in place, I felt overwhelmed and reflected on the daily risks faced by workers in this environment, affirming my choice to pursue a career away from such settings. This experience offered valuable insights into my preferences and underscored the importance of stepping out of my comfort zone.

Day 3: 11th September 2024

Our next stop was the National Museum of Bhutan, followed by Druk Gyalpo's Institute. Although I was familiar with the museum, seeing my friends' enthusiasm rekindled fond memories of my first visit. The highlight, however, was the campus tour at Druk Gyalpo's Institute. Despite our delayed arrival, the hospitality we received was heart-warming. A sudden rainstorm added an unexpected element to the tour, and watching my Indian friends admire the views, even through the rain, reminded me to appreciate Bhutan's natural beauty and not take it for granted.

Day 4: 12th September 2024

Hiking to Bumdrak was both physically demanding and immensely rewarding. The high altitude and steep trails challenged us, but the camaraderie within the group and the breathtaking scenery motivated me to keep going. The tiny flowers scattered across the rugged landscape added a delicate charm, balancing the harshness of the trail. That evening, we gathered for a reflective discussion, exploring profound questions about life and purpose. This discussion helped me recognise how my Buddhist teachings shape my worldview, emphasising compassion, emotional honesty, and kindness.

Day 5: 13th September 2024

The next morning, we engaged in a deeply personal exercise: writing letters to our future selves. This exercise was an emotional experience, reminding me of the importance of self-care and nurturing my well-being. Later, during a session on Indo-Bhutan Friendship, I gained a greater understanding of India's rich culture and history and felt immense pride as my Bhutanese peers shared their love for our

country. This mutual appreciation reinforced a sense of unity, showing how much we all shared despite our diverse backgrounds.

Day 6: 14th September 2024

The descent to Taktsang Monastery brought yet another meaningful experience. Excited to explore the new trail, I realised my own tendency to overlook my values when I plucked flowers along the way. This small act reminded me to appreciate nature without disturbing it. Throughout the hike, the mutual support between Bhutanese and Indian participants, especially when some found the heights challenging, highlighted the strong bonds we had developed and the value of teamwork that transcends cultural boundaries.

Day 7: 15th September 2024

Attending the Thimphu Tshechu festival was a significant moment for me. Although I had lived in Thimphu for five years, this was my first time experiencing the festival. Sharing it with my Indian friends made it all the more special and reminded me of how much I have yet to learn about my own culture. This realisation sparked a desire to explore our traditions more deeply, so I can better preserve and share them. The exchange of small gifts between Bhutanese and Indian participants added a personal and symbolic touch, reflecting the friendships and connections forged during the summit.

Day 8: 16th September 2024

As the summit approached its end, revisiting familiar places felt refreshingly new due to the friendships we had formed. A light-hearted moment occurred as we danced together on a moving bus, reflecting the closeness we had developed over the days.

Bidding farewell to Passang, a close friend who had to leave early, was an emotional experience. The depth of our connections, which bridged cultural divides, underscored the lasting impact of these friendships.

Day 9: 17th September 2024

The final day culminated in the presentation of our group project, "BEYOND." Listening to the other groups' presentations filled me with pride and admiration for the creativity and potential each individual brought to the summit. This moment reaffirmed my belief that we each possess the power to drive meaningful change, and these projects would keep us united even after the summit concluded.

Saying goodbye to my newfound friends was bittersweet. While our time together had ended, the memories, friendships, and shared aspirations will remain with me, ensuring that this experience marks a meaningful and unforgettable chapter in my life.



SONAM WANGMO

College of Language and Culture Studies, Trongsa, Bhutan

Day 1: 9th September 2024

The journey from Thimphu to Phuentsholing marked the beginning of an inspiring experience. Phuentsholing's warmer climate contrasted sharply with the cool, familiar air of Thimphu, but the welcoming environment at the RIGSS Coronation Hostel soon made me feel at ease. The hostel's impressive facilities, including a gym, recreational centres, snooker hall, and canteen, created an energised atmosphere.

Later that evening, we had the privilege of meeting Dasho Chewang Rinzin at the RIGSS headquarters. His words on reading and time management resonated deeply with me, renewing my commitment to these principles. Although the day had been tiring, with the heat and late dinner at 11:00 pm, it left me inspired and eager for the experiences to come.

Day 2: 10th September 2024

The day offered a mix of cultural immersion, technical exploration, and personal interaction. We began with a memorable ice-breaker where participants introduced themselves with adjectives matching their initials, making names easier to remember and fostering a sense of connection. A group photo with Dasho Chewang Rinzin highlighted the warm efforts by the organising team to make the Indian participants feel at home.

Our visit to the Chukha Hydropower Plant was eye-opening. Witnessing the engineering marvel of a clean energy plant was both enlightening and humbling, especially as it aligns with Bhutan's emphasis on sustainable development. Later that evening, we visited the Druk Gyalpo's Institute and had an engaging discussion with Mr. Amitabh Kant, who spoke on optimism, change, technological integration, and communication skills. The day concluded with a memorable bonfire gathering at Mr.

Kapur's residence, where we shared stories and reflections. It was an enriching experience, balancing learning with relationship-building.

Day 3: 11th September 2024

The morning began with a quiet reflection on our experiences so far. Following this, we visited Ta Dzong, the National Museum of Bhutan. The intricate masks and the Artist Collaboration Program left a lasting impression, as did the unique Takin exhibit, which fascinated our Indian friends. The museum, with its layered exhibits of Bhutan's history, religion, and culture, offered a profound insight into Bhutanese heritage.

Later, we arrived at the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI) for lunch with students, a highlight for its glimpse into their disciplined routine, including extempore speeches and prayers before meals. Our tour of the campus, led by Jigme, a bright 7th-grade student, provided a unique perspective on their philosophy of "leadership of self" and the Bhutan Baccalaureate model. I was particularly impressed by the Bhutan Baccalaureate's holistic approach to education and how it has been implemented in 23 schools nationwide. It was a rewarding day of cultural exchange and learning.

Day 4: 12th September 2024

An early start set the stage for our challenging hike to Bumdrak. The steep terrain and high altitude tested our resilience, but the group's encouragement and the awe-inspiring views kept our spirits high. We began with warm-up exercises led by a fellow participant, which invigorated us for the journey ahead. The beauty of the tiny wildflowers along the rugged path was a charming contrast to the demanding trek. That evening, a group discussion on global issues allowed us to explore perspectives on citizenship, environmental responsibility, and mutual cooperation. This physically

demanding yet fulfilling day strengthened our camaraderie and deepened our connections.

Day 5: 13th September 2024

The day began with a "Letter to Self" exercise, prompting introspection and goal-setting. Writing the letter was a surprisingly emotional experience, allowing me to pause and consider my ambitions. A visit to Bumdrak Monastery followed, where the serene environment inspired reflection on Indo-Bhutan friendship and the role youth can play in fostering these ties. In the afternoon, we engaged in team-building exercises, underscoring the importance of collaboration and understanding. These activities were both rewarding and enjoyable, adding a playful dimension to our shared learning experience.

Day 6: 14th September 2024

Our hike to Taktshang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) was both a physical and spiritual journey. Although the path was challenging, reaching the monastery perched on a cliffside was a significant achievement. Along the way, a minor mishap with a group of friends reminded us of life's unpredictability and the importance of caution. Lunch at Taktshang Café allowed for lighter, personal conversations and breathtaking views, deepening our bonds.

In the evening, we had the honour of a formal dinner hosted by the Indian Embassy, where we presented our views on various topics in front of dignitaries, including Ambassador Sudhakar Dalela and Dasho Chewang Rinzin. The experience was memorable and professionally enriching, allowing us to network with influential individuals from both countries and discuss collaborative opportunities.

Day 7: 15th September 2024

Experiencing the vibrant Thimphu Tshechu festival in traditional Bhutanese attire was truly memorable. The festival's colourful dances and intricate costumes offered a glimpse into Bhutan's spiritual heritage. The cultural exchange deepened with conversations about Onam, a harvest festival from Kerala, which highlighted the richness of Indian culture.

Later, we visited Buddha Point, where the towering statue and panoramic view of Thimphu Valley evoked a sense of peace and reflection. An informal interview for a documentary added an unexpected but rewarding dimension to the visit. That evening, after shopping for local souvenirs, we rehearsed a Bhutanese-Indian dance performance to be showcased at the closing dinner. This collaborative dance symbolised the harmonious blend of our cultures and the friendships we had forged.

Day 8: 16th September 2024

Our visit to Dochula Pass, with its 108 chortens commemorating Bhutan's history, was both awe-inspiring and humbling. We learned about the Druk Wangyel Stupas and their significance, while I had the privilege to visit the Druk Wangyel Temple nearby, which is dedicated to Bhutan's monarchs.

The closing day of the summit was marked by final presentations from each group, focusing on diverse topics such as mental health, women's empowerment, cultural diplomacy, and technology in education. The dedication and creativity in each project demonstrated our collective passion for positive change. Saying goodbye to friends was bittersweet, but I left with a sense of pride, gratitude, and hope for future collaborations.

Conclusion

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit was a transformative experience, broadening my understanding of Bhutan's relationship with India and fostering invaluable friendships. Each day brought lessons that have left a lasting impact, shaping my outlook on leadership, cultural exchange, and personal growth. The summit not only deepened my knowledge but also instilled a renewed commitment to serve my country and contribute to meaningful change. The friendships and memories forged during this journey will remain with me, guiding and inspiring me in the years to come.



SONAM YANGCHEN

Sherubtse College, Trashigang, Bhutan

Day 1 (9th September 2024)

The journey towards the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) began with a small detour, as I mistakenly arrived at the RIGSS office instead of the Coronation Hostel, reminding me of the importance of confirming locations ahead of time. Later that evening, all the Bhutanese participants gathered at the RIGSS office, where we were introduced to Dasho Chewang Rinzin, who shared his inspiring personal journey. Dasho spoke about his school days, the opportunities he seized, and the key experiences that ultimately led him to become Director of RIGSS. His insights on the Indo-Bhutan friendship highlighted its significance and the need to strengthen these ties moving forward. This set a positive, reflective tone for the summit.

Day 2 (10th September 2024)

The day began with a hearty breakfast at RIGSS, followed by a lively introduction activity where we each described ourselves using an adjective. I chose “Sunshine Sonam Yangchen,” which was a fun way to help remember each other’s names. We then made our way to the Chukha Hydropower Station, Bhutan’s first hydropower plant, a joint effort with India. The chief engineer gave a brief overview of the facility and advised us on safety measures during the tour. Experiencing the powerful sounds of the rushing river and dam engines inside the plant was both fascinating and overwhelming, reminding me of the immense scale of this technology.

After lunch, we travelled to Paro and checked into Sinchula Villa. Later, we visited Druk Gyalpo’s Institute (DGI) for dinner, where we met prominent figures, including Mr. Arun Kapoor, the Director of DGI, who provided extensive insights into the Bhutan Baccalaureate education system. We were encouraged to ask questions, and the discussion offered us a meaningful understanding of DGI’s unique approach. After a memorable evening, we returned to the villa, eager for the days ahead.

Day 3 (11th September 2024)

Our day began with a visit to Ta Dzong, Bhutan's National Museum, which houses numerous antique objects, masks, and contemporary paintings of spiritual figures. The authenticity of these relics was awe-inspiring, and I could only imagine the wonder our Indian friends must have felt seeing Bhutanese culture up close. We then visited the Royal Academy, where we interacted with students and were introduced to the Bhutan Baccalaureate education system, which focuses on five key areas: cerebral, physical, emotional, spiritual, and social. The system's holistic approach was impressive, and I began to understand why Royal Academy students are so well-rounded and insightful.

During the tour, I met Karma, a student who shared her initial struggles with homesickness and how the Academy's daily spiritual reflections helped her adjust. She encouraged us to adopt similar practices to help manage emotions. The Academy's "Road Map" approach, which encourages students to identify their weaknesses and monitor their progress, resonated with me as a valuable tool for personal development. After our tour, we explored Paro Town, assisting our Indian friends with souvenir shopping, which added to the camaraderie of the day.

Day 4 (12th September 2024)

The fourth day began with a group briefing and breakfast. We were advised to record our thoughts in our diaries and given some hiking tips before boarding the bus to Sangachhoekhaor. Upon arrival, we participated in a warm-up led by Bal Bahadur Gyalal from GCBS, who introduced us to a motivational activity to "increase our heart size" and prepare ourselves for the trek ahead.

Our trekking group included Bal from Gedu College, Roshna from JNEC, myself from Sherubtse, and two Indian friends, Sarita and Kumar. The uphill journey became enjoyable as we sang, danced, and shared college stories, turning the challenging trek into a memorable experience. A delicious lunch halfway through the hike made the journey even more enjoyable. Despite initial struggles, everyone, including my friend Jesna, persevered and reached the base camp with a sense of pride.

After some refreshments, we engaged in a deep discussion about global issues, including mental health, education, artificial intelligence, and poverty. Dasho Chewang concluded the session with insightful advice, urging us to focus on our own paths rather than comparing ourselves with others, using golf as an analogy. This was followed by light-hearted games, bringing the day to a satisfying close.

Day 5 (13th September 2024)

The morning started with an energising aerobic dance led by Miss Sigay Dem. We then completed a reflective exercise, writing a letter to our future selves to be received in six months. This allowed me to set clear intentions and reflect on my current achievements and aspirations for the future, reminding me of the importance of keeping track of my thoughts and goals.

After breakfast, we had a thought-provoking discussion on India-Bhutan friendship, exploring our respective countries' knowledge, opportunities, and challenges in strengthening this relationship. Later, we visited the Bumdra Monastery for a group photo, taking in the serene surroundings. We then participated in a team-building activity, "The Blindfold Game," which required us to rely on teammates' verbal instructions to navigate obstacles. This exercise highlighted the importance of communication and teamwork, echoing the challenges we face in the real world.

In the day's final session, we discussed our future aspirations and goals, from careers in gender equality and environmental conservation to writing and politics. We explored the value of mentorship and networking, which left me feeling motivated and supported by my peers. Dividing ourselves into groups focused on development, mental health, education, startups, and technology, we ended the day with a bonfire, singing and dancing together—a perfect conclusion to a rewarding day.

Day 6 (14th September 2024)

An early 4:30 am start led us to watch the sunrise. Though the climb was challenging, my friends' encouragement kept me going. While the morning was cloudy, we were able to enjoy stunning views and visited the sky burial sites, where we took a moment for meditation and gratitude. After breakfast, we began our descent to Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest). On the way, I spoke with one of the coordinators, Acho Shedra, who shared his inspiring journey to RIGSS and motivated me to work hard towards my own goals.

Some friends briefly got lost along the way, but the camaraderie and stories that followed made it a memorable part of the experience. We managed a quick lunch before heading back to Thimphu for a meeting at the Indian Embassy. Despite the day's intensity, we finished with an enriching discussion and dinner, leaving me inspired by the insights shared.

Day 7 (15th September 2024)

The seventh day took us to Tashi Choxang for the Tshechu festival, marking my first visit to Thimphu's celebrated festival. Watching the sacred mask dances and visiting Buddha Point for a blessing from Khandro Dorji Phagmo was an unforgettable experience. After a group discussion on mental health, we explored Thimphu city,

introducing our Indian friends to authentic Bhutanese cuisine. The day ended with a joyful bus ride filled with singing as we returned to the hotel.

Day 8 (16th September 2024)

The final day began with a mixture of sadness and reflection. We presented our group projects, including our work on mental health, while other groups covered topics like development, technology, startups, and education. After packing our belongings, we shared our final goodbyes with a mussa activity led by Bal, who departed for college shortly after.

The journey back to Phuntsholing included a heartfelt dinner, karaoke, and dancing, bringing our adventure to a poignant close. Returning to the hostel marked the end of an unforgettable experience, one filled with lessons, friendships, and memories that I will cherish.



SUKHETH KALLUPALLI

Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India

Although every single day of the summit was memorable, I would like to focus on two very important days - September 10 and September 11.

10th September 2024

Today was a day filled with travel, but in a country as beautiful as Bhutan, there's no better way to spend time than by journeying through its breathtaking landscapes. We departed from Phuentsholing for the Chukha Hydropower Plant, a significant landmark showcasing Bhutan's dedication to clean energy and a strong partnership with India. Unfortunately, I missed much of the plant tour and presentation due to an interview for campus placements, so I stayed back at the plant's office while my friends from India and Bhutan had an in-person tour.

The drive to Paro afterwards offered equally stunning views, and though I tried to capture the landscapes on my camera, I couldn't quite do them justice. On arriving in Paro, I had my first glimpse of a Bhutanese city beyond Phuentsholing, which, given its border location, felt distinctly different in pace and atmosphere. Paro, nestled within Bhutan's borders, gave me a sense of the country's unique urban lifestyle—a peaceful yet bustling town where daily life moves at a gentler pace than a typical Indian city.

Once we checked into Sinchula Villa, we quickly freshened up and headed to Mr. Kapur's residence for an evening of engaging conversations around a bonfire. The warmth of the fire amidst the chilly mountain air felt perfect, especially as I love bonfires in the mountains. I had the privilege of discussing online education and its impact on soft skill development with Mr. Amitabh Kant, who shared valuable insights. The conversation was thought-provoking and gave me a fresh perspective on the impact of digital learning.

Mr. Kapur's guidance on career choices in the climate sector was particularly insightful. As someone interested in climate initiatives, I was considering entering the startup space down the line. Mr. Kapur, however, advised me to delve into the climate sector first, offering ideas and perspectives I had not yet considered. I also had a memorable conversation with Pranav Sharma on theoretical astrophysics and the role of policy in supporting scientific research.

Returning to Sinchula Villa that night, I felt fulfilled and excited for the days to come.

11th September 2024

Today offered a profound blend of cultural immersion and academic insight, with experiences that deepened my appreciation for Bhutan's rich heritage and progressive educational approaches.

Bhutan National Museum

Our visit to the Bhutan National Museum was enlightening. The exhibits on Bhutanese mythology and art were particularly captivating, revealing parallels with Indian mythology that sparked intriguing conversations with my Bhutanese friends. These exchanges helped us understand each other's cultures on a more personal level. The museum's artefacts, representing Bhutan's political and religious history, offered a tangible connection to the country's heritage, underscoring the power of cultural preservation in bridging nations.

The Royal Academy at the Druk Gyalpo's Institute

The highlight of the day was our visit to the Royal Academy. The warm welcome from the young students set a friendly tone, and lunch with them provided a window into

their daily lives. My conversations with the students revealed their aspirations, interests, and perspectives, painting a picture of Bhutanese youth that was both inspiring and humbling.

Meeting Mr. Vivek, a computer science teacher from Nainital, was a pleasant surprise. His presence underscored the collaborative ties in education between India and Bhutan, reminding me of the shared goals that unite our nations.

Campus Tour

The campus tour, led by a student guide, was awe-inspiring. The Royal Academy's facilities seamlessly blend traditional Bhutanese architecture with modern educational spaces. The modern library, in particular, stood out to me with its extensive collection. As an engineering student, I found the fablab (tinkering lab) fascinating; it reminded me of similar labs at IIT Madras, highlighting the universal appeal of innovation and hands-on learning.

Bhutan Baccalaureate: A Holistic Educational Approach

The presentation on the Bhutan Baccalaureate education system was both eye-opening and refreshing. Unlike the standardized testing models common worldwide, Bhutan's approach emphasizes holistic, hands-on learning that fosters both academic knowledge and personal development. This forward-thinking model encourages students to engage in critical thinking, emotional resilience, and practical skills—a progressive approach that could be beneficial to education systems everywhere.

Reflecting on today's experiences, I'm struck by the warmth of the Bhutanese people and the eagerness of Bhutanese youth to learn about other cultures while sharing their own. The connections formed today have not only strengthened my understanding of

Bhutanese culture but also left me hopeful for future collaborations between India and Bhutan. As I retire for the night, I feel immensely grateful for these experiences and excited to see where the rest of the summit will lead.



TASHI WANGYEL

Gyalpozhing College of Information Technology, Thimphu, Bhutan

Participation in the India-Bhutan Youth Summit has been a transformative journey, fostering mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and enduring relationships. This summit provided an invaluable platform for the youth of India and Bhutan to engage in constructive dialogues, not only exploring the current dynamics of bilateral ties but also envisioning their role in shaping future cooperation and diplomacy. Through this experience, I gained profound intellectual insights, developed emotional resilience, and cultivated a renewed respect for both my own culture and that of India.

From the start, the summit aimed to connect students from diverse backgrounds across both countries. For me, a Bhutanese student, meeting peers from different educational institutions within Bhutan was a source of inspiration, as was interacting with Indian delegates. Although our backgrounds varied, we connected on shared values and a collective goal: to contribute constructively to the progress of our respective countries.

The discussions throughout the summit traversed a wide array of topics, ranging from traditions and social values to our aspirations for the future. These dialogues were both eye-opening and enriching, revealing both differences and profound similarities in our histories, struggles, and dreams. The summit created a unique forum for friendship, collaboration, and deeper understanding, enabling us to bond over shared ideas and respect for each other's perspectives.

One of the summit's most valuable experiences was learning about the historical and contemporary relationship between India and Bhutan. India-Bhutan relations are often lauded as a model of international friendship rooted in mutual respect, cooperation, and shared goals. Understanding this enduring bond helped me appreciate the critical role we, as youth, have in upholding and strengthening this heritage. Leaders and experts at the summit emphasised the importance of passing this legacy forward and the responsibilities we share in shaping future collaborations.

Throughout the summit, interactive sessions delved into how this relationship was established, how it has been nurtured, and how it continues to evolve to address modern challenges and opportunities. Economic and social collaborations, particularly in areas like hydropower, education, and cultural exchange, were discussed extensively. Our visit to the Chhukha Hydropower Plant, for instance, was a remarkable learning experience. The plant not only symbolised energy cooperation but also highlighted Bhutan's hydropower sector as a cornerstone of the India-Bhutan relationship and a powerful agent of economic sustenance.

One of the most enriching aspects of the summit was sharing and celebrating Bhutanese culture with our Indian counterparts. Through visits to landmarks, we had opportunities to showcase Bhutan's heritage while learning about Indian culture in return. Visiting the National Museum of Bhutan, where we could introduce the Indian delegates to Bhutan's rich history, was especially rewarding. Explaining Bhutan's traditions deepened my connection to my own culture, as I saw it afresh through the curiosity and appreciation of our Indian friends.

The cultural exchange was a two-way experience, as our Indian counterparts shared their own traditions and perspectives. We quickly realised that, despite our differences, our cultures intersected at various points—be it through religion, shared values, or our common aspirations for a better future. This mutual respect reinforced the unity that the summit sought to build, fostering a genuine appreciation for the distinct yet interconnected identities we hold.

In addition to cultural exchange, the summit provided an intellectually stimulating environment that prompted reflection on education, leadership, and societal roles. Thought leaders present at the summit emphasised the need for innovation in education, spurring conversations about how systems can evolve to meet the needs of future generations. Mr. Amitabh Kant, for instance, highlighted the opportunities and

challenges facing education in both countries, emphasising the necessity of continuous reform for adaptive, forward-looking societies.

A visit to The Royal Academy introduced me to the Bhutan Baccalaureate, a curriculum that embraces a holistic approach to education by addressing emotional, spiritual, social, and intellectual development. Experiencing this novel educational model firsthand opened my eyes to how reform in education can blend cultural values with skills suited for the modern world. Reflective exercises, like writing a letter to our future selves, encouraged self-awareness and goal-setting, offering valuable moments to pause and contemplate our individual journeys and future contributions.

Leadership and teamwork emerged as central themes throughout the summit, woven into the very fabric of our activities, from hiking to group presentations. These tasks underscored the importance of collaboration, effective communication, and resilience. The challenging hike to Bumdrak, for example, tested our physical and mental endurance but highlighted the power of teamwork and mutual encouragement. The experience taught me that true leadership often involves collaboration, perseverance, and the support of those around us.

Sessions with mentors such as Dasho Chewang Rinzin further emphasised that leadership is not about individual achievements but about fostering a sense of shared responsibility and teamwork. These lessons of leadership, collaboration, and empathy will remain invaluable, particularly in contexts involving cross-cultural cooperation and international relations.

Our connection to nature, a significant part of Bhutanese culture, was equally prominent throughout the summit. The physical challenges of outdoor activities provided ample opportunity for reflection on our personal and collective relationship with the environment. Visiting sacred sites like Bumdrak Lhakhang and Taktsang

encouraged us to reconnect with Bhutan's spiritual heritage and reflect on our responsibility towards environmental conservation. The emphasis on sustainability and respect for nature echoed through each activity, reminding us that cultural preservation and environmental stewardship are interdependent goals.

The friendships and connections forged during the summit were undoubtedly among the most rewarding aspects of this journey. Beyond formal sessions, informal gatherings around bonfires, shared meals, and local excursions allowed us to form lasting bonds. These moments of laughter, shared experiences, and cultural exchanges created friendships that will endure long after the summit, offering a lasting foundation for collaboration and mutual respect.

In sum, the India-Bhutan Youth Summit has left an indelible mark, enhancing my understanding of the historical and cultural ties between our nations while fostering personal growth. This experience has broadened my perspective on international diplomacy, education, and environmental stewardship, instilling in me a commitment to contributing positively to my community and country. I leave the summit with a renewed sense of purpose, ready to apply the lessons I've learned towards building a future that honours and strengthens the relationship between India and Bhutan, with the hope of making meaningful contributions to our shared world.



TSERING JIGMATH

Elizer Joldan Memorial College, Leh, India

India and Bhutan have enjoyed a longstanding relationship rooted in cultural, political, and economic exchange, with ties strengthened through centuries of religious, diplomatic, and developmental cooperation. As two countries that share a long, peaceful border, India and Bhutan have cultivated a mutually beneficial partnership that remains a model of collaboration and trust. The India-Bhutan Youth Summit is an initiative to extend this enduring connection to the next generation, ensuring the legacy of mutual support and friendship continues well into the future.

In 2024, Bhutan had the honour of hosting the summit, giving participants from both nations the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in each other's cultures. This year's summit, held from 8th to 17th September, brought together twenty-two participants—eleven each from India and Bhutan—who connected deeply through shared experiences, meaningful discussions, and a journey that fostered not only knowledge but also lasting friendships.

For me, attending the summit was both a privilege and a deeply enriching experience. Before this journey, my familiarity with Bhutan was limited to the geographical sketches I had made in school or the occasional mention of Bhutan in our studies of neighbouring countries. I grew up with a Thangka, a traditional Buddhist painting, hanging in our home—a relic from my father's visit to Bhutan decades ago. Yet, it was only during the summit that I truly understood the depth of Bhutanese culture and traditions, appreciating them in a way I could not have anticipated.

Day 1: September 8-9 – A Warm Welcome and Insights from Bhutanese Leadership

My journey to the summit began on 8th September from Leh, Ladakh, and continued the next day as I travelled from Delhi to Bagdogra. At Bagdogra airport, I was warmly welcomed by representatives from the Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) and the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP), setting the tone for an

unforgettable experience. From Bagdogra, we embarked on a four-hour drive to Phuntsholing, Bhutan, where I was introduced to the Bhutanese participants. The evening culminated in an enlightening session led by Dasho Chewang Rinzin from 9 pm to 10:45 pm. Dasho shared insights about the Indo-Bhutan relationship and its importance to the region. His perspective was both inspiring and motivating, leaving us all eager to delve further into the topics to come. Following a hearty dinner, we retired to comfortable accommodations at the RIGSS Hostel.

Day 2: September 10 – Exploring Bhutan's Natural and Educational Treasures

Our second day began with a spirited introductory session, which included fun games that helped break the ice and foster camaraderie among participants. We had a memorable photo session with Dasho Chewang Rinzin before heading to the Chukha Hydropower Plant, Bhutan's first hydropower project developed in collaboration with India. Here, we gained a first-hand understanding of the critical role hydropower plays in Bhutan's economy, not only as a source of sustainable energy but also as an important element in India-Bhutan relations. Although I missed part of the tour due to a scheduled campus interview, the insight I gained about this monumental project left a lasting impression.

From Chukha, we continued our journey to Paro, passing through scenic landscapes that seemed almost magical, capturing the natural beauty that makes Bhutan truly unique. Paro's atmosphere felt refreshingly different from bustling Phuntsholing, and it was my first real glimpse of urban life in Bhutan. After checking into Sinchula Villa, we were invited to the home of Mr. Arun Kapoor, where we engaged in enlightening discussions with Mr. Amitabh Kant, a renowned figure in Indian governance and policy. His views on optimism, change, technology integration, and communication resonated deeply, encouraging me to reflect on my own aspirations. The day

concluded with dinner and fireside conversations, allowing us to bond further in a relaxed yet thought-provoking environment.

Day 3: September 11 – Immersion in Bhutanese History and Education

On the third day, we had breakfast at 8 am, followed by a quiet hour for reflection and journaling about our experiences so far. By 10:45 am, we visited the Bhutan National Museum (Ta Dzong) in Paro, where we explored two main structures housing a wide array of artefacts. We saw intricate fir masks, rare animals, ancient tools, thankas, and traditional royal attire that together painted a vivid picture of Bhutanese history and culture. The artefacts and stories behind them highlighted Bhutan's unique heritage, and sharing these insights with my Indian friends deepened our mutual appreciation for the country's past and present.

The next stop was Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), where we joined the students for lunch and took part in a pre-meal prayer ceremony that reminded me of similar customs back home in Ladakh. Tenzing, a student at DGI, led us on an insightful tour of the campus, explaining the Bhutan Baccalaureate system. This progressive education model, which encourages holistic growth, made a strong impression on me. The day ended with tea and a walk around Paro Market, where I soaked in the sights of Bhutan's bustling town life and enjoyed the rare experience of Bhutanese rain—a refreshing contrast to Ladakh's occasional showers.

Day 4: September 12 – Trekking to Bumdrak and the Beauty of Bhutan's Landscape

Our fourth day began bright and early as we embarked on a trek to Bumdrak, starting from the historic Sangyaschoskor Monastery. The journey was challenging yet exhilarating, with Bhutan's unspoiled landscapes offering breathtaking views at every turn. Along the way, I was struck by the importance of environmental responsibility,

as I noticed litter along the path. I urged my fellow participants to adopt environmentally conscious practices, hoping to preserve Bhutan's pristine beauty.

By 4:30 pm, we reached Bumdrak, where we were welcomed with steaming tea, coffee, and delicious dumplings. Later, Dasho Chewang Rinzin led a session on Global Citizenship, emphasising individual contributions to society. This inspiring session reinforced my sense of responsibility towards not only my country but also the world at large.

Day 5: September 13 – Reflection, Teamwork, and Building Bonds

The fifth day began with an energising warm-up session led by Ma'am Sigay Dem. We then engaged in a self-reflection exercise, writing letters to our future selves—a deeply introspective activity that prompted me to evaluate my personal goals, values, and aspirations. After breakfast, we gathered for a heartfelt discussion about our countries, sharing thoughts on diverse topics like marriage customs, education systems, and social values.

Later, we visited the serene Bumdrak Monastery and took part in a blindfolded team-building game that reinforced the importance of trust and collaboration. Group discussions followed, focusing on five major themes: Education, Startups, Mental Health, Development, and Diplomacy & Politics. These groups provided a platform for intellectual exchange and the potential for future collaborations.

The evening concluded with a bonfire, where we bonded over stories, songs, and laughter—a joyful end to an enriching day.

Day 6: September 14 – A Pilgrimage to Taktsang Monastery

Our sixth day took us to the iconic Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest), perched high on a cliff, offering both spiritual and scenic beauty. The hike tested our endurance, but reaching Taktsang was deeply rewarding. I had the privilege of observing and understanding the Monastery's spiritual significance, and we enjoyed a well-deserved lunch at a nearby café. We also made sure to collect any litter along the path, demonstrating our commitment to environmental preservation.

Returning to Thimphu, we checked into Hotel Lhudrong and prepared for a formal dinner hosted by the Indian Embassy, where we met with distinguished personalities, including Ambassador Mr. Sudhakar Dalela, RIGSS Director Dasho Chewang Rinzin, and Mr. Arun Kapoor. This evening was a rare opportunity for meaningful dialogue, enabling us to explore avenues for further cooperation between our nations.

Day 7: September 15 – Thimphu Tshechu Festival and Cultural Exchange

The seventh day allowed us to witness Bhutan's famous Tsechu mask festival, similar in some respects to celebrations in Ladakh. Dressed in my traditional Goncha, I immersed myself in the festival, captivated by the vibrant masks and rhythmic music. We then visited the awe-inspiring Buddha Point, where I conducted an interview for a documentary.

Following a delightful lunch, we engaged in group discussions on mental health awareness, women's empowerment, education reforms, and cultural diplomacy. In the evening, we explored Thimphu's bustling market, savouring Bhutanese cuisine and enjoying the festival atmosphere. The day concluded with a dance performance blending Bhutanese and Indian cultural elements, symbolising the fusion of our two nations.

Day 8: September 16 – Reflecting on Bhutan’s Peaceful Landscape

The eighth day saw us visiting Dochula Pass, a picturesque mountain pass with 108 chortens that commemorate Bhutan’s victory in the 2003 mission. The serene beauty of Dochula provided a moment for quiet reflection on Bhutan’s cultural heritage and history. After a visit to the Royal Takin Preserve, we said farewell to our friend Passang over lunch at the Takin Zoo.

Later, an interactive session with Dasho Sonam Kinga expanded our understanding of Bhutan’s contemporary issues and aspirations. The evening concluded with a vibrant closing ceremony and a cultural program, including the traditional Tashi Labay dance, marking the end of the IBYS with gratitude and joy.

Day 9: September 17 – Farewell and Final Reflections

Our last day began with a group presentation session where we shared insights on key topics, including mental health, education, technology, and social development. Each group presented well-thought-out proposals, reflecting the collective ideas we had developed throughout the summit.

As we enjoyed our final lunch together, there was a shared sense of nostalgia. The bonds we formed over these ten days felt almost like family, and the realisation that we were parting was bittersweet. After a brief stop at Phuntsholing Market and a farewell dinner with karaoke, we finally bid each other goodbye.

Final Reflections

Looking back on the India-Bhutan Youth Summit, I am immensely grateful for the learning, connections, and personal growth I experienced. This summit deepened my appreciation for Bhutan's rich culture and the enduring bond between our countries. I am thankful to CEP, RIGSS, IBF, and PLS for making this possible, as well as to the dedicated organisers—Choki, Sigay, Choden, Shedra, and Thupten—who worked tirelessly to create an impactful experience. Lastly, I am grateful to my fellow participants, whose support, friendship, and shared values made this journey truly unforgettable.



YASHIKA YADAV

Chandigarh University, Mohali, India

As I stood amidst the vibrant colours of the Thimphu festival, donning a *kira* for the first time, I felt the weight of something far greater than a youth summit. This was a journey that would redefine my understanding of leadership, collaboration, and mental health.

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit (IBYS) 2024—an initiative designed to strengthen the enduring ties between India and Bhutan—was an experience that transcended mere dialogue between neighbouring nations. For me, it became a profound journey of discovery, encompassing both culture and self-reflection. Throughout the summit, I had the privilege of representing my country, engaging in meaningful conversations about leadership, global citizenship, and the power of collaboration. From the vibrant energy of cultural exchanges to deep discussions on pressing global issues, every moment felt like a step towards a shared future.

My aim in attending was straightforward: to grow as a leader, broaden my understanding of international relations, and contribute to the strong bond between India and Bhutan while advocating for mental health. What I gained, however, was far more profound. Surrounded by inspiring Indian and Bhutanese participants, I forged deep friendships and learned about the rich cultures and traditions that unite us. The summit was not just a platform for dialogue; it was a space in which I evolved as a leader and changemaker.

One of the most adventurous—and terrifying—moments came during a trek through Bhutan's stunning landscape. As we navigated the lush trails, I suddenly realised that we had lost sight of the group. Panic set in as I found myself surrounded by towering trees and unfamiliar paths, the beauty of the surroundings overshadowed by fear. For what felt like an eternity, three of us wandered, calling out for our companions. Just when I began to feel truly lost, I saw them—Pasang and Sir. Their relief mirrored my

own, and as we regrouped, I felt a profound gratitude for Pasang, for Sir, and for the safety of connection.

In hindsight, that experience was not just about being lost; it taught me resilience and the importance of community. In those moments of uncertainty, I learned the value of connection and support—principles that resonate deeply with my advocacy for mental health. What had felt like the scariest moment of my life has now transformed into a cherished memory, reminding me of the strength we find in each other during challenging times.

The summit's itinerary struck a balance between intellectual discussions, physical challenges, and cultural immersion. A particular highlight was our visit to The Royal Academy, where I was introduced to the Bhutan Baccalaureate. This unique educational framework, focused on holistic development and personalised learning, left a lasting impact on me. The Academy's vision to cultivate not only academic but also moral, emotional, and physical well-being reinforced my belief that education systems can play a pivotal role in shaping resilient, emotionally healthy individuals. The session titled "How I See the World, Myself, My Country, and Bhutan" was especially enlightening. Each participant shared personal journeys, perspectives on global issues, and visions for their countries. I reflected on the rich cultural heritage of India and Bhutan and on how both nations navigate modern challenges while honouring their traditions. This session provided invaluable insights into how Bhutanese youth perceive their roles in the world, underscoring our collective responsibility in addressing opportunities and threats within a rapidly changing global landscape.

We engaged in meaningful discussions about opportunities and challenges facing India and Bhutan, particularly around environmental sustainability, youth employment, and mental health—issues critical to both nations. These sessions

encouraged us to think about the future, not just locally but as global citizens. This broader perspective inspired me to further develop BhIMHA, envisioning it as a platform for cross-border collaboration in mental health advocacy.

Cultural exchange was a significant part of the summit, allowing me to immerse myself in Bhutanese traditions. Wearing the *kira* at the Thimphu festival, witnessing vibrant celebrations, and exploring local markets deepened my appreciation for Bhutan's rich cultural fabric. These experiences strengthened my understanding of Bhutanese values like community, sustainability, and spirituality—values that play a crucial role in promoting mental health.

Another defining moment was our visit to the Indian Embassy, where I engaged in an insightful conversation with the Indian ambassador. His perspective on India's geopolitical stance, particularly in relation to China, was illuminating. We discussed the complexities of India's foreign relations and the role of diplomacy with Bhutan as a strategic buffer. This conversation broadened my understanding of India's diplomatic strategies and the importance of youth involvement in shaping international relations.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the summit was the inception of BhIMHA (Bhutan-India Mental Health Advocacy). Fuelled by a focus on holistic well-being and my passion for mental health advocacy, BhIMHA aims to destigmatise mental health in both India and Bhutan through peer support networks, therapy sessions, and community engagement. Our short-term goals include organising donation drives and group sessions, while our long-term vision is to develop a counselling curriculum for parents and teachers. With the support of mental health professionals, young volunteers, NGOs, and governmental backing, I believe BhIMHA can have a lasting impact on mental health awareness in both nations.

The India-Bhutan Youth Summit 2024 was not merely an event—it was a turning point in my journey as a mental health advocate and global citizen. Every discussion, trek, and cultural exchange deepened my understanding of the interconnectedness of our two nations and of the collective power we hold to shape a better future. From wearing Bhutan’s *kira* to speaking on mental health before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and even discussing geopolitics with the Indian ambassador, I grew in ways I hadn’t anticipated.

As I move forward from the summit, I am not just an advocate; I am a catalyst for change, inspired by the lessons learned and connections forged. Together, we have the power to reshape the narrative around mental health in India and Bhutan, creating a legacy for future generations to build upon. The summit may have ended, but the work it has inspired is only just beginning.



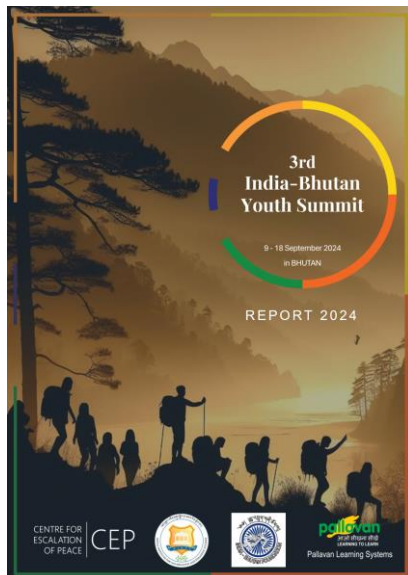
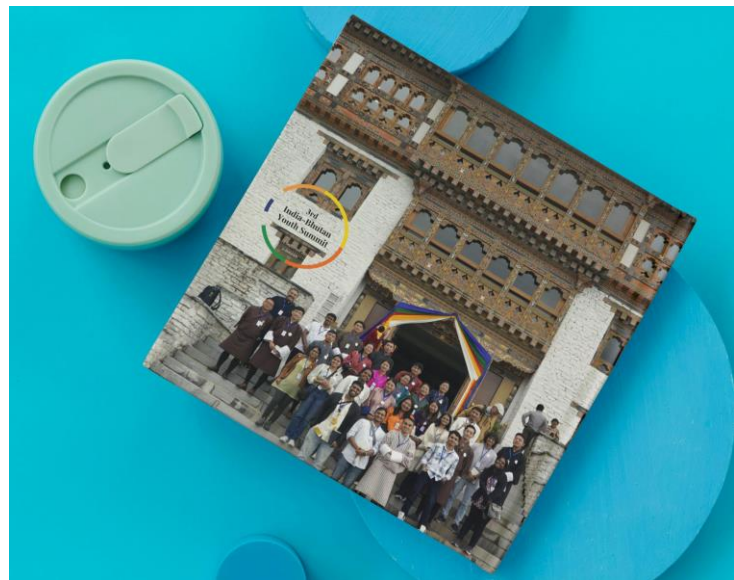
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