

JICA provides assistance to maintain bridges

Younten Tshedup | Sarpang

From the ancient cantilever bridges in places like Paro and Punakha to the most recent one over Amochu at the Samtse-Phuentsholing highway, bridges play an important role in connecting places and people.

There are hundreds of bridges in the country of which about 325 bridges are with the Department of Roads (DoR). It was learnt that most of these bridges were built in the 70s and 80s and have outlived their design lives.

DoR officials said lack of timely maintenance and inspection has left many of the bridges in perilous position.

In an effort to foster technical understanding and knowledge on bridge inspection and maintenance, about 27 bridge engineers are attending an on-the-job training in Sarpang since April 22.

Through the capacity development in construction and maintenance of bridges known as the CAMBRIDGE project, experts from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) are providing the five-day training.

The group carried out deck replacement at the Kopche bridge in Sarpang yesterday. Also samples of the bridge materials were collected for further study of the structure.

An expert with the project, Takeshi Suzuki, said the structure had suffered multiple deteriorations and needed immediate maintenance. "Due to heavy traffic, there are cracks in the structure and water seepage has accelerated the deterioration."

Given the high velocity of discharge from rivers, the base of most bridges in the country has eroded. "There are several vulnerable structures that need to be replaced and reinforced with preventive measures."

An engineer with the department in Sarpang, Sonam Jamtsho, said that through the CAMBRIDGE project, DoR has completed the formation of a bridge inventory that records data of all bridges with the department.

The bridge inventory is incorporated in the bridge management system (BMS) and the first round of inspection on these bridges has also been completed.

"Without such a system in the past, maintenance works, and inspections of bridges were difficult," he said. "Based on these data, we can now carry out damage diagnosis and accordingly request budget for maintenance works."

Sonam Jamtsho said prior to the launching of the project, there were no inspections made on the bridge structures in the country. "Only when a structure was damaged, necessary actions were taken," he said. "Now with the BMS, we can provide timely protection and preservation works."

One of the participants, Jigme Dorji, said the training provided hands-on experience in handling new technology and equipment. "Besides the technology, the systematic way of working with the Japanese experts was a new knowledge for me."

Meanwhile, besides the technical support in implementing bridge maintenance works, Japan has been assisting the country in building bridges since 1997.

There are about 26 bridges built with support from JICA today. Four major projects - Telegangchu, Beteni, Samkhara and Passangchu bridges, along the Gelephu-Trongsa highway are underway.

Apart from the quality of the bridges, aesthetic appeal is one of the apparent features in bridges constructed by the Japanese in the country.

Takeshi Suzuki said proper planning is key to build quality bridges. "We take adequate time in planning and design works, sometimes even more than the actual project period. This is because, if the design is a failure, the end product would definitely fail," he said.

Limited budget and equipment could have affected Bhutan from building better quality bridges in the past.



► About 27 bridge engineers from five dzongkhags are attending the on-the-job training

World Immunization Week (24-30 April 2019) Theme: "Protected Together, #VaccinesWork"



Immunization is the most successful and cost-effective health intervention of the last few decades, which has contributed in preventing illnesses, disabilities and deaths among children under-five from vaccine preventable diseases and cervical cancer among women.

Every year, Bhutan joins the global community in observing the **World Immunization Week**; observed in the last week of April to increase awareness on the benefits of vaccination and to promote the use of vaccines to protect people of all ages against deadly but preventable diseases. Evidences suggest that immunization averts an estimated 1.5 million deaths every year from vaccine preventable diseases for children below five years of age. Hence, there is a need to accelerate the efforts to vaccinate nearly 20 million unvaccinated and under-vaccinated children globally to ensure child survival.

The theme for 2019 World Immunization Week **Protected Together: Vaccines Work!** is to celebrate the splendid work of **Vaccine Heroes** from around the world. These vaccine heroes are from all parts of life- parents and community members to health workers and innovators who help ensure that we are all protected through the power of vaccines.

In Bhutan, the immunization program was launched in 1979 and it is now one of the most successful programs with the Department of Public Health, Ministry of Health. It has contributed significantly in improving survival and health of children in Bhutan. The nation achieved Universal Child Immunization Status in 1991, was certified polio-free in 2014, and achieved and sustained maternal and neonatal tetanus elimination in the same year. Measles elimination was also declared in 2017. Bhutan also received 'public health achievement award' for the control of Rubella and Congenital Rubella Syndrome in 2018 from the World Health Organization (WHO) South East Asia Regional Office (SEARO), New Delhi, India.

In addition to the various immunization programs, Bhutan introduced the Pneumococcal-13 valent vaccine into routine immunization schedule in early 2019 and we are now preparing to introduce seasonal influenza vaccine for health workers and pregnant women.

The Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan in collaboration with UNICEF and WHO, reiterate our full commitment to accelerate actions to improve immunization quality, increase awareness and demand, ensure access and utilization of immunization services by all eligible children and women across the country to ensure that they are protected from deadly diseases.



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