# CHAPTER 7 TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

About two and half decades back, Bhutan had fragmented transport and communications network. An efficient road system for a landlocked country assumes paramount importance as it plays a crucial role in supporting all development activities and in stimulating domestic and international trade. The first appearance of motor vehicle was in 1962 and surface transport continues to be the main means of transport. The Bhutan Government Transport Service (BGTS) originally entrusted with goods transportation was restructured to concentrate on passenger transport. The gradual privatization of the passenger transport services began in 1985 on pilot basis and was achieved fully by October 1991 with 21 operators managing a fleet of more than 100 buses on 73 routes. As of December 2007, there were 35,703 registered vehicles in Bhutan.

The Government, in order to promote and develop the surface transport, with emphasis on safety, formulated the Roads Safety and Transport Act, which became operational since October 1997. In the last 25 years, tremendous achievements were made in establishing 4,946.70 kilometers of motorable roads and several motorable bridges. In the difficult areas where the construction of motorable road has not yet begun, suspension bridges provide the vital transport links. Today the Department of Roads is responsible for the design and planning of roads and in setting standards for quality.

Druk Air, the national airline commenced providing services since February 1983 and was commercialized in 1985. Bhutan established its international air links first with Kolkata, India and today it flies to over ten destinations in the region. The Division of Civil Aviation was established in January 1986 to provide infrastructure and air traffic services and to regulate the airline industry. The Civil Aviation Act was enacted in 1990 and the Division of Civil Aviation became the member of ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization). The Paro International Airport inaugurated on 10th April 1999 has taken the air transport sectors further ahead in providing reliable, safe and comfortable travel services.

Since the establishment of first telephone network in 1963 the ICT sector has come a long way. Telecommunication network has changed from physical wire network to a national digital network today. Telecommunication has been accorded high priority in Bhutan’s development plans. Bhutan’s first satellite international link was established in 1990 with the installation of the Earth satellite station and an international gateway switch in Thimphu. In September 1993 the telecommunication link between Thimphu and Tsirang was established and in March 1999 all the 20 district headquarters had access to telecommunication services.

Following the formulation and implementation of Bhutan Postal Act of 1996, Division of Post was incorporated under the Companies Act of Bhutan. In 1993, Bhutan Post introduced International Express Mail Service and after a year Domestic Express Services and Fax Mail Services were introduced. Fax Money Order Service started in 1996 followed

by Post Overnight Courier and Bhutan Post Express Passengers Services in 1997. Within a short period, Bhutan Post increased the types of services from 4 to 13. There are now 127 postal infrastructures, where on an average one Post Office caters to around 5,188 Bhutanese People.

The recently completed national telecommunication network opened the path to global information network. On 2nd June 1999, the country established the first television network and also started the Internet Services. Since then, the information and communication technology such as Internet provides access to global information and plays an important role in the every day affairs.

Yet another breakthrough was the launch of cellular mobile (B Mobile) services in the Kingdom, coinciding with the His Majesty’s Birthday, 11 November 2003. The Bhutan Telecom Corporation Ltd. has now connected all twenty Dzongkhags by the cellular services. As of December 2007, there were 30,279 telephone sets in use and 148,179 B- Mobile subscribers.

