



## Gross National Happiness (GDH)!

What is this guy banging on about now? Some sort of utopian dream drummed up by smiley imogis and eternal star-gazers? Well actually, no! Gross National Happiness is a reality. It's what the Kingdom of Bhutan thrives on!



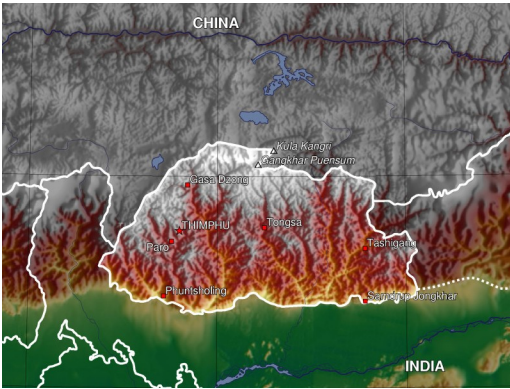
COP26 - the latest version of the annual climate-fest - finished on a decidedly downbeat note ... especially for countries like Bhutan: small, poor, and already suffering the ravages of climate change! As often the case, the rich (polluting) countries chose to kick the can down the road,

opting to *phase down coal* rather than *phase out coal*, thus delivering a stalemate on fossil fuels and keeping the status quo alive for 8,500 coal-fired power stations. 8,500! That's a lot of coal ... and a lot of carbon emissions!

Politics is a tricky business, derided by many as focusing on short-term staying power for parties and leaders, rather than well-being for *wananchi*. And though the science of climate change can no longer be denied, the power addicts controlling our destinies still vote (against all logic) to preserve the status quo ... and their own backsides! Australia is a stand-out example which even though subjected to devastating impacts of climate change, refused to play ball at the global COP, its PM strongly defending the right to mine and export coal.



So let's get back to Bhutan and 'GNH'. It's a David amongst Goliaths story: a tiny Himalayan country landlocked between India and China. Some years back



the Kingdom established a *Ministry of Happiness*, focusing on social and environmental well-being, alongside healthy economics and good governance. Today all policies must meet a happiness criteria. Also the world's first country to achieve carbon neutrality, now Bhutan is carbon-negative, soaking up twice as much carbon as it emits!

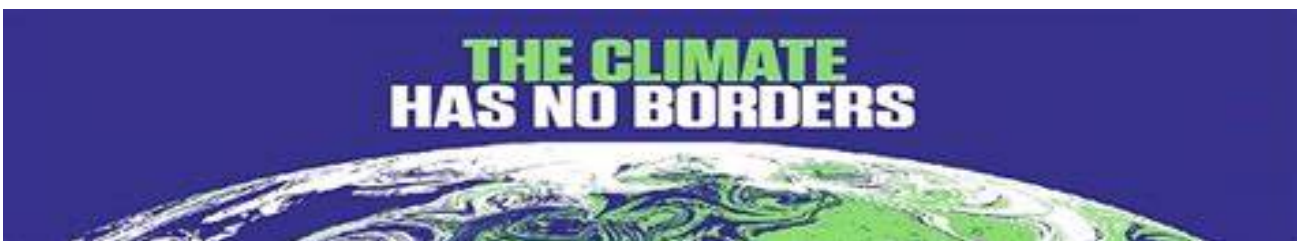
Bhutan is self-sufficient in electricity generation from renewable sources and is exporting electrical capacity to neighbours. The Bhutanese constitution reserves 60% of land for forest, while ensuring freedom for wildlife to roam between forested areas. It also states that the monarch has to retire by 65. One wonders how much better the world could be if more nations adopted this approach: a long rather than short-term view, preserving flora and fauna rather than logging forests, focusing on renewable energies not fossil fuels, curtailing the potential power of leaders.



Of course, the Bhutanese freely admit their example is 'work in progress'. Many challenges remain, particularly regarding climate change: glaciers melt, dams break, valleys flood and villages are swept away! But the problem is not of their own making; the climate crisis is a man-made phenomenon, caused by industrialisation of the so-called developed world.

It seems unlikely that Bhutan's remarkable blueprint for our planet will be acted upon any time soon. The rich have transferred their egos to the 2022 COP (No. 27 in Egypt) and unless their houses of power are brought down by fire or flood before then, they will probably repeat the process, by kicking the can further along the road ... regardless of their children's futures!

We need to stop this never-ending cycle of self-destruction!



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