

## **Druk Gyalpo Ugyen Wangchuck's Twenty Points Proposal to the British India to Modernise Bhutan**

*Contributed by Tshering Tashi\**

In 1921, His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuck the first Druk Gyalpo, wrote a letter to Rufus Isaacs, the Earl of Reading, who was then the Governor-General and Viceroy of India, in which he submitted a 20 points proposal to modernize Bhutan, and requested for Rs 1,30,000.00

On 18 November, Major F.M Bailey, the British Political Officer based in Gangtok, Skkim, wrote a favourable cover letter to his Secretary in Delhi, advising his government to act favourably on the grounds that it would help enhance its trade relations and that the assistance would be of mutual benefit. In paragraph 13 of his letter No. 47-T.C. of 25 January 1910, Mr. Bell writes about informing Ugyen Wangchuck of the willingness of the Government of India to assist him in developing the resources of Bhutan. This was done in obedience to the instructions contained in Foreign Department letter No. 97 E.B.C. of 11 October 1909.

This letter is being revealed to the public for the first time. Written in Dzongkha and translated into English, the letter sent from Bumthang is dated 5 September 1921.

\*\*\*

---

\* Tashi Tshering is a freelance writer and researcher based in Thimphu.

To His Excellency the Viceroy of India.

(Through the political Officer, Gangtok, Sikkim)

1. I take the liberty of asking Your Excellency's warm interest in the welfare of my country of Bhutan and laying before you certain proposals for its development in the hope that I may gain help from the Government of India towards their realization.
2. Bhutan is at present a poor and a backward country. Until recent years it suffered frequently from internal struggles which depopulated and ruined the country. Now that peaceful times have come and a stable hereditary Government has been established under the protection of the British Government, there has arisen an ever-growing desires for closer political and trade relations with India for the progress on the lines of civilized countries.
3. The first great barrier to be removed is the ignorance of my people. Until seven years ago, there was, outside of the monasteries, no knowledge of reading or writing among the people. In 1914 I sent 45 boys to be taught at Kalimpong (with the summer session at Haa in Bhutan) and in 1915 started a School at Pumthang [Bumthang] in which Hindi and English are taught. Of the 45 boys who went to Kalimpong, 33 have passed the Middle School standard and 4 of them will appear for the University Entrance examination in 18 months time. The boys have proved themselves to be apt pupils. At Pumthang [Bumthang] School 8 of the pupils have reached the 6th standard.

## *Twenty Points Proposal to Modernise Bhutan*

4. The problem now faced is how best to utilize these lads for the development of Bhutan. A number of openings suggest themselves to me as urgent. There is a great need of medical knowledge to relieve suffering, to deal with these epidemics which have frequently decimated the population and to help towards a lower general mortality. I should therefore, like to see at least two of the lads trained as Doctors.
5. The prosperity of Bhutan depends largely in its animal and for their care and protection, it would be well that two of the lads should pass through a Veterinary College. During the last few years the cattle in large tracts of the country were practically exterminated by rinderpest.
6. For initiating a system of general education among the people at large it is desirable that a few of the lads should get a thorough training in the science and methods of training and for this 6 lads might be deputed who would afterwards take charge of a Training School for primary Teachers in Bhutan and conduct schools at various centres in the country.
7. The real basis of prosperity of the country is agriculture (including stock raising and dairying) and practically the whole population is engaged in it. It is in a backward state. I believe that if the modern methods, which I have heard are employed in many other countries, were adopted, much could be done to improve the crops and the animals (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, horses and mules). If three of the lads could get a scientific and practical course of training in agriculture and dairying (including cheese making),

they might do much to introduce improved methods and to teach people through demonstration farms.

8. There is weaving in a primitive style of cotton and wool and eri silk in the country and there is also the manufacturer, on a small scale of art cloths which have been admired beyond Bhutan. Two lads could be profitably be trained in improve methods of weaving and in developing the indigenous art fabrics. Another might learn tanning of skins which is now done in the most primitive fashion.
9. Bhutan has great forest which if worked on good lines should in time produce considerable revenue to the country and be a benefit to India. At present they product hardly any revenue and those adjoining the plains of India have been largely destroyed through the absence of supervision and ignorance of the proper methods of conservation. I should like to have 4 of the lads trained at a School of Forestry.
10. There are Minerals in Bhutan but hitherto there has been no careful survey and no successful attempt has been made to deal with them on a large scale. If one of the lads were trained in mining so that he could be able to conduct a thorough mineral survey of the country, there might be much fruit from his labours.
11. One great obstacle to the development of the country is the absence of good roads. It takes a coolie with a burden from 7 to 10 days to struggle up from the south frontier to the healthy zone in middle and northern Bhutan. The journey from the east to west in that same zone takes about 21 days, over a succession of valleys and the high mountain ridges

*Twenty Points Proposal to Modernise Bhutan*

which separate them. To prepare for the provision of better communication, two of the lads might go to college to be trained as Civil Engineers, and it would be well if they too could get a knowledge of hydro-electricity. In the great rivers of Bhutan which flow from the snowy ranges down to the plains – the Toorsa, Rydak, Sunkos, and Manas – as well as in the smaller rivers, there is unlimited power to be utilized for the development of the country and for the use of industries in India, and it would be of first important to India as well as Bhutan to have men able to take advantage of this power.

12. A Printing is a necessity for carrying on the organization of the country under the new conditions and of supplying the necessary educational apparatus. Two lads might be trained to run a press.
13. The above represent what seems to me to be the most pressing outlets for the lads who have been so far educated and I believe that they could do a great work in organising a new era in Bhutan. My petition to Your Excellency is that you should generously provide for their training in India. You have their institution for their training and if you will graciously undertake this great work for us, will you confer on me personally and on my country a great boon.
14. We ourselves are able to do little. Bhutan through rice, in promise for the future is now very poor. There is little or no money in the country. We are still in the shortage of barter. Revenue is paid in kind. Unless we get your help at the present stage, Bhutan must remain in its backward state for many years to come.

15. If you will undertake this work for us, I would make this request that our Bhutanese lads during their time of training should be kept as simple as possible for if they are pampered there is the danger that they would be unfitted for the simple life of their native land on their return.

16. I do not know exactly what will be the exact cost of the training of the 25 lads I have suggested. A rough estimate has been given to me as follows:-

1	To carry them on to the Entrance stage	Rs.10,000.00
2	To give them a University or Professional training	Rs. 10,000.00
3	To give a small outfit to enable them to make a start with their various departments in Bhutan:- e.g. outfits for two Hospitals and a Veterinary Dispensary; Plant for two Demonstration farms and Dairy; Equipment for weaving School, Tannery and Printing Press; Mining Survey and Civil Engineering apparatus; and Furnishing for Chief Schools	Rs. 65,000.00
	TOTAL	Rs. 130,000.00

17. If Your Excellency will meet the cost, I shall do my best to supply satisfactory lads for training. The cost would be spread over a considerable number of years- say from 7 to 10 years.

18. I have still another-and if possible still more important-petition to present Your Excellency. At present time Bhutan receives an annual subsidy of

## *Twenty Points Proposal to Modernise Bhutan*

Rs. 1, 00,000.00 from the Government of India. This sum is by way of compensation for the Bengal and Assam Duar and the Kalimpong Sub-Division of the Darjeeling District annexed after the Bhutan war of 1865. I would respectfully suggest that the amount of the subsidy should now be increased. I would urge that the Rs. 1, 00,000.00 has much less value now than when the sum was fixed. It is I believe not unreasonable to plead that the subsidy should be at least trebled to make up for the great fall in the purchasing power of the rupee and to meet the growing demands of the State. For example, a large proportion of the subsidy is spent on imported cloth to cloth the officials and sepoy and now the cloth costs three times what it did seven years ago.

19. I also ask Your Excellency's consideration of the growing revenue received by the Indian Government for the rich Districts of the Dooars and Kalimpong in respect of which the subsidy was granted. I have no grudge against the Government because of the annexation. We now in Bhutan see that it was the result of our own ignorance and high handedness at a time when the country was torn by internal factions, and we have no legal claim to make. But I should be most grateful if the Indian Government could see its way to give to Bhutan some share of the prosperity of the land which formerly belonged to her in the shape of an increased subsidy and by doing so to help her make a fair start in a new career in conjunction with and under the protection of the British Government. I need hardly remain Your Excellency that the prosperity and stability of Bhutan are no small

importance to the welfare of the north-eastern frontier of India.

20. By undertaking the training of our first lads to be educated along modern lines and by giving them an equipment for beginning their work in Bhutan, Your Excellency will set us on the way towards a new and more hopeful national future. By increasing our subsidy, you will enable us to carry on the work which you will have begun and which will requires an ever-increasing expenditure until the various resultant enterprises themselves can produce their natural fruits.

Source: British Library (1922), File Number L/P&S/12/2225. P757, 1922, BHUTAN AFFAIRS.