

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024



འབྲུག་གི་དང་ཁྲིམས་ལྷན་ཚུལ།  
JUDICIARY OF BHUTAN



ཁྲིམས་འོག་དབེར་མེད་དང་མཉམ།  
EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW



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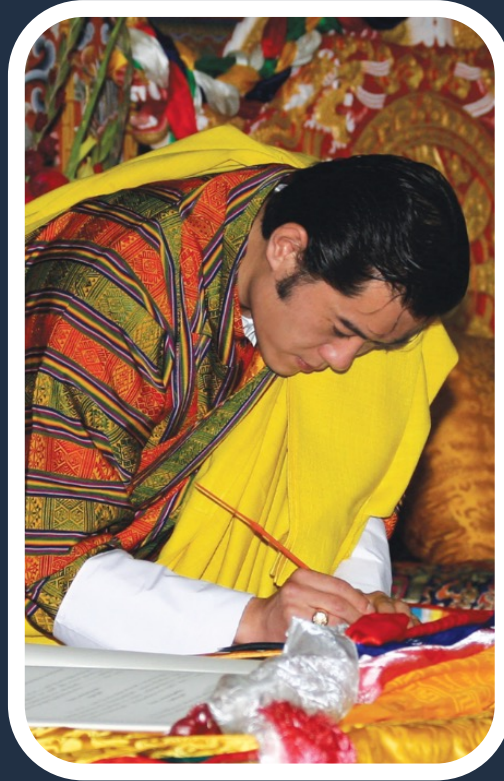


“ Laws are the foundation of order, security, prosperity, and social harmony. However, many countries face challenges due to an over-abundance of laws, poor public understanding, and weak enforcement. This burdens the people and stifles innovation and enterprise.

In Bhutan, we must ensure that laws, particularly those affecting the economy, are enacted swiftly and amended when necessary to create an agile, responsive legal system that fosters progress rather than impedes it. Such a system will be essential to ensure the smooth convergence of the GMC with the rest of Bhutan. Our goal is to establish one of the best legal systems in the world within the next 10 years.

Laws should serve the nation, its people, and the economy.”

- His Majesty The King, 17th December 2024



## VISION

Strive to create a free, fair, just, and harmonious society through effective resolution of disputes and expeditious dispensation of justice.

## MISSION

Safeguard, uphold, and administer justice fairly and independently without fear, favour, or undue delay in accordance with the rule of law to inspire trust and confidence and to enhance access to justice.



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Supreme Court of Bhutan

༄། དཔལ་ལྷན་འབྲུག་པའི་ཞིམས་ཀྱི་འདུན་ས།  
ROYAL COURT OF JUSTICE

## FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF BHUTAN

The Judiciary of Bhutan has remained steadfast in upholding the sacred trust placed upon it by the Constitution, ensuring the fair and efficient administration of justice. In 2024, our courts have made significant strides in fulfilling this mandate, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to resolving disputes with integrity, impartiality, and efficiency. I take this opportunity to commend our esteemed judicial personnel—the justices, judges, court officials, and support staff—whose dedication and perseverance have contributed to the continued decline in pending cases. Their tireless efforts ensure that justice is not only delivered but also done so in a timely manner, strengthening public confidence in our legal system.

As Bhutan navigates an era of rapid change, both domestically and globally, our judiciary must remain vigilant and responsive to new challenges. It is imperative that we embrace judicial creativity, staying attuned to evolving legal, economic, and societal landscapes. In this spirit, the Judiciary must align itself with national initiatives such as the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC). The enactment and application of Law No. 1 within the GMC will serve as an inspiration to our adaptability and commitment to progressive legal frameworks. To remain an institution of trust and relevance, we must continuously enhance our efficiency, modernize our judicial processes, and cultivate a legal environment that fosters inclusivity, fairness, and justice for all.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all judicial personnel for their unwavering dedication to serving the Tsa-Wa-Sum. Your integrity and commitment to upholding the rule of law form the bedrock of our democracy. As we move forward, let us rededicate ourselves to the noble pursuit of justice, ensuring that the Judiciary of Bhutan remains a beacon of fairness, wisdom, and progress for generations to come.

Wishing everyone a year of growth and excellence. Tashi Delek !

**Chogyal Dago Rigdzin**  
CHIEF JUSTICE OF BHUTAN  
Supreme Court  
Royal Court of Justice  
Thimphu, Bhutan



# ABOUT THE JUDICIARY



*The Judiciary is one of the three arms of the Government, together with the Executive and the Legislature. The Judiciary is made up of the Supreme Court, High Court, Dzongkhag Courts, Dungkhag Courts and Bhutan National Legal Institute.*

## **1. SUPREME COURT OF BHUTAN**

The Supreme Court is headed by the Chief Justice of Bhutan. The Supreme Court consists of the Supreme Court Benches and Supreme Court Registry and is supported by the Judicial Administration team headed by the Registrar General of the Supreme Court. It hears both civil and criminal cases and is made of 5 Benches, namely, Singye Bench, Langchen Bench, Tachog Bench, Maja Bench, and Khading Bench. It serves as the ultimate authority on the interpretation of laws. It has appellate jurisdiction over High Court order/decision/judgment and exercises its Advisory Jurisdiction whenever a question of law or a fact is referred to it by His Majesty The King for consideration.

## **2. HIGH COURT OF BHUTAN**

Serving as the court of first instance for constitutional cases and providing appellate jurisdiction, the High Court is led by a Chief Justice of the High Court and six Justices. It is supported by its Administration team headed by the Registrar General of the High Court. It comprises of the Reldri Bench and the Khorlo Bench. Hears all civil and criminal appeals against decisions made by the Dzongkhag Courts and arbitration awards by the Alternative Dispute Resolution Center.

## **3. DZONGKHAG COURTS**

Dzongkhag Courts, 20 in total, serve as courts of first instance for most cases within their territorial jurisdiction and each Dzongkhag Court is presided over by a Drangpon. Few Dzongkhags have multiple benches. It exercises appellate jurisdiction over an appeal from order/decision/judgment of Dungkhag Courts.

## **4. DUNGKHAG COURTS**

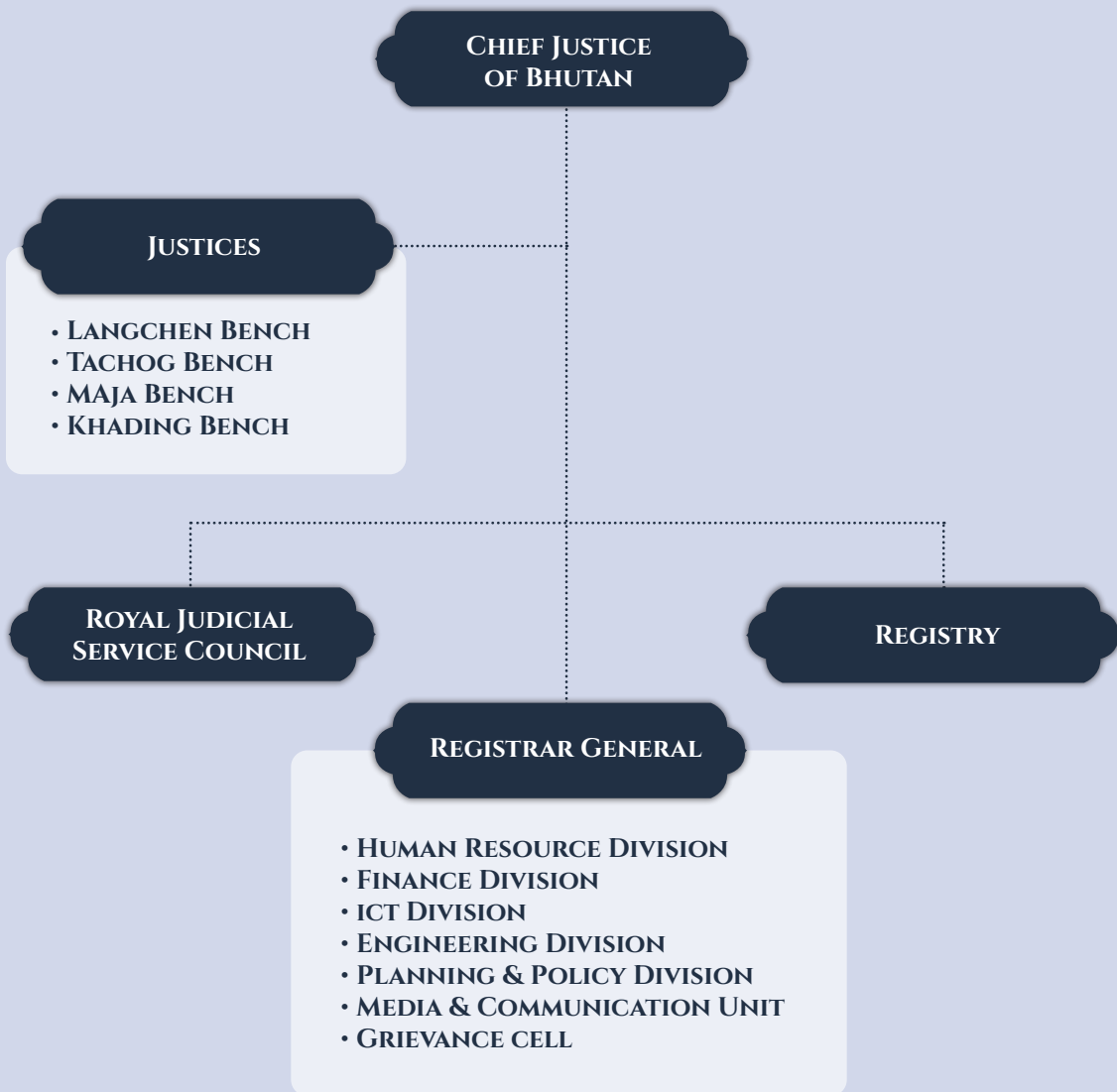
There are 15 Dungkhag Courts spread across 11 Dzongkhags. These courts serve as courts of first instance for cases within their jurisdiction and are presided over by a Dungkhag Drangpon. One Dungkhag has multiple benches.



# JUDICIARY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



## SUPREME COURT



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE (as of 21st February 2025)



## HIGH COURT

**CHIEF JUSTICE**

**JUSTICES**

- KHORLO BENCH
- RELDRI BENCH

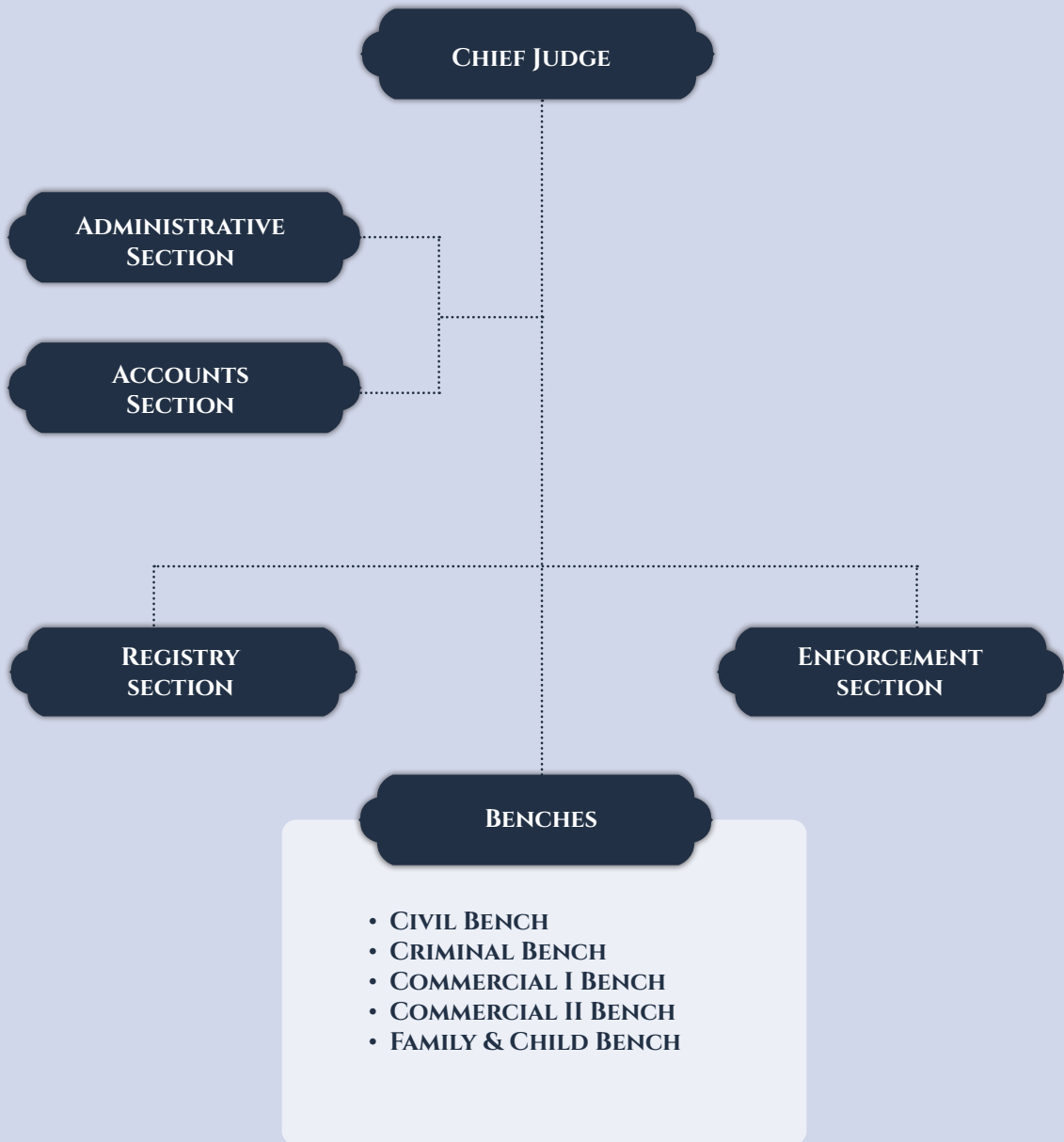
**REGISTRAR GENERAL**

- ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION
- ENFORCEMENT DIVISION
- PROCUREMENT DIVISION

**REGISTRY**

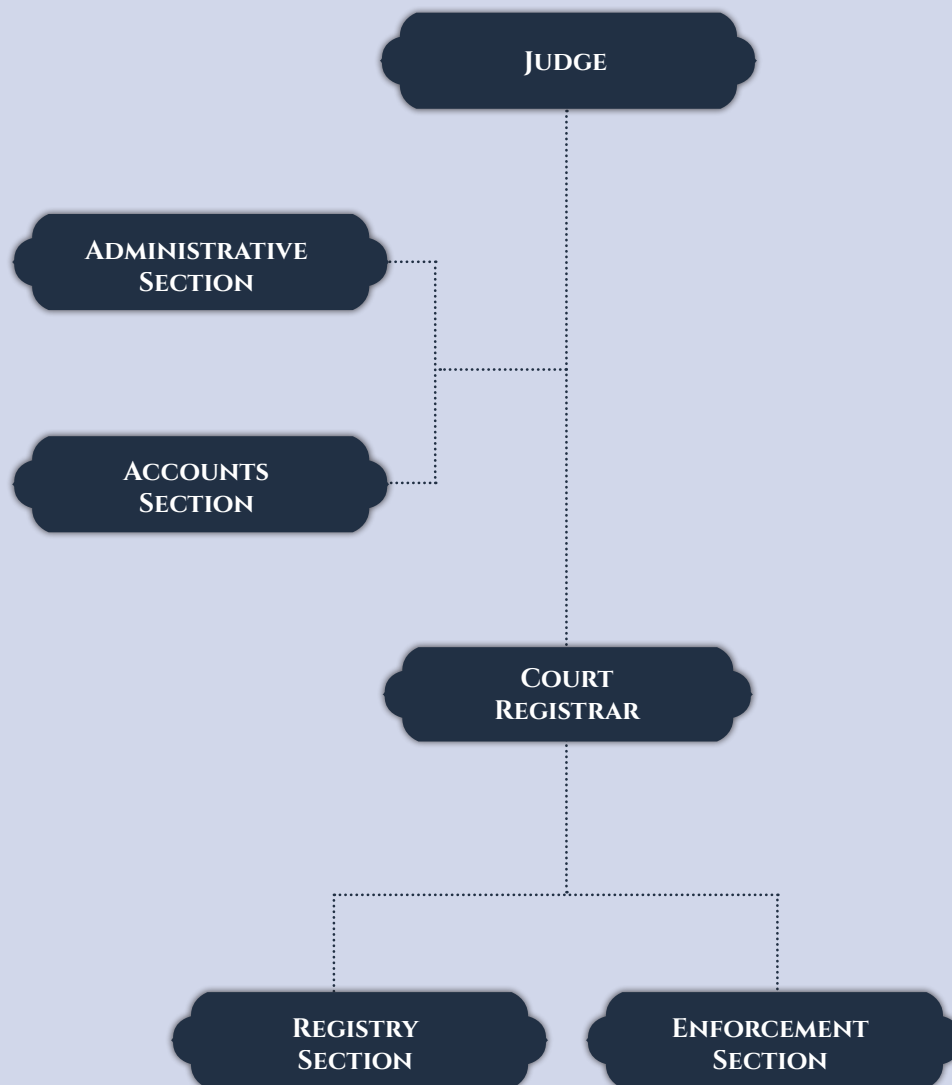
## DZONGKHAG/DUNGKHAG COURT

### DZONGKHAG COURT WITH SPECIALIZED BENCHES





## ANY OTHER COURT



## THE SUPREME COURT JUSTICES



L to R

■ Justice Kinley Dorji ■ Justice Norbu Tshering ■ Chief Justice Chogyal Dago Rigdzin ■ Justice Sangay Khandu

## THE HIGH COURT JUSTICES



L to R

■ Justice (Dr.) Jangchuk Norbu ■ Justice Pema Wangchuk ■ Justice Lobzang Rinzin Yargay ■ Chief Justice Dupa Dukpa  
■ Justice Pasang Wangmo ■ Justice Bir Bahadur Rai ■ Justice Kinley Namgay



## SUPREME COURT & HIGH COURT REGISTRAR GENERALS

L to R

- Registrar General Phurba Dorji of the Supreme Court
- Registrar General Chimi Dorji Shartsho of the High Court

## DZONGKHAG DRANGPONS



**Chief Drangpon Wangchuk Drukpa**  
Thimphu Dzongkhag Court  
(29 years in service)



**Drangpon Tharchean**  
Commercial Bench  
Thimphu Dzongkhag Court  
(30 years in service)



**Drangpon Rinchen Penjor**  
Haa Dzongkhag Court  
(29 years in service)



**Chief Drangpon Chador Phuntsho**  
Paro Dzongkhag Court  
(28 years in service)



**Drangpon Sonam Gyeltshen**  
Bumthang Dzongkhag Court  
(28 years in service)



**Chief Drangpon Ugyen Jamtsho**  
Wangdue Dzongkhag Court  
(28 years in service)



**Drangpon Tashi Dorji**  
Gasa Dzongkhag Court  
(28 years in service)



**Drangpon Norbu**  
Trashigang Dzongkhag Court  
(28 years in service)



**Drangpon Gembo Tashi**  
Sarpang Dzongkhag Court  
(23 years in service)



**Drangpon Pelden Wangmo**  
Family & Child Bench  
Thimphu Dzongkhag Court  
(20 years in service)



**Drangpon Tashi Yangzom**  
Tsirang Dzongkhag Court  
(19 years in service)



**Drangpon Karma Dorji**  
Punakha Dzongkhag Court  
(17 years in service)



**Drangpon Lhindup Zangpo**  
Trongsa Dzongkhag Court  
(18 years in service)



**Drangpon Pema Choden**  
Chukha Dzongkhag Court  
(16 years in service)



**Drangpon Kinley Tenzin**  
Zhemgang Dzongkhag Court  
(20 years in service)



**Drangpon Pema Dechen**  
Civil and Commercial Bench  
Paro Dzongkhag Court  
(17 years in service)



**Drangpon Kesang Choden**  
Criminal Bench  
Thimphu Dzongkhag Court  
(17 years in service)



**Drangpon Dechen Wangmo**  
Civil Bench  
Thimphu Dzongkhag Court  
(14 years in service)



**Drangpon Thongjay**  
Dagana Dzongkhag Court  
(13 years in service)



**Drangpon Singye Wangdi**  
Samtse Dzongkhag Court  
(13 years in service)



**Drangpon Jigme Lodey**  
Mongar Dzongkhag Court  
(13 years in service)



**Drangpon Gyelpo**  
Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag Court  
(12 years in service)



**Drangpon Sangay Chedup**  
S/Jongkhar Dzongkhag Court  
(13 years in service)



**Drangpon Tenzin Dorji**  
Lhuentse Dzongkhag Court  
(12 years in service)



**Drangpon Richa Gurung**  
Bench II  
Wangdue Dzongkhag Court  
(12 years in service)



**Drangpon Sonam Tshering**  
Trashi Yangtse Dzongkhag Court  
(33 years in service)



## DUNGKHAG DRANGPONS



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Damcho Lhundup**  
Samdrupcholing Dungkhag  
Court (37 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Tobgay**  
Sombeykha Dungkhag Court  
(35 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Ugyen Nima**  
Tashicholing Dungkhag Court  
(39 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Bholanath Dahal**  
Dorokha Dungkhag Court  
(35 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Purushotam Ghimerey**  
Lhamoizingkha Dungkhag Court  
(27 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Dungal Tshering**  
Wamrong Dungkhag Court  
(11 years in service)



**Drangpon Rabjam  
Phuntsho Wangchuk**  
Registry  
Supreme Court  
(11 years in service)



**Drangpon Rabjam  
Tshering Pelden**  
Public Notary Office  
Thimphu Dzongkhag Court  
(9 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Pema Yechang**  
Bench I  
Phuentsholing Dungkhag Court  
(9 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Dawa Gyeltshen**  
Gelephu Dungkhag Court  
(8 years in service)



**Dungkhag Drangpon  
Jigme Gyaltshen**  
Bench II  
Phuentsholing Dungkhag Court  
(7 years in service)



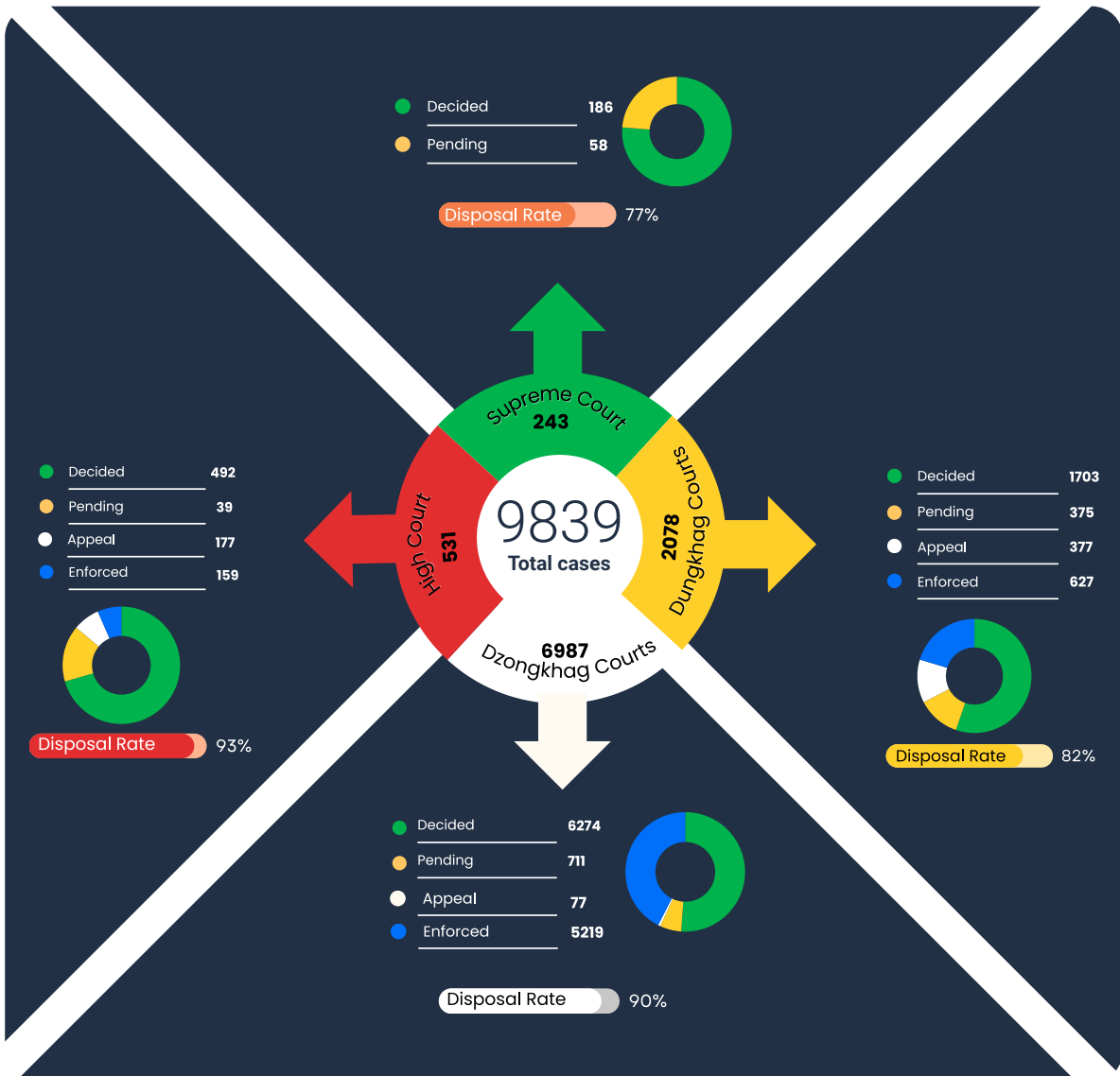
**Drangpon Rabjam  
Tshering Yangdon**  
Enforcement Unit  
Thimphu Dzongkhag Court  
(7 years in service)



# JUDICIAL PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW



## A) JUDICIAL YEAR IN FIGURES





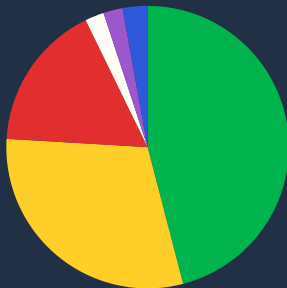
### Court-Annexed Mediated Cases

●	Dungkhag Courts	290
●	Dzongkhag Courts	1951
●	High Court	3

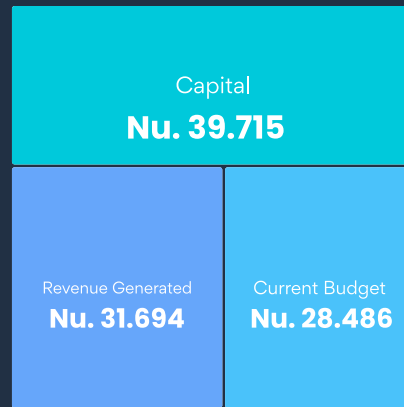


### Notary Services

●	Marriage Certificates	6621
●	Attestation of Docs	4319
●	Affirmation of MC	2426
●	Child Travel Docs	313
●	Closing and Transfer of Accounts and Shares	318
●	Others	410

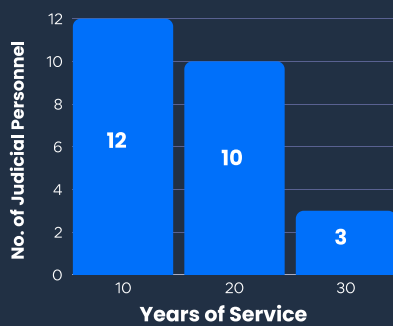


### Budget and Revenue

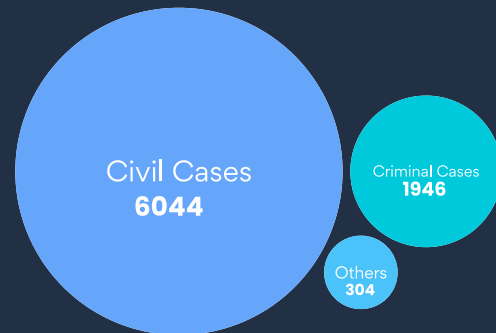


Amount in Millions

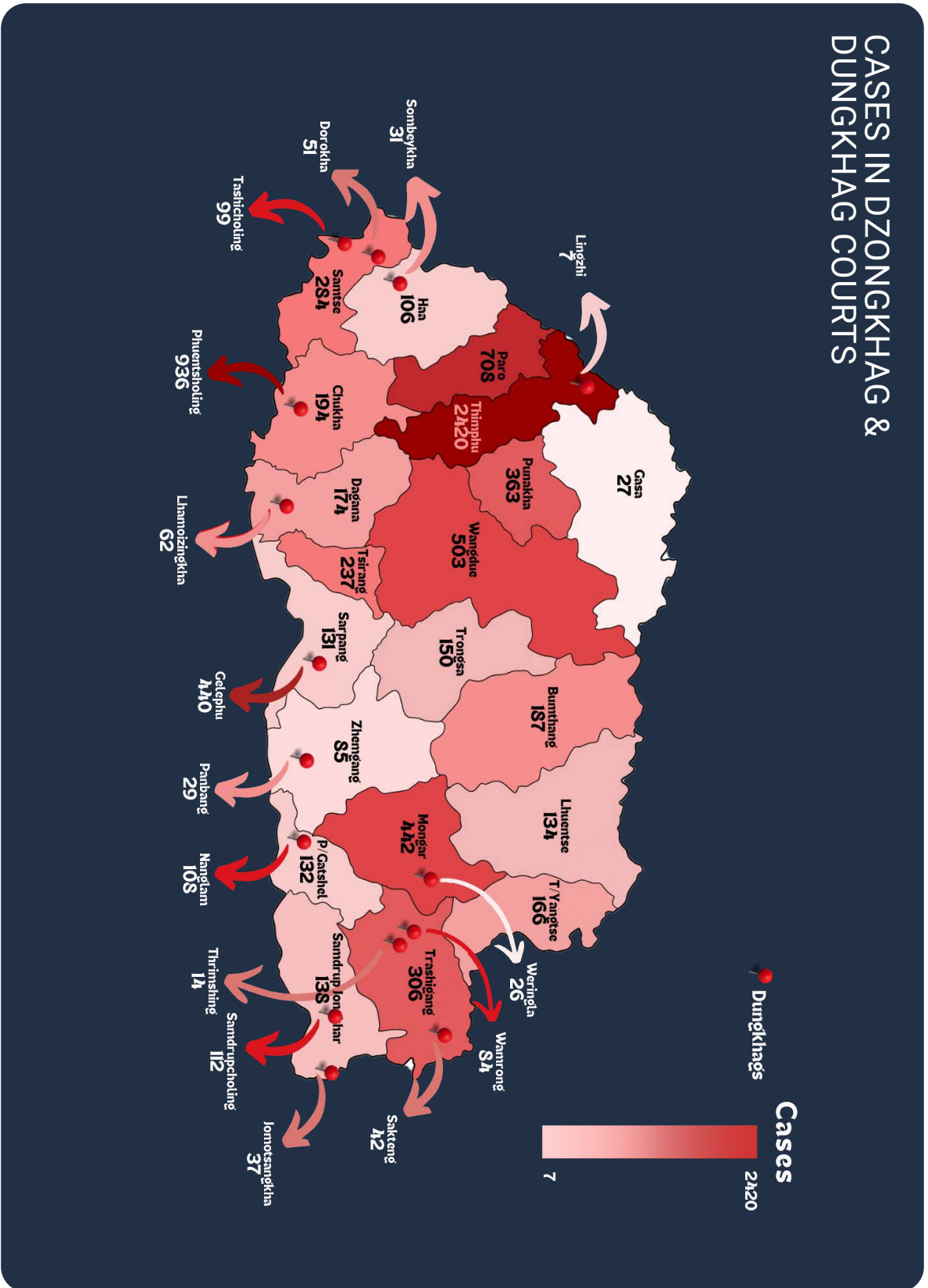
### Civil Service Awards



### Classification of Registered Cases (Dungkhag and Dzongkhag)



## CASES OVERVIEW



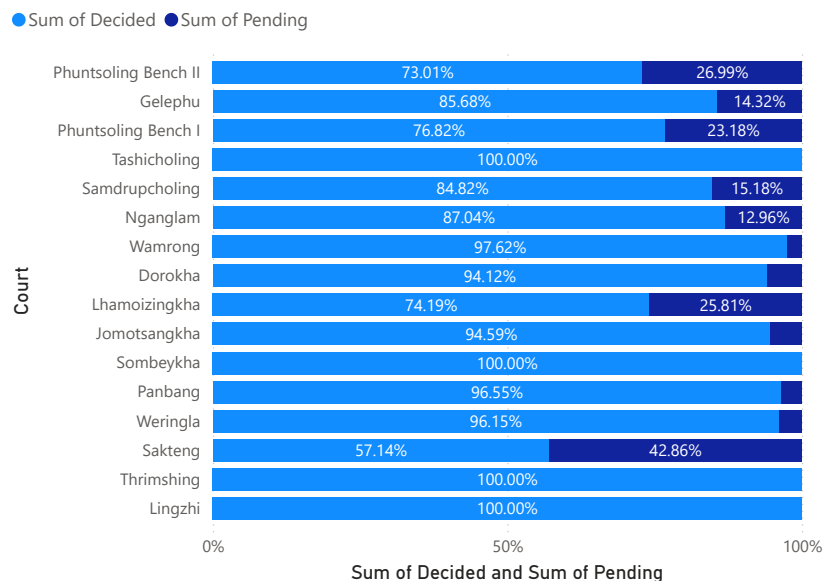


## B) CASE STATISTICS

### i. DUNGKHAG COURTS

Sl. No	Court	Opening Balance	Registered	Total	Decided	Pending	Pending Beyond 12 Months	Appeals to Dzongkhag Court
1	Dorokha	10	41	51	48	3	0	2
2	Gelephu	57	383	440	377	63	0	36
3	Jomotsangkha	6	31	37	35	2	0	0
4	Lhamoizingkha	6	56	62	46	16	2	1
5	Lingzhi	0	7	7	7	0	0	1
6	Nganglam	10	98	108	94	14	0	6
7	Panbang	2	27	29	28	1	0	1
8	Phuntsoling Bench I	89	295	384	295	89	21	18
	Phuntsoling Bench II	238	314	552	403	149	71	5
9	Sakteng	0	42	42	24	18	0	0
10	Samdrupcholing	6	106	112	95	17	0	2
11	Sombeykha	0	31	31	31	0	0	0
12	Tashicholing	3	96	99	99	0	0	2
13	Thrimshing	0	14	14	14	0	0	0
14	Wamrong	4	80	84	82	2	0	2
15	Weringla	5	21	26	25	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>436</b>	<b>1642</b>	<b>2078</b>	<b>1703</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>77</b>

Sum of Decided and Sum of Pending by Court



Fifteen Dungkhag Courts handled a total of 2,078 cases. And, they successfully resolved 1,703 cases, yielding a disposal rate of 81.95%.

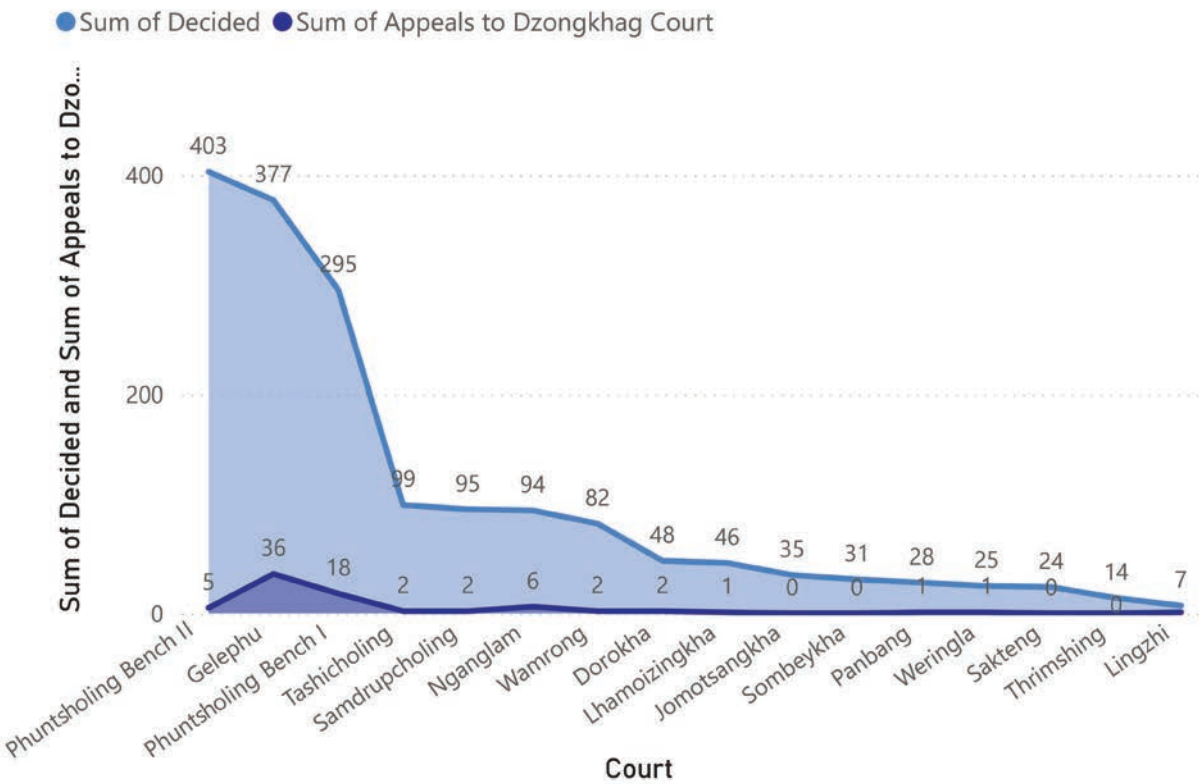
The highest volume courts were the Phuentsholing Dungkhag Court's Bench II, which received 552 (26.5% of the total cases) cases and decided 403 (73.01% disposal rate), Gelephu Dungkhag Court, which received 440 (21.17% of the total cases) cases and decided 377 (85.68% disposal rate), and Phuentsholing Dungkhag Court's Bench I, which received 384 (18.4% of the total cases) cases and decided 295 (76.82% disposal rate).

Likewise, Wamrong Dungkhag Court decided 82 out of 84 cases (97.62% disposal rate), Weringla Dungkhag Court decided 25 out of 26 cases (96.15% disposal rate), and Panbang Dungkhag Court decided 28 out of 29 cases (96.55% disposal rate). Further, Samdrupcholing Dungkhag Court has received 112 cases and decided 95 (84.82% disposal rate) and Nganglam

Dungkhag Court has received 108 cases and decided 94 (87.04% disposal rate). However, the Sakteng Dungkhag Court decided only 24 out of 42 cases (57.14% disposal rate) mainly due to a judge temporarily having to manage the Sakteng Court with Wamrong Court. On the other hand, Dungkhag Courts of Sombeykha, Tashicholing, Thrimshing and Lingzhi did not have any pending cases achieving 100% disposal rate. These Dungkhag Courts in general received a relatively lesser number of cases.

There was no appeal from the Dungkhag Courts of Jomotsangkha, Sakteng, Sombeykha, and Thrimshing. Likewise, the Phuentsholing Dungkhag Court's Bench II, which decided the highest number of cases, also maintained a relatively low appeal rate of only 1.24%. The year 2024 saw only 77 appeals from the 1703 cases decided by the Dungkhag Courts. An overall appeal rate for the Dungkhag Court Judgments remained at 4.52%.

**Sum of Decided and Sum of Appeals to Dzongkhag Court**

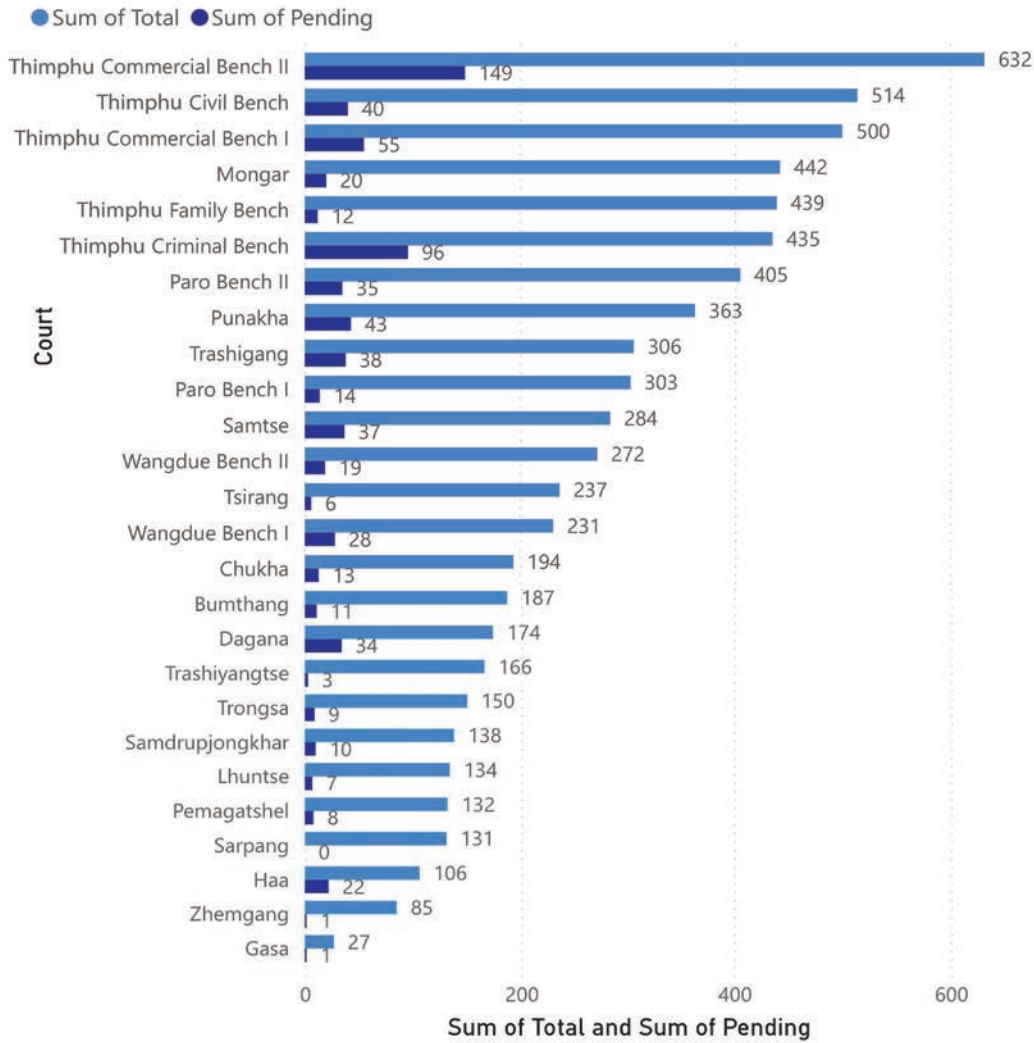




## ii. DZONGKHAG COURTS

Sl. No	Court	Opening Balance	Registered	Total	Decided	Pending	Pending Beyond 12 Months	Appeals to High Court
1	Bumthang	25	162	187	176	11	0	4
2	Chukha	23	171	194	181	13	0	11
3	Dagana	38	136	174	140	34	0	5
4	Gasa	4	23	27	26	1	0	2
5	Haa	33	73	106	84	22	0	4
6	Lhuentse	16	118	134	127	7	0	7
7	Mongar	36	406	442	422	20	0	11
8	Paro Bench I	49	254	303	289	14	0	18
	Paro Bench II	65	340	405	370	35	0	34
9	Pema Gatshel	11	121	132	123	8	0	8
10	Punakha	40	323	363	320	43	3	22
11	Samdrupjongkhar	6	132	138	128	10	0	4
12	Samtse	26	258	284	247	37	0	9
13	Sarpang	4	127	131	131	0	0	19
14	Thimphu Criminal Bench	113	322	435	339	96	9	31
	Thimphu Family Bench	21	418	439	427	12	0	17
	Thimphu Commercial Bench I	24	476	500	445	55	0	38
	Thimphu Commercial Bench II	174	458	632	483	149	53	17
	Thimphu Civil Bench	53	461	514	474	40	0	62
15	Trashigang	41	265	306	268	38	1	8
16	Trashiyangtse	12	154	166	163	3	0	6
17	Trongsa	22	128	150	141	9	0	10
18	Tsirang	24	213	237	231	6	0	11
19	Wangdue Bench I	62	169	231	203	28	0	10
	Wangdue Bench II	52	220	272	253	19	0	8
20	Zhemgang	10	75	85	83	1	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>984</b>	<b>6003</b>	<b>6987</b>	<b>6274</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>377</b>

**Sum of Total and Sum of Pending by Court**



Dzongkhag courts handled a total of 6987 cases and decided 6274 cases, yielding a disposal rate of 89.79%.

Among the Dzongkhag courts, Thimphu Commercial Bench has the highest pending rate at 23.58%. Courts like Trashiyangtse and Zhemgang demonstrate low pending rates at 1.81% and 1.18%, respectively.

Conversely, Thimphu Criminal Bench (22.07%) and Haa (20.75%) show higher pending rates. Sarpang had the highest appeal rate at 14.50%, followed by Thimphu Civil Bench at 13.08% and Thimphu Commercial Bench I at 8.54%. On the other hand, Zhemgang had the lowest appeal percentage at just 1.20%.

Of the 6,274 cases decided, 377 were appealed to the High Court, resulting in an overall appeal rate of only 6.01%.

**iii. HIGH COURT**

Sl. No.	Miscellaneous Matters	Bench	Opening Balance	Registered	Total	Decided	Pending
1	1308	Reldri Bench	18	241	259	249	10
2		Khorlo Bench	31	241	272	243	29
<b>Total</b>			<b>49</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>39</b>



#### iv. SUPREME COURT

Sl. No	Miscellaneous Matters	Bench	Opening Balance	Registered	Total	Decided	Pending	Pending Beyond 12 months
1	624	Langchen Bench	17	43	60	44	16	1
2		Tachog Bench	20	43	63	52	11	0
3		Maja Bench	12	43	55	38	17	0
4		Khading Bench	22	43	65	52	14	0
Total			71	172	243	186	58	1

#### v. PENDING CASE STATISTICS OF PAST 5 YEARS

Year	Case Pending	Cases Pending Beyond 12 Months
2020	2873	342
2021	1806	100
2022	1779	64
2023	1621	179
2024	1183	161

#### OVERVIEW OF CASE REPORT

The Supreme Court managed a total of 243 cases across its four Benches (Langchen, Tachog, Maja, and Khading), resolving 186 cases and leaving 58 pending. Notably, only one case in the Langchen Bench exceeded the 12-month mark. Meanwhile, the High Court, operating through its Khorlo and Reldri Benches, handled 531 cases, successfully concluding 492 and leaving 39 pending.

At the Dzongkhag Court level, 6,987 cases were processed across 20 jurisdictions, with 6,274 cases resolved, achieving an impressive

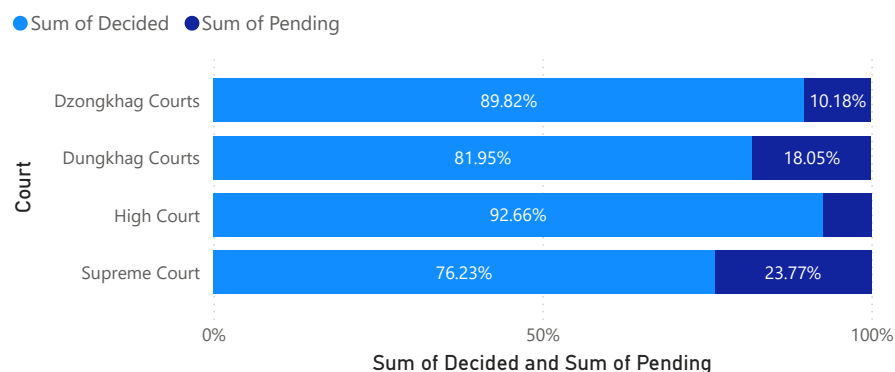
resolution of 89.8%. However, challenges were evident in the Thimphu Dzongkhag Commercial Bench II, which reported the highest number of pending cases at 149, including 66 cases pending over 12 months. Additionally, 377 cases from the Dzongkhag Courts were appealed to the High Court.

The Dungkhag Courts handled 2,078 cases across 15 courts, resolving 1,703 cases, resulting in an 82% resolution rate. The Phuentsholing Dungkhag Bench II faced the heaviest workload, with 552 total cases and 149 pending, including 94 cases exceeding the 12-month timeline.

Based on the statistics, the overall case disposal rate across all courts stands at 87.96%, with 8,655 cases resolved out of a total of 9,839 cases. Breaking this down by court level:

1. The Supreme Court has a disposal rate of 76.54% (186 out of 243 cases).
2. The High Court demonstrates a disposal rate of 92.66% (492 out of 531 cases).
3. The Dzongkhag Courts show a disposal rate of 89.79% (6,274 out of 6,987 cases).
4. The Dungkhag Courts maintain a disposal rate of 81.95% (1,703 out of 2,078 cases).

Sum of Decided , Sum of Pending and Sum of Decided by Court





Regarding cases pending beyond 12 months, a total of 161 cases, (1.64% of the total caseload) fall into this category. The distribution of these long-pending cases is as follows:

1. Dungkhag Courts account for 94 cases (4.52% of their total caseload).
2. Dzongkhag Courts have 66 cases (0.94% of their total caseload).
3. The Supreme Court has only 1 case (0.41% of its total caseload).
4. The High Court has zero cases pending beyond 12 months.

### **Significance of Lower Courts' Appeal Rate**

The appeal rate of Dungkhag Courts remained at 4.52% and that of Dzongkhag Courts at 6.01%. A small rate of appeals in the judiciary indicates several positive aspects of the judicial system. It would most likely indicate a high quality of initial judgments, public trust and satisfaction, effective case management, reduced judicial burden and cost and time savings.

A low appeal rate at Dungkhag and Dzongkhag Courts suggests that lower courts are delivering well-reasoned, fair, and legally sound judgments, reducing the need for higher judicial review. When litigants accept lower court decisions without appealing, it reflects confidence in the judiciary's fairness and efficiency, indicating that parties are satisfied with the outcomes. A low appeal rate may point to efficient case handling, proper application of laws, and effective dispute resolution mechanisms at the initial level. Fewer appeals can ease the workload on higher courts, allowing them to focus on complex or precedent-setting cases, thereby improving overall judicial efficiency. A low appeal rate reduces the financial and time burdens on litigants, as fewer cases undergo prolonged litigation processes.

However, a very low appeal rate could also signal potential issues, such as limited awareness

of appeal rights, barriers to accessing higher courts, or reluctance to challenge decisions due to systemic inefficiencies. Therefore, while a low appeal rate is generally a positive indicator, it should be analyzed in context to ensure it reflects genuine satisfaction and not underlying barriers to justice.

### **Significance of Enforcement**

The Judiciary's successful enforcement of 6,005 judgments in 2024 demonstrates the effectiveness of its enforcement system. Dungkhag Courts enforced 627 judgments, Dzongkhag Courts 5,219, and the High Court and Supreme Court collectively 159. Significantly, the Enforcement Unit of the Thimphu Dzongkhag Court led with 3,452 enforced judgments.

These figures signify the vital role of enforcement in the judicial process. Effective enforcement transforms court decisions into tangible outcomes, safeguarding the rights of successful litigants and deterring non-compliance with court orders. This process is crucial in maintaining the integrity of the judicial system and ensuring that justice is not merely proclaimed but realized.

This success is attributed to two key factors: dedicated enforcement units within courts, allowing focused attention on enforcing judgments, and strong institutional collaboration with external agencies like the Royal Bhutan Police, Office of the Attorney General, National Land Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Immigration Department, and financial institutions, enhancing the Judiciary's ability to enforce judgments across different jurisdictions.

This enforcement system not only ensures that justice is served but also reinforces public confidence in the judicial process, demonstrating that court rulings have real-world consequences and are not merely symbolic gestures.



#### vi. APPEALS FROM HIGH COURT TO SUPREME COURT

Sl. No	Court	Bench	Appeal to Supreme Court
1	High Court	Reldri Bench	111
2		Khorlo Bench	66
<b>Total</b>			<b>177</b>

#### vii. ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER

Sl. No	Institution	Appeals to High Court
1	ADRC	22

#### viii. TYPES OF CASE DISPOSAL HIGH COURT

Sl. No	Court	Affirmed	Fully Reversed	Partially Reversed	Remand	Negotiated Settlement	Withdrawal	Dismissal
1	Khorlo Bench	149	14	72	1	6	1	0
2	Reldri Bench	104	14	113	2	3	11	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>253</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>

#### ix. SUPREME COURT

Sl. No	Court	Affirmed	Fully Reversed	Partially Reversed	Dismissed
1	Langchen Bench	8	0	14	22
2	Tachog Bench	23	0	16	13
3	Maja Bench	23	4	6	19
4	Khading Bench	13	3	16	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>67</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>74</b>

## C) REPORT ON COURT-ANNEXED MEDIATION

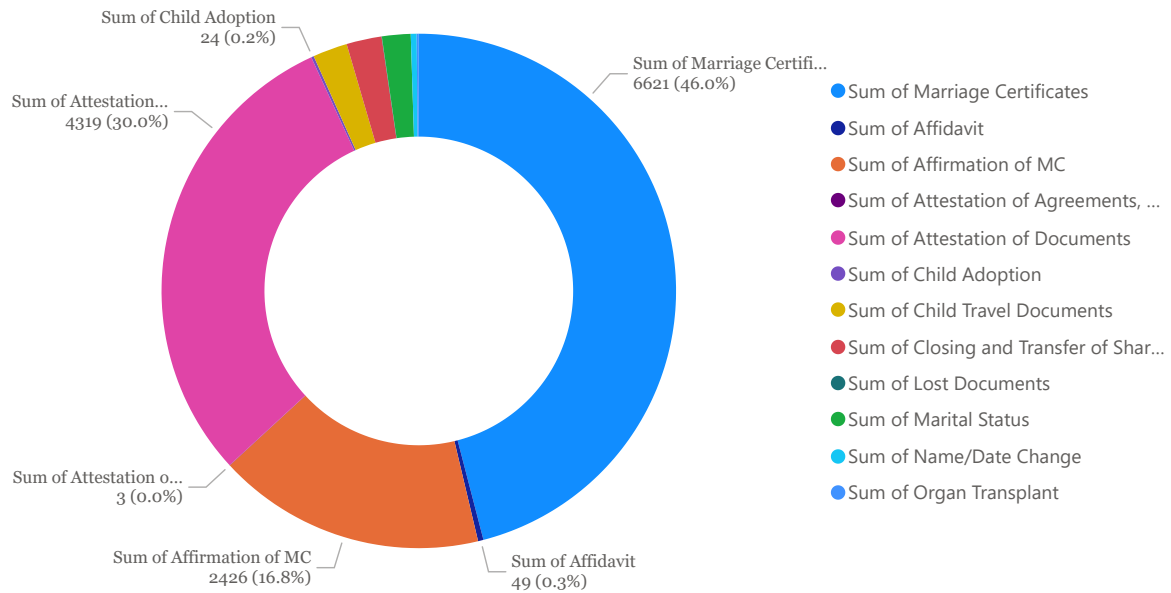
#### i. DUNGKHAG COURTS, DZONGKHAG COURTS AND HIGH COURT

Sl. No	Court	No. of Cases Mediated
1	Dungkhag Court	290
2	Dzongkhag Court	1951
3	High Court	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>2244</b>





## Notary Services



### Notary Services

Courts play a multifaceted role in providing notary services, with marriage-related services (certificates and affirmations) constituting the majority at 62.80% of all services provided. This underscores the significance of these services within the courts' notary functions. Document attestations, which account for 29.98% of services, further highlight the courts' critical role in validating a wide range of legal and administrative documents. Together, marriage-related services and document attestations make up 92.78% of all notary services, reflecting the core focus areas of the courts' notary work.

While other services, such as lost document handling and will attestations, represent a very small percentage (0.02% each), their availability demonstrates the courts' commitment to addressing diverse citizen needs, no matter how infrequent. This reflects the courts' integral role in supporting the legal and administrative framework of the country.

# YEAR IN REVIEW



## HIS MAJESTY THE KING GRANTED AUDIENCE

On June 14, 2024, His Majesty the King granted an audience to the judiciary at the Royal University of Bhutan's Hall. The distinguished gathering included Her Royal Highness Princess Sonam Dechan Wangchuck, the Chief Justice of Bhutan, Justices of the Supreme Court and High Court, the Director General of Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI), Judges from the Thimphu Dzongkhag Court, Court Registrars and Bench Clerks from courts within Thimphu, and administrative staff of the Judiciary.

This momentous occasion provided a unique opportunity for the judicial community to receive His Majesty's invaluable insights and vision regarding the Gelephu Mindfulness City. The wisdom shared during this audience is regarded as a profound blessing for the entire judiciary, further strengthening their dedication to upholding justice and the rule of law in the Kingdom.

## HON'BLE CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA'S VISIT TO BHUTAN

In a significant diplomatic and legal event, His Excellency Dr. D.Y. Chandrachud, former Chief Justice of India (CJI), undertook an official visit to Bhutan from October 7 to 10, 2024. This visit marked a pivotal step in strengthening judicial cooperation between Bhutan and India, fostering closer ties between the legal institutions of the two nations.

During his four-day visit, Dr. Chandrachud participated in a series of institutional programs at the prestigious Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law (JSW Law), engaging with Bhutanese legal scholars, professionals and students. The highlight of the visit was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Chief Justice of Bhutan and the Chief Justice of India, aimed at enhancing judicial collaboration and knowledge exchange between the two countries.



The MOU signing ceremony was graced by the presence of Her Royal Highness Princess Sonam Dechan Wangchuck, President of the Bhutan National Legal Institute. Her Royal Highness's attendance underscored the significance of the agreement and the high regard in which judicial cooperation is held by both nations. This historic event further solidified the shared commitment to advancing justice and the rule of law in the region.

## BHUTAN AND INDIA SIGNED A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING TO DEVELOP, PROMOTE, AND STRENGTHEN BILATERAL TIES IN JUDICIAL COOPERATION



On October 9, 2024, a landmark event in judicial collaboration was marked by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Supreme Court of Bhutan and the Supreme Court of India. The ceremony was held at the Yongthri (Full Bench) of the Supreme Court of

Bhutan, with the MOU signed by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bhutan, Lyonpo Chogyal Dago Rigdzin, and the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, Dr. Dhananjay Yeshwant Chandrachud. This MOU aims to strengthen mutual interaction between the judiciaries of both nations through a range of initiatives, including exchange visits, training programs, and academic collaborations. Additionally, the MOU emphasizes the sharing of best practices and experiences in leveraging information technology to enhance judicial systems.

The MOU also paves the way for the two judiciaries to explore specific bilateral initiatives, develop strategies, and establish modalities to further strengthen cooperation. It includes provisions for the exchange of information on the latest developments in the field of law and justice, ensuring both nations remain at the forefront of judicial innovation and efficiency.

In conjunction with this historic signing, a renewal of the MOU between the Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI) and the National Judicial Academy (NJA) of Bhopal was also formalized. The renewal was signed by the Director General of BNLI, Drangpon Pema Needup, and the Ambassador of India to Bhutan, H.E. Sudhakar Dalela, reaffirming their commitment to advancing legal education and fostering collaboration between the two institutions.

This dual signing of MOUs represents a significant step forward in judicial and legal cooperation between Bhutan and India. By formalizing these MOUs, both nations have demonstrated a strong commitment to mutual learning and collaboration in the field of justice. The focus on technology-sharing and best practices highlights the importance of modernizing judicial systems to improve efficiency and accessibility. Furthermore, the renewal of the BNLI-NJA MOU underscores the long-standing partnership between the two countries in legal education, which will continue to benefit legal professionals and students in both nations. These initiatives not only strengthen bilateral ties but also contribute to the broader goal of promoting justice, transparency, and the rule of law in the region.



## JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS LAUNCHES JUSTICE SECTOR STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2029

Her Royal Highness Princess Sonam Dechan Wangchuck, President of Bhutan National Legal Institute, graced the launching ceremony of Bhutan's Justice Sector Strategic Plan II (2024-2029) on November 19, 2024.

The launch of JSSP II underscores Bhutan's unwavering commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring that justice remains a cornerstone of its democratic governance. Her Royal Highness's presence at the ceremony highlighted Her continued support for the justice sector and its role in fostering a just and equitable society. This strategic plan is expected to serve as a catalyst for transformative change in Bhutan's justice sector, aligning with the nation's broader goals of sustainable development and good governance.

## SUPREME COURT JUSTICE KINLEY DORJI'S VISIT TO THE COMMEMORATION OF 75 YEARS OF THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

On January 28, 2024, Hon. Justice Kinley Dorji of the Supreme Court of Bhutan, representing the Chief Justice of Bhutan, undertook a significant visit to the Supreme Court of India to extend congratulations on the commencement of its Diamond Jubilee Year, marking 75 years since the establishment of the institution. Hon. Justice Kinley Dorji participated in the celebratory event, which was attended by distinguished dignitaries, including the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, former Chief Justice of India, Dr. D.Y. Chandrachud, and the Hon. Justices of the Supreme Court of India.

Hon. Justice Kinley Dorji's visit to India during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the Supreme Court of India is a testament to the strong bilateral relationship between Bhutan and India, particularly in the realm of justice and legal cooperation. The visit underscores the mutual respect and shared commitment to upholding the rule of law and advancing judicial excellence. This event is a reminder of the importance of nurturing such relationships to ensure a more just and equitable future for both nations.



## AMBASSADOR OF INDIA TO BHUTAN CALLED ON HON'BLE CHIEF JUSTICE OF BHUTAN



On August 27, 2024, His Excellency Sudhakar Dalela, Ambassador of India to Bhutan, paid a courtesy call on the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bhutan. The meeting provided an opportunity to explore potential avenues for collaboration within the judiciary sector and to discuss strategies for further strengthening the existing partnership between the two nations. This engagement underscored the shared commitment of Bhutan and India to fostering judicial cooperation and enhancing mutual understanding in the legal domain.

## APPOINTMENT OF DRANGPONS

His Majesty, the Druk Gyalpo granted Dhar on July 18, 2024 and appointed Drangpon Gyelpo to Pemagatshel Dzongkhag Court; Drangpon Richa Gurung to Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag Court; Drangpon Tenzin Dorji to Lhuentse Dzongkhag Court; and Drangpon Tshoejab Mephram Denlen to Office of the Gyalpoi Zimpon.

Timely appointment of judges are critical to maintaining the efficiency, credibility, and independence of the judiciary. A well-functioning judicial system relies on having an adequate number of judges to handle caseloads, reduce backlogs, and deliver justice without delay.





## APPOINTMENT OF REGISTRAR GENERAL OF THE HIGH COURT



The Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bhutan appointed Drangpon Chimi D. Shartsho of Lingzhi Dungkhag Court as the Registrar General of the High Court on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2024. The appointment has ensured the smooth functioning and administrative efficiency of the High Court. As the principal administrative officer, the Registrar General plays a pivotal role in managing court operations, overseeing case management systems and ensuring the effective implementation of judicial policies and procedures.

## APPOINTMENT OF DRANGPON RABJAMS



The Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bhutan appointed four Senior Court Registrars as Drangpon Rabjams at the Supreme Court of Bhutan on July 18, 2024.

Drangpon Rabjam Tshering Yangdon who was working as a Senior Court Registrar at the Time-Bound Bench was placed at the Enforcement Unit under Thimphu Dzongkhag Court. Drangpon Rabjam Dawa Gyaltsen was serving as an Acting Drangpon at the Jomotsangkha Dungkhag Court and Drangpon Rabjam Jigme Gyaltsen was serving as an Acting Drangpon at the Phuentsholing Dungkhag Court's Bench II. Drangpon Rabjam Sonam Deki Retty was serving as a Senior Legal Officer at the Office of the Gyalpoi Zimpon.

## RECRUITMENT OF COURT REGISTRARS AND OTHERS



The Judiciary welcomed five new Court Registrars on January 1, 2024, enhancing its administrative capacity across various institutions. Pasang Wangmo assumed her role at the Punakha Dzongkhag Court, while Passang Dorji and Yeshi Yuden were assigned to the Paro Dzongkhag Court. Meanwhile, Karma Tenzin and Tenzin Dorji joined the Bhutan National Legal Institute, contributing to its mission of legal education and research.

Furthermore, the organization welcomed seventeen new staff members in various capacities, including an Assistant Human Resource Officer, a Bench Clerk, nine Personal Assistants, four Drivers, a Gardener, and a Sweeper.



## NAMING OF THE HIGH COURT BENCHES TO KHORLO AND RELDRI BENCH

Previously, the High Court operated with three numerically designated benches-Bench I, Bench II, and Bench III. On April 30, 2024, the judiciary renamed the High Court's Bench II as the Khorlo Bench, and Bench III as the Reldri Bench. These new names carry deep symbolic significance, aligning the benches with Bhutan's cultural identity. By adopting culturally resonant names, the judiciary reaffirms its commitment to integrating tradition with modernity.

The event featured an address by Hon'ble Mr. Arjun Ram Meghwal, Minister of Law & Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and was led by a panel of experts including former High Court Justices and seasoned legal professionals. The programme was guided by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Aniruddha Bose (Retd.), Director of NJA, Bhopal, who provided valuable insights and leadership throughout the sessions. By providing Bhutanese judges and judicial officers with access to India's expertise and resources, the initiative not only enhances their professional capabilities but also fosters mutual learning and collaboration between the two nations. This training programme represents a significant step forward in bilateral judicial cooperation. Initiatives like these are essential for building resilient and efficient judicial systems that can adapt to the evolving needs of society.

## TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR JUDGES AND JUDICIAL OFFICERS OF BHUTAN IN NATIONAL JUDICIAL ACADEMY, BHOPAL, INDIA

The National Judicial Academy (NJA) of India hosted a five-day "Training Programme for Judges and Judicial Officers from the Kingdom of Bhutan" under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme from November 11 to 15, 2024.

## HIGH COURT JUSTICE LOBZANG RINZIN YARGAY'S VISIT TO BANGLADESH

High Court Justice Lobzang Rinzin Yargay, representing the Chief Justice of Bhutan, visited Bangladesh on June 7, 2024, at the invitation of Bangladesh's Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan. The purpose of the visit was to participate in a two-day "International Conference on Judiciary Across the Borders: 21st Century Challenges



and Experiences from the Himalayas and Beyond.” The conference provided a platform for judicial leaders from diverse regions to discuss common issues such as cross-border disputes, the impact of globalization on legal systems, and the integration of technology in justice delivery. By engaging in such dialogues, Bhutan’s judiciary gains valuable insights into innovative approaches and strategies adopted by other nations, which can be adapted to enhance its own legal framework. This participation also highlights Bhutan’s active role in global judicial discourse, reinforcing its dedication to promoting justice in an increasingly interconnected world.

## DRANGPON PELDEN WANGMO JOINED ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN’S DELEGATION FOR FOURTH UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW PRESENTATION

Family and Child Bench’s Drangpon Pelden Wangmo was part of the delegation team from the Royal Government of Bhutan, led by Lyonpo D.N. Dhyungyel, Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, which presented Bhutan’s fourth national report to the UN Human Rights Council under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism on November 6, 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Such participation fosters greater awareness and accountability within the judicial system, encouraging the adoption of best practices and innovative approaches to address human rights challenges. The inclusion of judicial representatives ensures that the perspective of the judiciary is reflected in national reports, emphasizing the role of the courts in safeguarding human rights.





## DRANGPONS THONGJAY AND TENZIN DORJI ATTENDED UNESCO REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE RULE OF LAW

Drangpon Thongjay of Dagana Dzongkhag Court and Drangpon Tenzin Dorji of Lhuentse Dzongkhag Court participated in the UNESCO Regional Workshop on “Artificial Intelligence and the Rule of Law”, on November 6, 2024 in New Delhi, India.

The Workshop brought together judicial actors, legal professionals, and technology experts to engage in critical discussions on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in legal systems. The participation of Bhutanese judges in this workshop highlights the growing importance of integrating technology into the judiciary to enhance efficiency, transparency, and access to justice. For judges, such events are invaluable as they provide insights into how AI can streamline case management, reduce backlogs, and support evidence-based decision-making.

## DRANGPON KESANG CHODEN ATTENDED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON “DISPLACEMENT JUSTICE: GLOBAL CHALLENGES, ISSUES AND STRATEGIES”

Drangpon Kesang Choden of the Criminal Bench, Thimphu Dzongkhag Court, represented the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bhutan at the “International Conference on Displacement Justice: Global Challenges, Issues, and Strategies”, held from May 4 to 5, 2024, in West Bengal, India.

Organized by the Indian Institute of Legal Studies, the conference convened distinguished legal experts, scholars, and practitioners to deliberate



on pressing issues related to displacement justice, including the protection of displaced populations, legal frameworks for resettlement, and strategies to address the socio-economic and human rights challenges arising from displacement. Participation in such events enhances the capacity of Bhutanese judicial officers to address emerging legal challenges and strengthens the judiciary's ability to uphold human rights and social justice. It also fosters international collaboration, enabling Bhutan to learn from global experiences while sharing its own unique approaches to justice and governance.

## REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE ROYAL COURT OF JUSTICE, BHUTAN NATIONAL LEGAL INSTITUTE, BAR COUNCIL OF BHUTAN AND BHUTAN ADR CENTER'S VISIT TO SINGAPOREAN JUSTICE INSTITUTION

The visit to Singapore on August 29–30, 2024, included representatives from the Royal Court of Justice, the Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI), the Bar Council of Bhutan, and the Bhutan

Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre (ADRC). The delegation engaged with Singapore's leading legal institutions, including Drew & Napier LLC, the Singapore Judicial College, the Law Society of Singapore, to study best practices, explore potential collaborations, and align Bhutan's legal reforms with Singapore's advanced legal framework. The exchange of knowledge and expertise during this visit is expected to enhance the ADRC's and judicial officers' capacity to implement efficient and effective dispute resolution mechanisms in Bhutan.

## CIVIL SERVANTS SERVICE MEDALS

Three Bench Clerks were honoured with gold medals for their exceptional service of over 30 years in the judiciary. Additionally, 2 Dzongkhag Drangpons, 7 Bench Clerks and 1 cleaner received silver medals for their commendable service of more than 20 years. Furthermore, 3 Dungkha Drangpons, 1 executive engineer, 5 Bench Clerks, 2 personal assistants and 1 dispatcher were awarded bronze medals for their dedicated service of more than 10 years in the judiciary.

The Civil Servants Service Medal is not just a symbol of honour but also a powerful tool for promoting excellence, integrity, and commitment in public service. The recipients of these medals





serve as role models for younger judicial officers, inspiring them to emulate the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by the awardees. Instituted by the Royal Government of Bhutan, upon His Majesty's Command, these medals play a crucial role in motivating public servants and judicial officers, fostering a culture of excellence, and reinforcing the values of integrity, commitment, and public service. They symbolize the nation's gratitude for hard work and sacrifices made by public servants and judicial officers in advancing justice and upholding the rule of law.

This recognition not only celebrates the contributions of individuals but also strengthens the foundation of Bhutan's judicial system, ensuring that it remains a pillar of fairness, efficiency, and trust for generations to come.

## JUDICIARY'S INITIATIVES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The Judiciary of Bhutan has implemented innovative measures to enhance access to justice, addressing challenges posed by limited resources and the country's rugged terrain. These initiatives reflect a commitment to inclusivity, community engagement, and leveraging technology for efficient justice delivery.

To overcome geographical barriers, courts conducted 580 virtual hearings, reducing travel costs and ensuring accessibility for remote populations. Community engagement was prioritized, with Drangpons leading awareness sessions in schools and Gewogs on topics like citizen rights, court processes and drug abuse. Notably, the Mongar Dzongkhag Court issued 144 Marriage Certificates while educating the public on the process, combining service delivery with legal awareness.

The judiciary also hosted 16 internship programs for law students, providing practical exposure and fostering interest in the rule of law. To address linguistic barriers, the Pemagatshel Dzongkhag Court initiated Tshangla-language radio broadcasts on civil and criminal procedures, ensuring legal information reaches remote communities.

These initiatives – virtual hearings, community outreach, internships, and localized broadcasting – demonstrate the Judiciary's proactive approach to empowering citizens and ensuring equitable access to justice. By integrating technology, education, and cultural sensitivity, Bhutan's Judiciary is setting a strong example of inclusive and efficient justice delivery.

# CONCLUSION



The Judiciary remains unwavering in its commitment to safeguard, uphold, and administer justice fairly and independently without fear, favour, or undue delay in accordance with the rule of law. This commitment aims to inspire trust, enhance access to justice, ensure the effective and expeditious resolution of disputes.

The year 2024's data from all the courts and related services illustrates a significant progress in Judiciary's delivery of its services. The decline in pending cases from 2,873 in 2020 to 1,183 in 2024 depicts the improved efficiency in the Judiciary. The concurrent decrease in pending cases beyond 12 months from 342 in 2020 to 161 in 2024 is an evident effort to address case backlog and ensure expeditious resolution of disputes. This improvement is remarkable given the factors like absconding of parties, and complexities of cases requiring adequate time to collect evidence including but not limited to forensics, and such related constraints. This marked increase in cases decided marks a proportionally enhanced access to justice.

The Judiciary also achieved a small rate of appeals from lower courts. This is not only an indication that the lower courts are rendering well-reasoned, fair, and legally sound judgments but also an indication of heightened public confidence in the Judiciary. The fact that the majority of the decisions of lower courts are upheld by the higher courts indicate uniform and consistent interpretation of laws. As for the implementation of judgments, the year marks a high enforcement rate of judicial decisions entailing that the parties get the result from the judicial process.

Additionally, Judiciary employed appropriate methods for dispute resolutions like court-annexed mediation at different tiers which saved time and resources, contributing to the success of the Judiciary as a whole.

Finally, the key events, starting from the profound insights and vision of His Majesty through His Majesty's audience to actions taken at grassroots level by the courts has empowered Judiciary more than ever to continually uphold its vision and mission.

**TASHI DELEK**



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