

At UN, Russia & China veto US resolution for Gaza ceasefire

Washington In Past Voted Against 3 Truce Motions Over Israel's Right To Defend Itself

Russia and China Friday vetoed a US resolution in the United Nations Security Council that called for "an immediate and sustained ceasefire" in Gaza, rejecting a measure that included some of Washington's strongest language since the start of the war.

The US-backed resolution reflected the Biden administration's growing frustration with Israel's conduct in the war, and had been intended to put pressure on Israel not to attack the southern city of Rafah.

But international divisions, including over Washington's own use of its veto power in the Council and its refusal to call for a permanent ceasefire, appeared to doom the resolution on Friday. A key issue was the unusual language that said the UNSC "determines the imperative of an immediate and sustained ceasefire." The phrasing was not a straightforward "demand" or "call" to halt hostilities. Eleven members voted in favour, but three nations, including two permanent members with veto power, Russia and China, voted against it. Algeria also voted against the measure and Guyana abstained.

Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, had denounced the US-backed measure before the vote, calling it "hypocritical". The draft, he said, was written with US poli-



A woman flees al-Shifa hospital in Gaza along with her triplets. Israel said Friday that it had killed over 150 militants in its raid since Monday and had arrested hundreds of others

tical interests in mind, to "ensure the impunity of Israel". China's UN ambassador, Zhang Jun, said the US proposal did not promote an immediate and sustained ceasefire and set preconditions. "If the US was serious about ceasefire, it wouldn't have vetoed time and again multiple council resolutions." The US ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield said Russia and China vetoed the resolution for two reasons: They had refused to condemn Hamas, and they "simply did not want to vote for a resolution that was penned by the US."

The US had vetoed three previous ceasefire resolutions, arguing that the measures could disrupt hostage negotiations and hinder Israel's right to defend itself. In each of those earlier votes, the US was the only vote against the motions. NYT

Israel will 'do it alone' in Rafah op: Bibi to Blinken

Tel Aviv: PM Benjamin Netanyahu told the top US diplomat Antony Blinken on Friday that Israel is prepared to continue its war against Hamas alone, amid tense relations between the two allies over the six-month-old Gaza conflict. Blinken met one-on-one with Netanyahu in talks aimed at ensuring more food flows into Gaza, the top US diplomat's sixth diplomatic swing through West Asia since the war began on Oct 7.

Netanyahu said he told Blinken he appreciated US support in its fight against Hamas and that Israel recognises it needs to protect civilians. However, he reiterated plans to push into Rafah, against the territory's southern border fence, where more than a million Gazans have taken refuge in makeshift shelters. "I also said that we have no way to defeat Hamas without going into Rafah. And I told him that I hope we will do it with the support of the US, but if we have to - we will do it alone," he said in a video statement. Israel says Rafah is the last bastion for Hamas militants, and that it has a plan to evacuate civilians before an attack. Washington says a ground assault would be a "mistake" and cause too much harm to those displaced there.

A strain in ties between the



US secretary of state Antony Blinken (L) speaks with relatives of Israelis held hostage in Gaza as they rally in Tel Aviv on Friday

US and Israel has increasingly become public, with US President Joe Biden calling Israel's campaign in Gaza "over the top" and saying it has had too great a toll on civilian lives. The war was triggered by a raid into Israel by Hamas fighters who killed 1,200 and took 253 hostages, by Israeli tallies. More than 32,000 Palestinians have been killed in the subsequent Israeli bombardments, Gaza health authorities say.

Speaking as he departed Israel, Blinken told reporters he had "candid conversations". A military ground operation in Rafah "risks killing more civilians. It risks wreaking greater havoc with the humanitarian assistance. It risks further isolating Israel around the world and jeopardizing its long-term security and standing," he said. REUTERS

Will lay down consultation rules for lokayukta appointments: SC

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New Delhi: SC on Friday took cognizance of the persistent grievances of leaders of opposition about their diminishing roles in selection panels for choosing persons for constitutional posts like lokayuktas and agreed to lay down benchmark guidelines on consultation process for such appointments in every state.

This decision from a bench of CJI Chandrachud, and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra came on a plea filed by Madhya Pradesh LoP Umang

Singhar, who approached the apex court directly questioning the manner in which he was virtually kept in dark till the last minute about the person who has been chosen for appointment as Lokayukta.

GIVING OPPN A SAY

Appearing for Singhar, senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Vivek Tankha said even though he is included in the three-member selection panel comprising the CM, chief justice of HC and LoP, he came to know about the choice through a letter written by

the CM just prior to appointment of retired HC judge, Justice Satyendra Kumar Singh.

On Thursday, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta had frowned at the last minute supply of credentials to members of panel including PM, home minister and LoP relating to selection of Election Commissioners and had commented that enough time should be given to each member to ponder over credentials of those in zone of consideration. LoP is also included in the panel comprising the PM and CJI in the selection of CBI director.

Navy monitoring entry of another Chinese 'research' vessel into Indian Ocean Region

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New Delhi: Indian Navy is closely monitoring the entry of yet another Chinese satellite and missile tracking ship into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which adds to its three such "research" vessels already present in the region.

The Chinese ship, Yuan Wang 03, has approached the IOR at a time when India has issued another NOTAM (notice to airmen) with a long no-fly zone over the Bay of Bengal for a possible ballistic missile test from the Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha on April 3-4. "Yuan Wang 03 is being kept under surveillance," a defence official told TOI on Friday.

The Navy uses its P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and warships to track Chinese "dual-use" vessels even if they go "dark" by switching

off their automatic identification system transponders.

The Yuan Wang class of ships, under the command of the People's Liberation Army's Strategic Support Force, are equipped with large antennae, advanced sensors and electronic equipment to monitor satellite launches and track trajectories of bal-

While China regularly sends research & survey vessels to IOR to map oceanographic and other data useful for navigation and submarine ops, officials say the presence of four such 'dual-use' ships in IOR at the same time is relatively rare

listic missiles as well as undertake electronic snooping.

Another Chinese research vessel, Xiang Yang Hong 01, was in Bay of Bengal during India's test of the 5,000-km range Agni-5 ballistic missile with multiple warheads (MIRV or multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles) for first time on March 11.

Then, of course, Chinese vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03 had docked at Malé late last month amid the plummeting India-Maldives bilateral relations under the pro-Beijing Mohamed Muizzu government in the archipelago.

Chinese marine resource survey ship, Da Yang Hao, is also currently present in IOR.

While China regularly sends such research and survey vessels to the IOR to map oceanographic and other data useful for navigation and submarine operations, officials say the presence of four such "dual-use" ships in the region at the same time is relatively rare.

"China has a large fleet of 65 research & survey vessels.

Most of them are ostensibly civilian ones for oceanographic research but they regularly undertake surveys for military purposes," an officer said.

China has also helped Pakistan Navy recently induct its first specialised research or spy ship, PNS Rizwan, which has the capability to track launches of ballistic missiles and undertake other intelligence-gathering missions, as was earlier reported by TOI.

With the world's largest Navy with over 360 warships and submarines, China deploys six to eight warships, apart from research ships and many fishing vessels, in IOR at any given time. Beijing is also working to establish additional logistical turnaround facilities from the African east coast to the Malacca Strait, having already secured a few since establishing its first overseas base at Djibouti on the Horn of Africa in Aug 2017.

After forcing Indian military personnel out, Muizzu seeks debt relief from Delhi

Male: After his anti-India rhetoric, pro-China Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has said India will continue to remain his country's "closest ally" and urged New Delhi to provide debt relief to the archipelago nation.

Maldives owed approximately USD 400.9 million to India by the end of last year.

Ever since he took oath as president last November, Muizzu has pursued a hardline stand towards India and made Indian military personnel operating three aviation platforms leave the country.

On Thursday, in his first interview with the local media since assuming office, Muizzu said India was instrumental in providing aid to the Maldives and has implemented the "greatest number" of projects.



India would continue to remain Maldives' closest ally, he said and emphasised that there was no question about it.

Maldives' proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and around 300 nautical miles from the mainland's western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes

Muizzu said loans taken by consecutive govts from India were heftier than can be borne by the Maldivian economy, and talks were on to explore leniency in the repayment structure

running through the Indian Ocean Region gives it significant strategic importance.

Muizzu urged India to accommodate debt relief measures in repayment of "the hefty loans taken over consecutive governments". He said the loans taken from India were heftier than can be borne by the Maldivian economy. "Hence, we are holding

discussions to explore leniency in the repayment structure of these loans." His comments come ahead of the parliament elections in Maldives slated in mid-April.

Muizzu, who expressed hope that India would "facilitate debt relief measures in the repayment of these loans", also said that he has conveyed his appreciation to the Indian government for its contributions.

"The only matter of contention" with New Delhi was the presence of Indian military, he said. "Even if they were troops of some other country, we would have dealt with them in the same manner. I have said so very clearly. It is nothing personal, but a matter of our national security," Muizzu added. ൧൩

Holi behind bars for Kejriwal after court gives ED custody till March 28

ED: CM Kingpin, Key Conspirator Of Excise 'Scam'

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New Delhi: A city court on Friday remanded Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal to the custody of Enforcement Directorate till March 28 in the alleged money laundering case connected to the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22.

**FULL COVERAGE
FLAP OPP & PAGES 4-7
▶ EDIT PG: Do It Right/What Arrest Does Not Mean**

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja at Rouse Avenue courts passed the order "for the purpose of his detailed and sustained interrogation with respect to his role and to unearth the remaining proceeds of crime and for confronting him with data retrieved from digital devices and material seized during investigation".

The agency had submitted that the Delhi CM was the "key conspirator" and "kingpin" in the case and sought his custody for interrogating him. It had alleged that he was directly involved in formulation of the policy and handling of the proceeds of crime.

The judge said in her order that it has been submitted that AAP was the major beneficiary of the proceeds of crime generated in the scam and a part of the proceeds of crime to the tune of Rs 45 crore was used in the Goa election campaign in 2021-22.

Continued on P 4

NO INCRIMINATING MATERIAL AGAINST CM: LAWYER

▶ Kejriwal was produced in trial court shortly after he **withdrew his plea** against his arrest by the agency from **Supreme Court**

▶ ED claims Kejriwal **'took advantage'** of being Delhi CM to **facilitate money laundering** by AAP, which is a **'major beneficiary'** of the proceeds of crimes generated in the alleged liquor scam. This is the first time AAP has been thus labelled by ED

▶ Abhishek Singhvi, representing Kejriwal, claimed that no incriminating material showing the AAP leader's involvement in crime was found despite over 200 raids in the excise policy case

▶ A dossier on senior ED officials, which agency claims it recovered during searches at Kejriwal's residence on Thursday before his arrest, has raised suspicion of **alleged snooping by Delhi govt on officials associated with sensitive money laundering probes** in Delhi and Mumbai. This will become part of the investigation into a larger conspiracy to influence the probe

▶ AAP ministers alleged they were **prevented by**



Cops detain Delhi minister Atishi during a protest at ITO against Kejriwal's arrest

police from visiting CM's family at his residence

▶ Delhi Police curbs on major stretches around ITO and India Gate threw **traffic out of gear in central Delhi** through Friday. Commuters faced a lot of trouble with ITO and Lok Kalyan Marg Metro stations being shut

No bar but not practical to run govt from jail

Can Arvind Kejriwal run the govt from jail? Experts said on Friday that constitutionally, there was nothing to stop him from continuing as CM given the majority he has in Delhi assembly. A court could order special facilities for Kejriwal in prison.

However, presiding over the govt from jail poses practical problems. For one, visits to inmates are restricted, curtailing the scope for cabinet meetings and interactions with bureaucrats. Another deterrent is security. A compromise can be reached with a building being declared a temporary jail to enable CM to function. P 5

CM: Dedicated to nation; wife says Delhi 'betrayed'

In his first reaction since his arrest by ED on Thursday evening, CM Arvind Kejriwal, while being produced before Rouse Avenue court in the excise policy case, told reporters that his life is dedicated to the nation whether he is inside jail or outside.

Hours later, CM's wife, who has so far stayed away from politics and is now being spoken of as a replacement for Kejriwal, slammed the PM in a post on X. "Modiji got your thrice-elected chief minister arrested due to his arrogance of power and is trying to crush everyone. This is a betrayal with the people of Delhi. Your CM has always stood with you... The public is supreme and knows everything," Sunita Kejriwal wrote. P 7

United oppn backs Delhi CM, asks EC to intervene

Rallying behind Kejriwal, opposition INDIA bloc petitioned Election Commission on Friday, accusing Modi govt of "illegally" using central agencies to stifle rivals. It urged EC to provide a level playing field to parties barring which polls would lose their sanctity. Congress and CPM joined AAP in some states in protests as well.

▶ Punjab Cong slams CM, welcomes arrest, FLAP OPP

TMC chief Mamata Banerjee called the arrest a "calculated assault on opposition CMs" while NCP (SCP)'s Sharad Pawar said BJP would have to pay the price for "misuse of power". DMK president and Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin called it an "egregious assault on democracy". P 6

CM entitled to fair trial, says Germany

Germany said Kejriwal is entitled to a fair trial and presumption of innocence is central to rule of law. The foreign ministry hoped standards of judicial independence and "basic democratic principles" would apply. TNN

Arrested because of his deeds: Hazare

Social activist Anna Hazare said Kejriwal was arrested due to "his deeds" while estranged former AAP colleagues Prashant Bhusan and Yogenra Yadav backed him and called the arrest "murder of democracy". TNN

BJP: Seen gangs being run from jail, not govt

We have seen gangs being run from jail, not any govt," BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said Friday, demanding CM Kejriwal's resignation.

Defending the arrest, BJP shared a Congress letter of June 2022 to the police commissioner, seeking action against Kejriwal in the excise policy case, citing gross irregularities. It also put out several undated videos of Congress leaders demanding CM's resignation in the matter. AAP leaders were holding protests against the ED move to arrest CM as if it was a celebration of corruption, BJP's Sambit Patra said. P 6

With China courting Bhutan, Delhi doubles aid to Thimphu

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New Delhi: With the weather finally smiling upon Paro international airport, PM Narendra Modi Friday landed in Bhutan for a two-day state visit that saw him announcing India's decision to double assistance for the Himalayan state's 13th five-year-plan from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 10,000 crore.

Amid efforts by Bhutan and China to resolve their border dispute, which could have a bearing on India's security, and Beijing's courting of Bhutan for diplomatic links, India and Bhutan expressed satisfaction with their cooperation on mutual security, agreeing in a joint statement to continue coordination on "issues relating to our national interests".

India and Bhutan also signed seven MoUs and agreements, while initiating another for rail links between the two countries, as Modi held talks with his counterpart Tshering Tobgay, who received him at Paro airport, and called on King Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck. The PM was presented with the Order of the Druk Gyalpo, Bhutan's highest civilian honour that was conferred on him in 2021, by the King who said India's future is bright with Modi at the helm.

The first foreign national to receive that honour, Modi had committed to stepping up support for Bhutan during Tobgay's visit to India last week. Modi strongly backed the King's initiatives like Brand Bhutan and Bhutan Believe, along with the Gelephu Mindfulness City project which, he said, will act as an inspiration for the world, like the "visionary framework" of Gross National Happiness. These initiatives are important for Bhutan to achieve its aim of becoming a high-income country by 2034.

"I want to assure you that our cooperation will reach new heights in the next five years. We will work on new possibilities for cooperation in trade, connectivity, trade and energy," said Modi, adding that measures for improved connectivity will soon see fruition in the form of a new airport, Banarhat-Samtse and Kokrajhar-Gelephu rail links, and Brahmaputra waterways.

Modi's third visit to Bhutan, which was delayed by a day due to poor weather conditions, came after elections were



King Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck confers the Order of the Druk Gyalpo, Bhutan's highest civilian award, on PM Narendra Modi Friday

announced in India and in the middle of hectic efforts by both China and Bhutan for the demarcation of their disputed boundary. Bhutan, however, has been mindful of India's interests, keeping Indian govt in the loop about the ongoing negotiations with China and not giving up its claim on Doklam at the India-Bhutan-China trijunction that has a bearing on India's security.

Asked if Bhutan's border talks with China figured in the meetings, foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra said in a guarded response that it is a matter between Bhutan and China. "As far as India's ties with Bhutan are concerned, these stand on their own footing, independent of any other relationship. There are some core fundamentals in our relationship, including shared values, trust, mutual respect, and sensitivity to each other's concerns," said Kwatra. He described the award to Modi as a significant milestone in the relationship, adding that the visit had provided a clear roadmap for cooperation between the two countries.

The MoUs signed covered areas like petroleum, trade, digital connectivity, space and agriculture. An Indian readout of Modi's meeting with the King, who held a private dinner for Modi, said, "Recalling that Bharat for Bhutan and Bhutan for Bharat was an abiding reality, the two leaders discussed ways to further the transformative partnership". Modi also called on the King's father and 4th king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

'Proud moment for India': Shah on honour for PM

Home minister Amit Shah, along with other senior BJP figures, celebrated Bhutan conferring its highest civilian honour on PM Narendra Modi, calling it a "proud moment" for the country. "Modi ji is the first foreign leader to be adorned with this award. It is a fitting accolade for him whose diplomatic vision has elevated India to the role of a robust yet compassionate nation in the global arena, making every Indian proud," Shah said.

The citation mentioned that under Modi, India had become the fastest growing economy and would be the third largest economy by 2030. "Prime Minister Modi has emerged as a figure of destiny, transforming the ancient civilisation of India into a dynamic centre of technology and innovation. His commitment to safeguard the environment and invest in renewable energy makes India's progress truly well rounded. Prime Minister Modi's leadership has set India on the path of transformation, and India's moral authority and global influence have grown," it said. The citation also said "Modi's Neighbourhood First policy has strengthened South Asia and taken it towards collective progress". **TNN**

The two countries also issued a joint vision statement on their energy partnership, pledging to ensure energy security in the region. "We will continue to expand our clean energy partnership in the sectors of hydropower, solar and green hydrogen and jointly develop new projects, which channel our technological prowess, vibrancy of the business sector, and skilled talent of both countries to enhance energy security in the region," said the joint statement.

The two countries also pledged to strengthen trade and investment linkages with each other, particularly through the private sector, including in the context of the King's vision to develop the Gelephu Special Administrative Region, which will lead to greater economic connectivity in the region in a sustainable manner, promote economic partnerships and bring the people of Bharat and Bhutan closer, according to the statement issued by the countries.

What Modi's Bhutan visit tells us about China's influence

PM Narendra Modi is paying a return visit to Thimphu days after his new Bhutan counterpart visited India. **Sachin Parashar** looks at the complex interplay between this exemplary trust-based relationship and China's efforts to find a foothold in the kingdom.

Trust And Goodwill

It's rare for any PM to travel abroad after the announcement of parliamentary elections. But Modi has made an exception. Bhutan remains at the centre stage of India's neighbourhood focus and there's a strong bond of friendship, mutual trust and goodwill between the two countries.

As the only Indian neighbour to not join China's BRI, despite various inducements on offer, Bhutan has perhaps been more mindful of Indian interests than any other country in the region.

TOI Explains

Geography has been an important factor in Bhutan's reliance on India for its development needs and Thimphu continues to hold India's assistance dear for its socio-economic development.

Bhutan now has a new government in place and the visit is an opportunity for India to reiterate its commitment to the strong development partnership that is driven by Bhutan's needs and priorities. And as China continues to cast a shadow on the relationship, perhaps more so now than ever before, frequent high-level visits also help allay the apprehension that the strategically located Himalayan kingdom may slip out of India's sphere of influence.

China Conundrum

China has for long courted Bhutan for a diplomatic mission in the country but Thimphu has resisted such efforts, aware of Indian sensitivities. It has focused more on resolving the boundary dispute with China. Thimphu held the 25th round of boundary talks with Beijing in 2023 - after a gap of seven years - and stunned many by claiming Bhutan was within a hair's breadth of resolving the boundary issue.

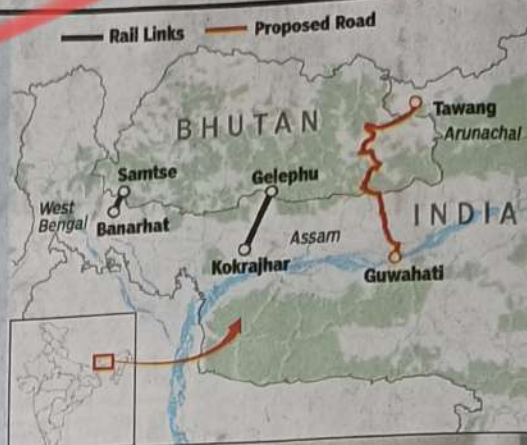
Careful that these efforts are not detrimental to India's security interests, Bhutan has kept India suitably informed about its boundary dialogue with China. The Bhutan king's visit to India last year, only six months after his previous visit and in the middle of reports about China-Bhutan boundary talks, was seen by some as Bhutan's way of reassuring a concerned India.

However, with the talks now in final stages, Bhutan remains cagey about any Indian military-related initiative passing through its territory, like the proposal to build a road from Tawang in Arunachal to Bhutan that would lead up to Guwahati (see map). Bhutan wants to wait till its boundary with China is demarcated as not doing so will most likely have Beijing hardening its position on disputed areas in the north.

India will not want to be seen as blocking any effort by a sovereign country to resolve its dispute with another neighbour but it will certainly be wary

CLOSER TIES

- Bhutan second country to launch BHIM app
- Rail links under way between Banarhat in West Bengal and Samtse in Bhutan, and also between Kokrajhar in Assam and Gelephu in Bhutan
- Proposal to build a road from Tawang in Arunachal to Bhutan that would lead up to Guwahati
- India has built 4 major hydro-electric projects in Bhutan. Two more are under construction



PM Modi with his Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay in Thimphu on Friday

of what might come next as the Chinese have already said they want to augment the demarcation with the establishment of diplomatic ties and expansion of economic cooperation.

Bhutan's Doklam Dilemma

Of all Indian worries, the foremost is how any settlement of the Bhutan-China border may impact the status of the Doklam area at the India-Bhutan-China trijunction, located dangerously close to India's Siliguri Corridor that links the North-Eastern states to the mainland. The disputed area, which India believes belongs to Bhutan but is claimed by China, saw a major military flare-up in 2017 after India objected to the Chinese construction of a road through the disputed plateau. India has since repeatedly reminded China of a 2012 understanding that any effort to determine trijunction points must involve all the countries concerned.

Significantly, as it looks to speed up the border demarcation with China, Bhutan has held extensive talks with India, too, on progress in the engagements with Beijing, including on the Doklam issue. Even the new govt has assured India that it won't budge on its claim of the boundary line, as desired by Indian authorities, starting from Doklam in the west to Serjungla in the east.

Development Goals

India's development assistance to Bhutan beginning in the early 1960s has been the mainstay of its relationship with the country. India committed Rs 5,000 crore (73%

of Bhutan's external grant component) for Bhutan's 12th five-year plan, helping it implement over 600 projects. It has pledged to step up assistance further for the 13th Plan that came into effect this year. Hydropower cooperation remains the standout feature of this cooperation with India having so far constructed four major hydel projects in Bhutan. Two more are under construction.

India remains Bhutan's top trading partner and also the main source of investment, accounting for 50% of FDI. There has also been a focus on increasing cooperation in newer areas like space, fintech and e-learning.

Cross-border connectivity is another area of focus with the two govts working to establish rail links between Banarhat in West Bengal and Samtse in Bhutan, and also between Kokrajhar in Assam and Gelephu in Bhutan.

India is also helping improve road, air and digital connectivity with a focus on areas like health agriculture, skilling and cultural preservation. The Indian govt has also backed the King's Gelephu Mindfulness City project for sustainable development, hoping to further improve investment and economic linkages.

According to MEA, the development partnership has moved into new and emerging areas with full interoperability of the flagship digital project RuPay, which has been successfully completed. Bhutan became the second country to launch the BHIM app, further deepening the financial linkages between our two countries, says an official Indian readout of ongoing cooperation between the two countries.