

As India inaugurates global co-operatives alliance, Bhutan pitches Gelephu as biggest co-operative project

Bhutanese PM on fourth visit to India this year as the country seeks investment for the smart-city project

Updated - November 25, 2024 10:13 pm IST - NEW DELHI:

SUHASINI HAIDAR, VIJAITA SINGH



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay light the lamp at the inauguration of International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) Global Cooperative Conference 2024, in New Delhi on November 25, 2024. | Photo Credit: ANI

Pitching the upcoming Gelephu Mindfulness City as the biggest “co-operative project” in Bhutan, Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay said in New Delhi that he was grateful for India’s support on the 2,500 square kilometre “Zero Carbon” city being developed. Mr. Tobgay spoke at the first “Global Conference of The International Co-

operative Alliance”, that was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. In his comments, Mr. Modi referred to Mr. Tobgay as his “younger brother”, while Mr. Tobgay, also speaking in Hindi for parts of his speech, followed by referring to Mr. Modi as his “elder brother” and “mentor”, thanking him for his “guidance and support in the development of this unique city”.

Around 3,000 delegates, including 1,000 representatives from 100 countries are attending the five-day event being held in Delhi, hosted by Union Home Minister and Minister of Co-operation Amit Shah. Speaking at the conference, Mr. Modi said India today had more than eight lakh co-operatives formed in every part of the country, and it was necessary to create big global financial institutions that would finance co-operatives all over the world.

Circular economy

“The current situation in the world can be a big opportunity for the co-operative movement,” Mr. Modi told those gathered at Delhi’s Bharat Mandapam complex. “For this, we will have to innovate and strategise our policies. To make co-operatives climate resilient, they should be linked to circular economy. It is also necessary to discuss how we can promote start-ups in co-operatives,” he added.

In his speech, Mr. Shah said that the government had opened the way to prosperity for lakhs of villages, crores of women and farmers through its motto of ‘Prosperity through Co-operation’. The Minister said that in the next three years, through two lakh new Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), there would not be a “single village panchayat” in India without a co-operative society. He said many steps had also been taken to make PACS modern, tech-enabled and economically-viable.

Co-operative spirit

“The Gelephu Mindfulness City is designed to be a hub of knowledge, technology, and finance, grounded in the values of mindfulness, sustainability and harmony,” the Bhutanese Prime Minister said, adding that it “embodies the co-operative spirit, as every citizen of Bhutan is both a shareholder and a stakeholder, actively participating in this significant initiative”.

Since the announcement of plans for the Gelephu city last December, situated to the south of Bhutan and bordering Assam, Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has visited India twice to discuss his plans for the city, and to seek

investment and collaborations from the Indian private sector in infrastructure development, bringing projects in the areas like hotels and hospitality, educational institutions, IT and wellness centres.

This is Mr. Tobgay's fourth visit to India this year, and comes after a visit in July, where he accompanied Bhutanese King to Gujarat to seek collaborations, including with the Adani Group on airport, infrastructure and renewable energy projects. While India's neighbours, including Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have announced reviews of Adani projects in the past few weeks, and the U.S. Department of Justice indictment of the Adani Group last week has cast a shadow over other projects, the Bhutanese government has thus far not commented on the issue. Last month, Gelephu's newly appointed Governor and former Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering had confirmed after a visit to Thimphu by Adani Group chief Gautam Adani to Thimphu, that the Adani Group was in talks over a number of solar and hydropower projects for the new smartcity.

Mr. Tobgay also travelled to India for a bilateral meeting in March and then attended Prime Minister Modi's swearing-in ceremony in June.

Published - November 25, 2024 10:05 pm IST