

Opening address of Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay during the 13th Batch De-Suung Integrated Training Program on 8th September 2014 at Tenchholing.

I have had the good fortune of attending as guest every De-Suung Course, from the 1st till the 12th. I am honored to be here today. And I am here with mixed emotions - very happy that I get to attend as a guest yet another course, but also full of regret that this is the course that I would have loved to be a part of. I have told each and every one of the past courses that being the Desuup is being a true son of the "Palden Drukpa" and that as such I regret not being part of the 12 courses. I feel that sense of regret very powerfully, as today 121 executives from all walks of life are participating in the 13th De-Suung course. I congratulate you and I thank you Desuups and all the organizers for allowing me to participate in today's opening ceremony.

Normally when I have the opportunity to meet the Desuups, I speak of volunteerisms and I speak of patriotisms through volunteerism. Today you are volunteers too, but you are executives. Many of you are managers, many of you are leaders and you are all volunteer executives. And I want to congratulate you for taking part in the 13th De-Suung program. Because, this course is ultimately about volunteerism and about leadership; it is about leading our country. There is leadership and there is management. There are leaders and there are managers. What is the difference? To me, if the status quo is good and you see a responsibility of maintaining that status quo efficiently and effectively, then you are a manager. But if you feel that the status quo is not good, it is inadequate or it is dangerous, and you are willing to prepare yourself and the rest around you to a higher level of existence, then you are a leader. You have to ask yourself - am I a leader or am I a manager? The very fact that you are here, in my opinion, makes you a leader. Because one of the hallmarks of leadership; one of the trades of leadership is being able to exercise leadership of the self, to exercise leadership from within.

I am certain that many of you are not comfortable being here and it has taken courage to come here. I am certain that many of you are anxious - Can I meet the physical challenges? You ask yourself. Can I exercise the emotional maturity to work as a team among 121 equal Desuups? You may ask yourself. Do I have the courage to undergo this important but rigorous course? You will be asking yourself and in spite of your anxiety, in spite of the many questions, the very fact that you are here today as part of the 13th De-Suung course proves that you are willing to push yourself, proves that you are willing to expand your envelope, proves that you are willing to step outside your comfort zone. In my opinion, unless the person is able to step outside his/her comfort zone, unless the person is willing to push himself/herself beyond what may seem necessary, you cannot be a leader. And therefore today, 121 Desuups, 121 guardians of peace, 121 volunteers and 121 leaders conjugate to open the 13th De-Suung program. I am honored and excited.

Do we have leaders in Bhutan? Should be a question. If our land blessed by our guardian deities, blessed by Guru Rinpoche and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, protected by guardian deities, shaped and natured by our enlightened monarchs, if this country of ours, if everything is as good as it can get, or as good as we may expect, then we don't need leaders. We need managers. On the other hand, if our small country sandwiched in between the largest, biggest economy and surrounded by densely populated neighbors, if this country of ours can do better and must do better, then we need leaders. We need each and every one of the 121 executives who are here, we need you as leader. But I ask you in all earnest, do we need to change, or in all honesty and objectively looking around having analyzed the situation - is Bhutan performing optimally? Are we happy? If that is the case, Executives, own your managerial skills. On the other hand there is not just a lot to do but also a lot of critical work to do, important work to do, then we need leaders.

Our 121 executive Desuups here, we need you as leaders not as managers. In my opinion our biggest task at hand is to secure our sovereignty. So the question that I request you to ask yourself is, are we happy with the state of our sovereignty? If it is yes, manager, if it is no, we can do a lot more. Leaders are the need of the hour. There is a lot that makes the nation sovereign. In our case one of the first and foremost must be our institutions. Amongst our institutions is the institution of our Monarchy and then we have the institution of the formal clergy - the Zhung Dratshang. These two institutions have carried our country forward to where we are today, faithfully and diligently. We have to ask ourselves, are we happy or can we do better to further strengthen our institutions? So that, they in turn, contribute toward strengthening our sovereignty.

The next question concerns democracy. Are we happy with the state of our democracy and everything that goes into making our country a democratic country? The democracy that was not fought for by people, but was gifted from the Golden Throne against the wishes of the people to the people. Are we happy with the state of our democracy? If yes, contribute to keeping that level of status quo, if no, and by no, I mean if we can do better, if we can organize ourselves better in Bhutan's very special democracy, then we must step up to the plate as leaders to ensure that Bhutan's democracy adds to strengthening our sovereignty and it is not just democracy for the sake of democracy. What was/is a vision of our beloved monarch when they handed democracy to the people? Are we fulfilling that vision? Are we, all of us in this hall, today fulfilling that vision? If not, I repeat, we need leaders; we need leaders to strengthen democracy so that a strong sound Bhutanese democracy can add to strengthening our sovereign nation.

And then there is the economy. Are we happy with our economy? We are enjoying prosperity as never before, we are enjoying access to wealth and material good as never before. But are we happy with the state of our economy? If we are more of the same, again we need managers. If we are not if we can do better, forget about doing better, if the current state of economy is dangerous, then it goes without saying that we need leaders. We need each and every one of you to exercise leadership to

improve our economy. We are a donor driven economy, not only are we only donor driven economy but we expect people to give money to us. We have developed a sense of entitlement. Not only that, we expect the donors to feel grateful to be honored to be associated to Bhutan and to give to Bhutan. If that is good for the economy, if that is good for our sovereignty, then we must continue with more of the same. If not, we have to tackle the problem head-on and strengthen/change our economy so that the sovereignty of our country is not compromised.

Today we have spiraling loans; we need to look at what is causing the increase in loans. We need to study very carefully, whether the loans are responsible – whether they are investments or whether we are blowing up money that our future generation may have to pay and may have to pay with the sovereignty of our county. This is something that we need to do, all of us together. We have a huge trade balance leading to trade imbalances, leading to our current account deficit. Simply to put it all, we can export electricity and we import everything else – labor, material, goods, food, technology and even capital. No wonder we experienced crises a few years ago and we are still bearing the effects of it. No wonder we are scared of what we call 'a rupee crisis'. But lets be honest, how many of us has really thought about the rupee crisis? What is it? What has caused it and how do we solve it? How do we tackle it? Those of you who have thought along that lines are leaders, if you haven't, if you feel the pinch but still feels that this is as good as it gets, then at the best you are managers.

We need to work hard, if we want to strengthen our economy. There are no two-ways about it. We have been fortunate with the blessings of Guru Rinpoche, the protection of our guardian deities, leadership of our Kings. We have been fortunate and we have not had to work hard. But now we do. Because each and every one of us in this proud nation has a will to work hard and is willing to grow our own food. Unless we are willing to build our own homes, our economy is going to be in shambles. It is going to be weak, going to be narrow and it will have impacts directly or indirectly on our sovereignty.

On agriculture, why is it that we have convinced ourselves as a nation that we cannot be food-sufficient? In the last year, I have consulted many people but time and time again, I have been told that we can never be food-sufficient and it fails me. I fail to understand how as a country, as sovereign nation, we cannot grow enough food for less than 700000 people. Can we become food-sufficient? Not in every item, but by and large, can we become food-sufficient? How can we call ourselves a sovereign nation if we are not food self-sufficient? We may be sovereign but our sovereignty maybe compromised at anytime. But it is not just about direct sovereignty. It is about our economy. We import almost everything, our farmers grow everything but they don't have access to markets, they can't reach our table, so we must do something. If we must, we need leaders. In the Ministry of Agriculture, in local government and in our dzongkhags, throughout the country we need leaders, who will lead a revolution to make our country food self-sufficient Not in a matter of decades but in a matter of years.

Production - small industries and cottage industries contribute just 3% to our GDP and our GDP is all of 100 billion Ngultrums. We must do something about cottage industries. We must spread small enterprises throughout the length and breadth of the country. Strategic industries like hydropower, not withstanding, agriculture, agro-processing and small-cottage industries must form the backbone of our nation, of our nation's economy if our nation's sovereignty must be strengthened. We need to take pride in using local produce, in consuming local produce seriously. Whether it is the Gho we wear, is it really Bhutanese? Did the Bhutanese weave it? Can we weave it, if not what is the next best alternative? If so why aren't we wearing Bhutanese cloth, cloth and textile that we are so proud of?

Do we aggressively seek out Bhutanese vegetables over imported produce? What can we not, as managers do, to increase the use of local produce but what can we, as leaders do, as ourselves as leaders, leaders in the family, community and in the government? What can we do to open our eyes, to consume our own produce so that our economy becomes stronger, employment is generated and that we become secure, more secure in our sovereignty? An example I want to use here is electricity and fossil fuel. Is the state of affairs good enough, when we export electricity at a very cheap rate and we import some of the most expensive fuels? Fuel that will damage our economy and damage our environment. If we are happy with that, we need to optimize it. If not we need to look for alternatives. And I dare say that electric vehicle is an alternative. If we can use sustainable eco-friendly transport, to use electricity, which is the cheapest in the world here and the cleanest over fossil fuel that is dirty and expensive and is causing current account problems, I think that this is an opportunity for leaders. I think that in the next three years, if we can collectively use sustainable transport to reduce the amount the fossil fuels, otherwise imported by, let's say, 1 billion Ngultrums that is a huge saving and huge contribution to our economy and that will make us that much more sovereign as a nation.

Leadership is not easy. It is fought with dangers, is fought with challenges, and is fought with criticism because leadership is about change. Some of you have to accept that responsibility. If you feel that the status quo is not good enough you must accept that responsibility.

And then there is equal opportunity. Are we as economy equal? Are we satisfied that the divide between the haves and have-not, rich and the poor, rural and urban is not too great or are we concerned that the gap is big and growing? Growing because the rich are getting richer and the worst still, the poor are getting poorer. And therefore how do we create access to equal opportunity so that those in rural Bhutan, those who parents still till the soil throughout our country, they also have a shot of meaningful participation in our modern economy. The best way to guarantee equal access to equal opportunity is education. Education must continue to be free but it must be of the highest possible quality. There is nothing worst then telling a child - you are educated but the child is not able to compete in the modern work place.

Because this child cannot go back to the farm and cannot compete in the modern work place. So education must continue to be free, but it must be of highest quality. The question that executives desuup, leaders, you must ask ourselves, are we content with the quality the education? If yes, manage the system, if no, lead the change, be the change for every year for our children that do not have access to quality education; we risk putting our future generations in a situation where there is going to be, not just discontent, but danger. And that danger is not just social disorder, it will spillover to the character and strength of our sovereignty.

And finally there is this Brand Bhutan. Who are we? What are we? Are we happy with how we define ourselves? If so, work at it, improve it. If not as leaders, you and I, all of us must define what a Bhutanese is? Who a Bhutanese is? Must define what GNH is? And not just talk about it but also implement the high ideals of GNH. Brand Bhutan has taken us a long way. The world knows Bhutan or at least a part of the world that knows, Bhutan is because of Brand Bhutan. Not because of our military, not because of our banks, not because of organic food but because of Brand Bhutan. What is Brand Bhutan today? And what brand will serve us will in future to make our nation proud and feel good about ourselves? To provide an anchor to each and every Bhutanese, but also most importantly, to ensure that our sovereignty is further strengthened, there too we need leaders. As desuups you are leaders, on one hand, all desuups are equal not just the 121 desuups today but all desuups covering the 12 previous courses, and the future courses, you are equal. One desuup is not more equal than the other, unless you have earned your strips, but you are all leaders too. And I request you desuups to think about leadership versus management. Ask yourself - as a desuup should I be a manager or must I be a leader? Ask yourself who are my fellow desuups and remember always that the most special fellow desuup that you have is His Majesty the King. He is a desuup. Not just the architect of this program, not just the essence of this program, not just the person who has embodied the character of this program, he is a fellow desuup. Celebrate his leadership and serve him as manager or a leader depending on what you see fit. But always remember to honor him.

In closing I want to congratulate all 121 desuups participating in the 13th Desuung course. I repeat I envy you.

Tashi Delek