



BHUTAN: World's only Carbon Negative Country

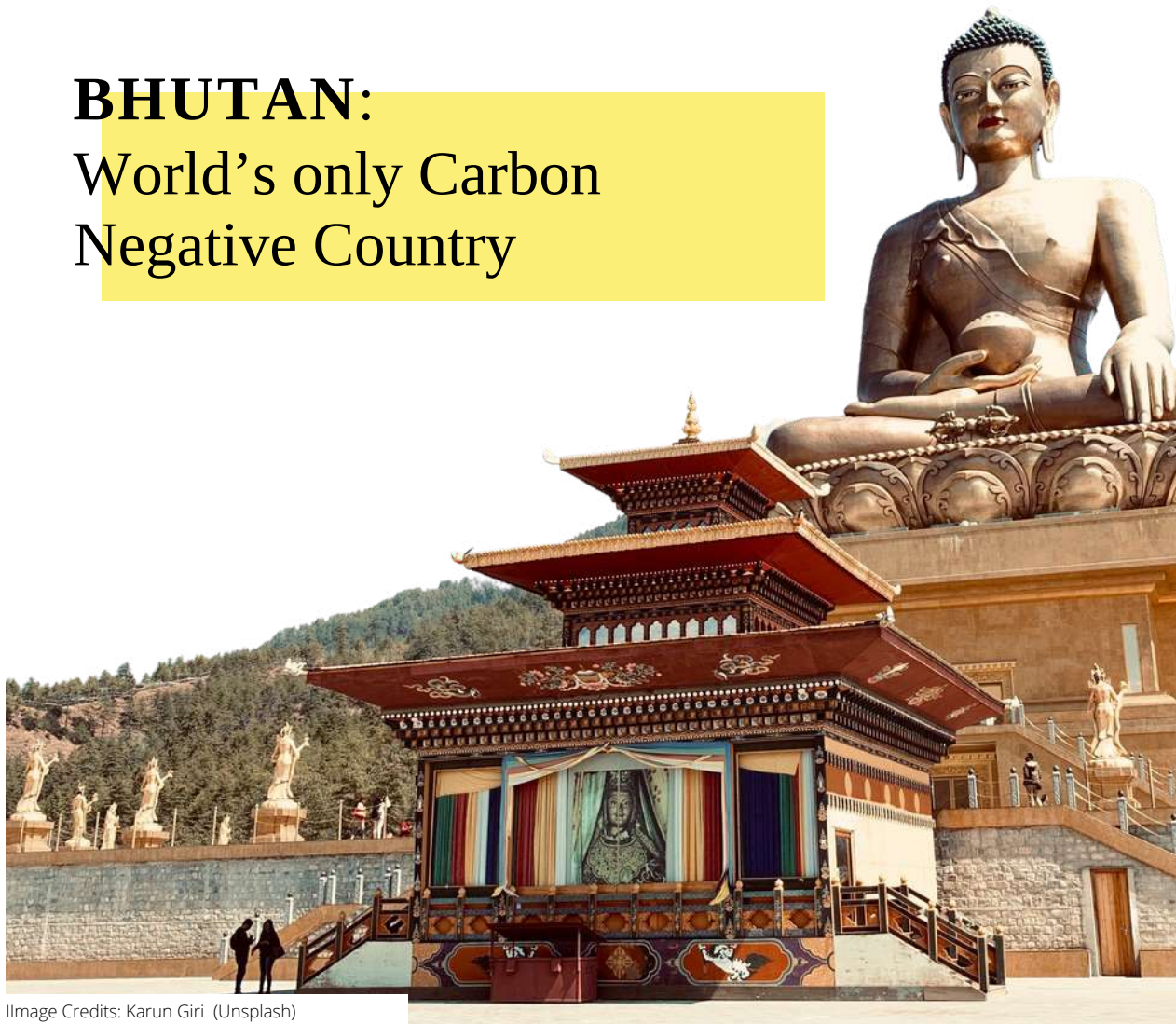


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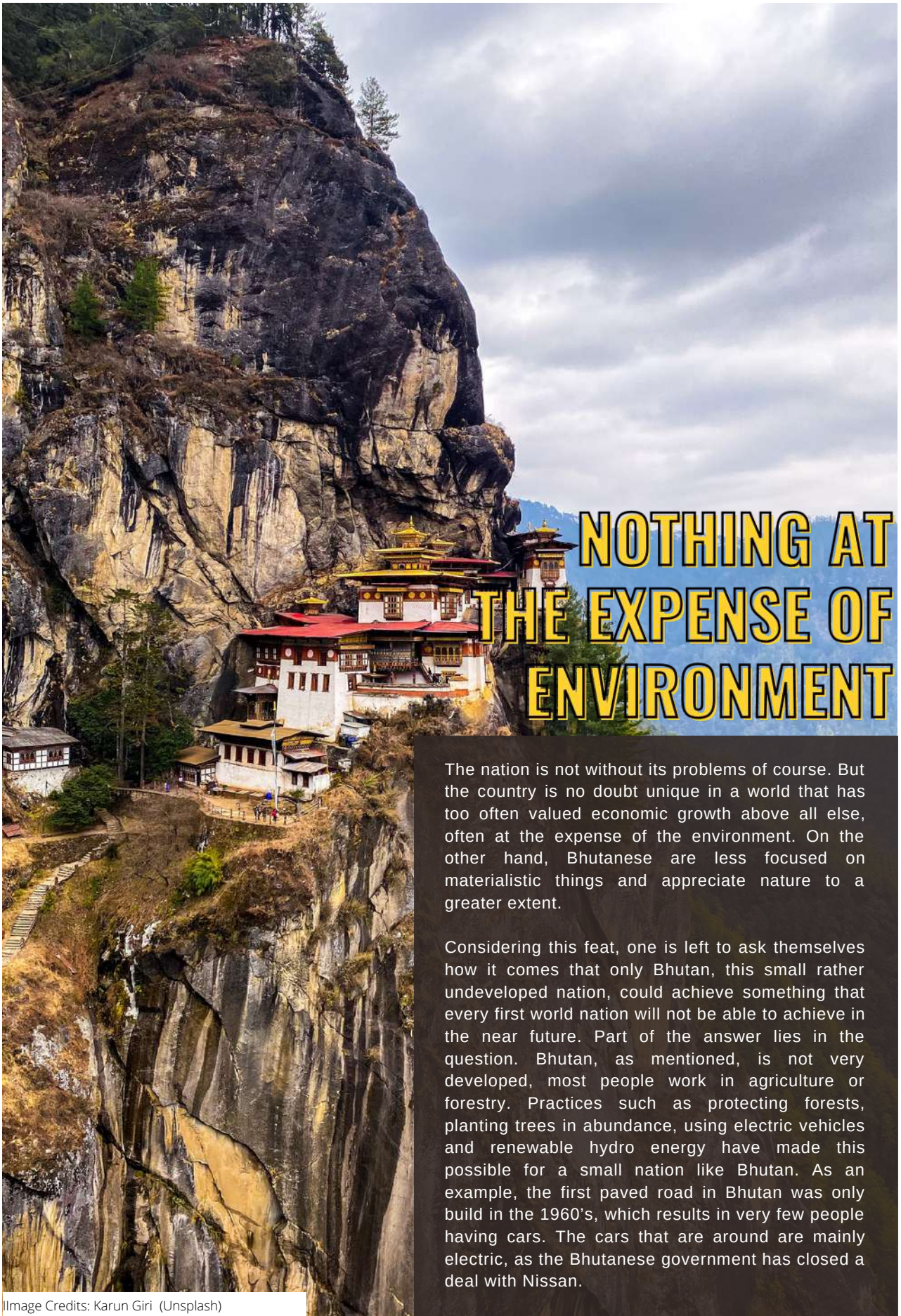
Bhutan, a country spanning approximately 14,800 square miles, is situated between India and China, which are major producers of carbon dioxide and yet, it has managed to achieve complete carbon neutrality in the past years. The World needs to learn from this small country which has its country's mission to put happiness before economic growth and set a world standard for environmental preservation.

With a small population of approximately 8,00,000 people, Bhutan is believed to be one of the greenest countries in the world, removing nearly three times as much CO₂ as it produces. Bhutan provides a tangible example of a country seeking to balance care for the environment, preservation of culture and economic growth. Promising to remain carbon neutral into the future is something all nations can strive for.

Bhutan has built Sustainability into its National Identity

"Our enlightened monarchs have worked tirelessly to develop our country, balancing economic growth carefully with social development, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation, all within the framework of good governance," Tshering Tobgay, Bhutan's former Prime Minister said at a 2016 TED talk.

In fact, the Country developed its signature Gross National Happiness index based on four pillars: sustainable development, environmental protection, cultural preservation, and good governance. In a global society obsessed with economic measures, this model provides a revolutionary and holistic understanding of development. It recognises the importance of economic growth but asserts that it must not undermine the nation's distinct culture or pristine environment.



NOTHING AT THE EXPENSE OF ENVIRONMENT

The nation is not without its problems of course. But the country is no doubt unique in a world that has too often valued economic growth above all else, often at the expense of the environment. On the other hand, Bhutanese are less focused on materialistic things and appreciate nature to a greater extent.

Considering this feat, one is left to ask themselves how it comes that only Bhutan, this small rather undeveloped nation, could achieve something that every first world nation will not be able to achieve in the near future. Part of the answer lies in the question. Bhutan, as mentioned, is not very developed, most people work in agriculture or forestry. Practices such as protecting forests, planting trees in abundance, using electric vehicles and renewable hydro energy have made this possible for a small nation like Bhutan. As an example, the first paved road in Bhutan was only build in the 1960's, which results in very few people having cars. The cars that are around are mainly electric, as the Bhutanese government has closed a deal with Nissan.

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Bhutan is the only country in the world that by its own constitution protects its forests. Environmental protection is enshrined in their constitution. Not only have they outlawed export logging, but have also an article in their constitution that states that the Himalayan nation needs to have at least 60% of its surface area forested. Currently, the nation has over 70% of the total surface area wooded, including the mountainous terrain on which trees can hardly grow. Another factor that helps to keep the level of forestation and thus the level of carbon dioxide absorption at an elevated level is the fact that as a celebration, for example at the birth of their Monarch's child, Bhutanese people plant trees. At the aforementioned date, for example, over 100,000 trees were planted as each household planted at least one.

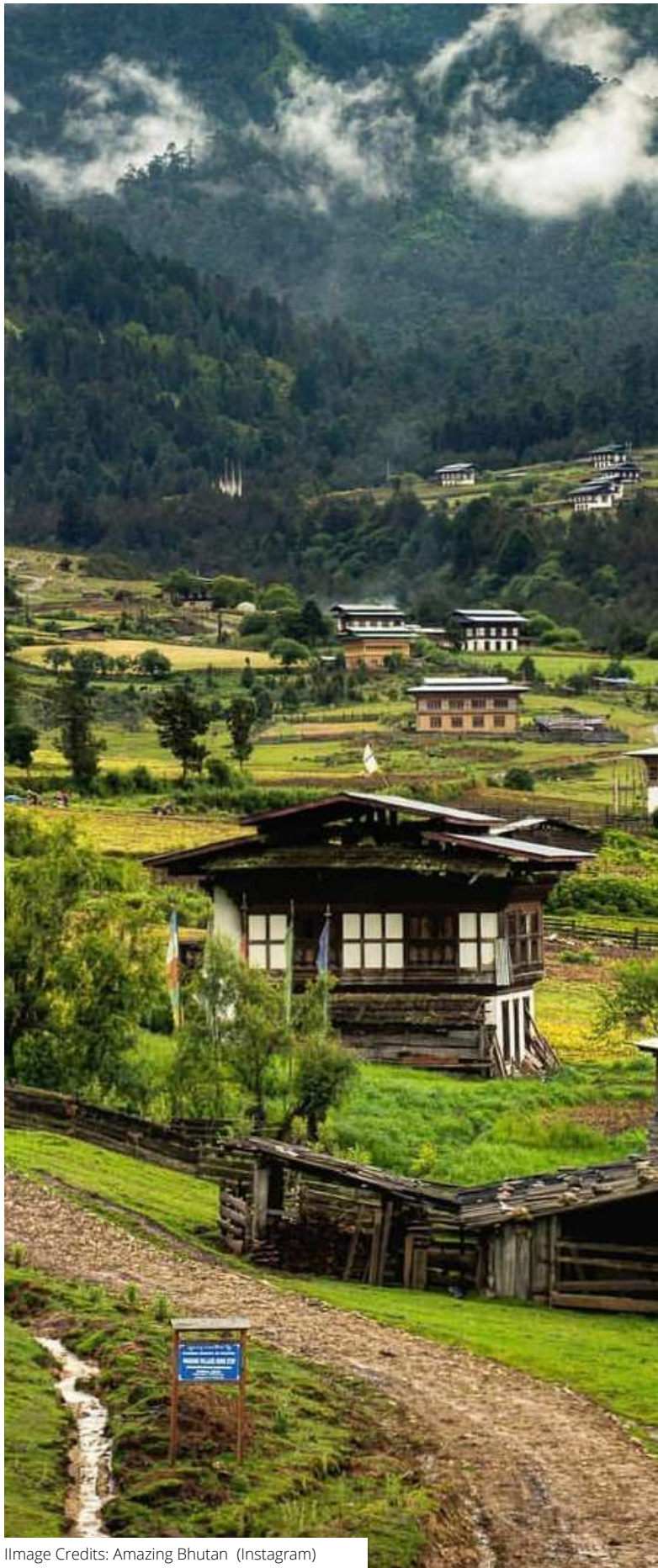
Bhutan utilises its extensive river resources to generate large amounts of renewable hydro energy, propelling the nation to carbon negative status. Almost all the country's electricity comes from hydropower. In fact, it produces so much hydroelectricity that it sells it to neighbouring countries, which Bhutan claims offsets another 4.4 million tons of annual CO₂ emissions. And Bhutan says that by 2025, increased hydroelectricity exports will let the country offset up to 22.4 million tons of CO₂ per year in the region.

Clean Bhutan, Green Bhutan

The Government's commitment to environmental protection is further evident in their provision of free electricity to rural farmers, investment in sustainable transport and national programs Clean Bhutan and Green Bhutan.

"Bhutan is on a "green and low-carbon development pathway" with government initiatives to make the country's agriculture 100% organic by 2020 and waste-free by 2030. The country is also looking at increasing its share of renewables while decreasing its reliance on hydropower and electricity imports in the winter. So, it's currently exploring wind, biogas and solar", Juergen Nagler, of the UN Development Program in Bhutan.

Bhutan even limits the number of visitors entering the country with a daily fee of \$250 per person to ensure the environment is not spoiled by mass tourism. The fee covers lodging in 3-star accommodations, all meals, a licensed tour guide, camping and trekking equipment, domestic travel and taxes and fees. A daily sustainable fee of \$65 is also included in the package. This goes towards funding education, healthcare and poverty alleviation, along with the building of infrastructure to accommodate growing tourism.



"The health facilities in Bhutan are free and education up to high school is also free. For those who advance, the education is free until the college degree," a representative of the Bhutan Tourism Council says.

"Bhutan (could have said) 'we want to be more connected to our neighbours, we want more industrialization, we want more economic development ... but they didn't.

"Leadership is all about deciding what to do and doing it, and the leadership of Bhutan have decided they're going to remain carbon negative ... and they're sticking to their guns."

"The country can act as an example to others. "Climate change is human-made - we caused the problems, we can also create the solutions," he says. "And the solutions are there if we can muster the willingness. In Bhutan the willingness comes from its wisdom and enlightened leadership", says Nagler.

Bhutan is carbon negative. This label doesn't sound like it is something worthy, however, it is not only respectable but extremely remarkable. Most countries struggle with trying to be carbon neutral or not too carbon positive, meaning that they try to absorb as much carbon dioxide as they propel into our atmosphere, or at least try to not propel disproportionate amounts in comparison to the carbon dioxide they can filter from the environment.

In conclusion, these measures that Bhutan has taken are not feasible for every country, especially considering the state of development and cultural as well as social mind-set of most nations. However, Bhutan's achievement does demonstrate what can be achieved when environmental sustainability is at the forefront of the political agenda.

Sources

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