

## Passang Zam is Japan's 23rd bridge in Bhutan

Younten Tshedup | Gelephu

Agriculture minister Yeshey Penjor and JICA's chief representative Kozo Watanabe inaugurated the 41.5m Passang Zam (bridge) over Passangchhu in Gelephu on January 18.

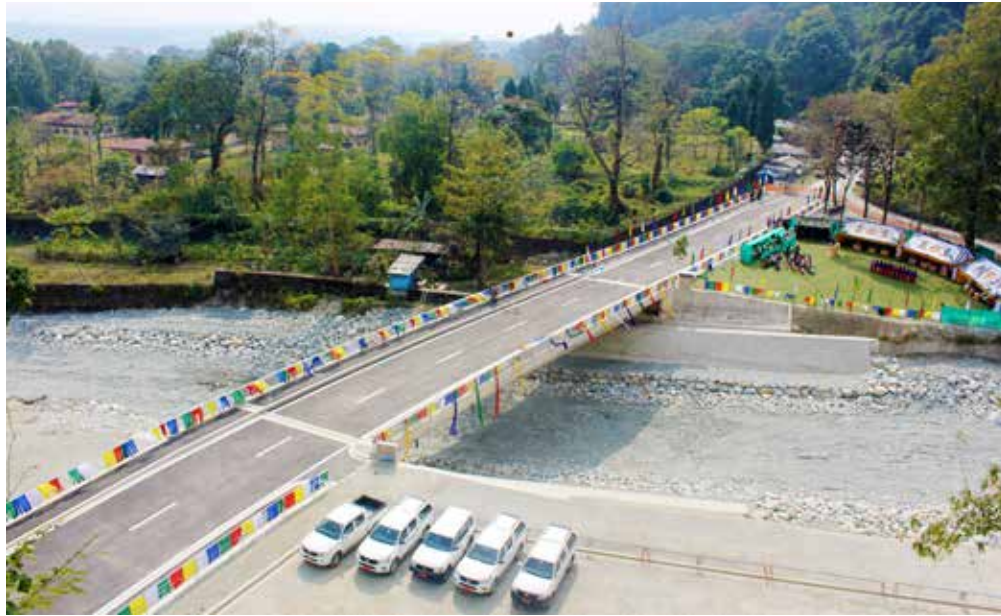
Passang Zam is the first of the four bridges, which has been reconstructed along the Gelephu-Trongsa primary national highway (PNH-4) under Japan's grant aid project.

The remaining three bridges - Samkhara and Beteni bridges in Sarpang and Telegangchhu bridge in Trongsa would be completed by January next year.

Department of Road's (DoR) chief engineer with the bridge division, Karma Wangdi, said that under grant aid project that started in 1997, 22 bridges in the country were studied along the national highways. "From the 22, 12 bridges were identified as the most critical that required replacement of which five were given priority and included for reconstruction in the project's first phase."

So far, a total of 23 bridges have been completed under different phases of the project.

Karma Wangdi said most of the existing bridges were old, narrow and had outlived its design life. "Passang Zam was constructed in 1970 with steel truss bridge and had



► Passang Zam

limited load carrying capacity and height restrictions."

The temporary Bailey bridge used over Passangchhu suffered major damage in the foundation during the last monsoon.

Lyonpo Yeshey Penjor, during the inauguration, said that the completion of the bridge would not only benefit the people of Gelephu but also all commuters in the central region.

He said that despite enormous business market Gelephu offered for the rest of the dzongkhags in the region, unstable road conditions and lack of quality bridge facilities

deterred people from coming to Gelephu.

"Apart from connecting different parts of the country, the bridge is also symbolic of the friendship that Bhutan and Japan shares," Lyonpo said, adding that the construction of the suspension bridge in Panbang by late Dasho Keiji Nishioka stands testimony of the strong friendship the two nations shares.

JICA's chief representative, Kozo Watanabe, said that the country has always placed a

high priority on the expansion and construction of road and bridge infrastructure in the past and present five-year plans.

"I am glad that the inauguration of this bridge could contribute to improving the transportation network in the country," he said. "Whenever I meet Bhutanese officials, they always compliment to me about the aesthetic and quality of all the bridges that have been constructed so far. I believe it is a part of its own

legacy and it has become an integral part of the primary national highways 1,5 and now 4."

He said that while better road network connectivity would facilitate transportation of goods and improve human mobility and sustain economic growth, a resilient road network infrastructure plays an important role during times of disasters. "I believe that the disaster-resilient bridge would play a crucial role in enhancement of human society."

For almost two decades, the Japan-based Dai Nippon Construction (DNC) company through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has built over 20 bridges in Bhutan.

DNC's project manager, Yasuhito Numazawa, said that the company has been working together with the Bhutanese since the early 1980s in the various field like agriculture, small hydroelectric plants and bridges.

"Besides imparting our techniques and skills, we have also learned a lot from our Bhutanese counterpart," he said. "We hope we can continue working in future projects as well."

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