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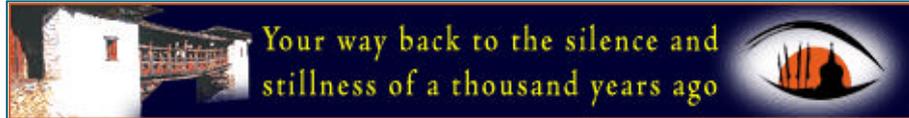
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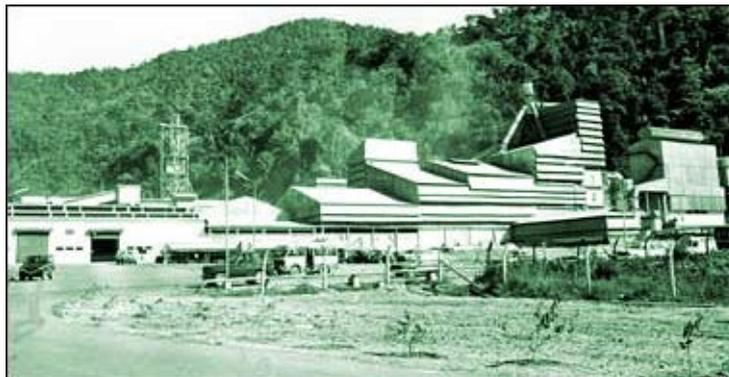


The industrial town of Pasakha

Posted on Wednesday, June 04 @ 12:00:44 PDT BST

➔ Amidst rows of large factory sheds, numerous workers in overalls work round the clock in shifts. Ten-wheelers and other trucks move in and out of the factories day and night. The greenery around has a thin coating of dust.

HOME



One of the factories in Pasakha

With industrial investment of more than Nu 2.6 billion since 1986, Pasakha, about 17 kilometres from Phuentsholing, is poised to become Bhutan's first major industrial town.

It is already home to several large industries - Bhutan carbide and chemicals (BCCL), Bhutan ferro alloys limited (BFAL), Tashi carbon, all of which were established in the early 1990s. Other factories include the expanded and upgraded Druk cement plant and a furniture unit of the Bhutan board products limited (BBPL).

More recently, Bhutan beverages company limited (BBCL) a soft drink bottling plant under the Tashi Group began commercial production this year. There are also several other small and medium size industries that have been established in Pasakha in the last few years.

Pasakha's growth as a major industrial town would have been faster had it not been for the devastating floods

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of August 2000. The Basra river damaged residential areas, telecommunication and power lines, and even some of the factories.

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Today, however, Pasakha is back on track although the scars of the floods are still visible.

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The industries situated along the Barsa river, like the BCCL and BFAL, have taken costly measures against future floods. River training works and construction of retention walls and spurs have cost the two companies about Nu 100 million. The riverbed is dredged every year to keep the level of the water lower than the walls.

In fact 2000 was not the first time Pasakha experienced floods. There was an earlier flood in 1996 that washed away tonnes of raw materials and damaged factory premises.



Despite the natural hazards of landslides and floods, Pasakha is still the place for setting up an industry in Bhutan says Mr K Koti Reddy, chief executive (works), BCCL.

Much of it has got to do with its location. Pasakha was ideal for mineral based industries because mineral sources were close by. Quartz, dolomite and limestone are available in Pachina, Kamji, Tintali and Gomtu, less than 100 kilometers away. Its proximity to the Indian border enabled easy movement and marketing of products, import of raw materials, labour and transport.

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Contact

[editor@](mailto:editor@kuensel.com.bt)

kuensel.com.bt

[Webmaster@](mailto:Webmaster@kuenselonline.com)

kuenselonline.com

Pasakha, according to Reddy, also had an ample and reliable supply of power which was important for any industry.

Another advantage was the double lane road between Phuentsholing and Pasakha making it convenient for large trucks to ferry finished products and raw materials. On an average, about 60 trucks ply on this route every day. Traffic is expected to increase further with the opening of the Pasakha-Manitar national highway.

Many new industries want to cash in on these advantages. There is already a proposal to set up four major industries and several small industries at the Singaybasti industrial site, identified by the ministry of trade and industry and approved by the government.

Located on the confluence of Barsa river and Singye chu, the new site is about one kilometre from BFAL factory. The site has about 70 acres of usable land that will be leased to interested Bhutanese companies and entrepreneurs. Site development and river protection work along its boundaries are already in process. A two-kilometre long, five-meter high retention wall will also be built as a flood protection measure.

"The site will house only production and manufacturing (PAM) industries that consume considerable amounts of electricity," said Jamtsho, an assistant trade officer in Phuentsholing. Meanwhile, about 29 thram holders of Singyebasti have been provided with alternative land of their choice in Balujohra geog in Phuentsholing.

The Tashi group of companies has already applied for about 60 acres of land to construct carbon silicon manganese, calcium silicide and magnesium metal factories as well as a brewery at the new site. "We are ready to go ahead with the construction of beer and low carbon silicon manganese factories," said Mr. Reddy. "We are just waiting for the land allocation."

He added that the other two calcium silicide and magnesium metal factories would be built within the next two years.

According to Reddy, the construction of four new large-scale industries would catapult the growth of Pasakha and create job opportunities for about 1,000 workers.

Hundreds of other jobs would also be available in small-scale industries like the proposed jute and welding electrodes manufacturing units in the area.

With an expected increase in the working population, Pasakha will also need more schools and other services for children of the factory employees. It also needs a hospital. "We had a post office and a small health unit but they were washed away by the flood and, since then, we do not have any," said a resident of Balujhora.

It also needs more residential area. Half of the 38 three-storey residential buildings of the BCCL and BFAL were washed away by the 2000 floods.

According to survey officials, the search for feasible land for the construction of housing colonies, a bank, and a well-equipped hospital was being carried out.

A possible place identified by the surveyors is the Gurungdara and Chengmari area, about 1.5 kilometers from the industrial site.

There is infrastructure to be built but factory officials feel that Pasakha has enormous potential to develop subsidiary industries and to expand the existing ones. It will be a town to be reckoned with.

By Kinley Y Dorji

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