

Bhutan

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Location and area

Bhutan is a monarchy in the eastern Himalaya (southern Central Asia), bounded on the north and northwest by Tibet and on the east, south, and southwest by India. It has a total area of 47,000 km² (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002). The official land area is claimed to be 46,600 km², but recent mapping suggests the true area is only about 40,000 km² (www.geoanalytics.com/bims/bt.htm).

Topography

Bhutan is almost entirely mountainous with only a narrow strip of flat land, the Duars Plain, along the southern border. Ranges of the Himalaya rise abruptly from the plain, reaching their maximum elevation at Kula Kangri (7,554 m) on the Chinese border. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

The climate varies from subtropical, on the Duars Plain, to temperate, with cool winters and warm summers in the mountain valleys. It becomes increasingly harsh at higher altitudes. Average annual precipitation ranges from about 1,500 mm in the mountain valleys to more than 5,000 mm in the Duars Plain. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

More than two-thirds of the country is forested. Bhutan produces much hydroelectricity. Hydroelectric power exports provide around 40 per cent of Bhutan's national revenue (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

The wetlands generally consists of rocky and fast-flowing rivers, with marshes restricted to flat valley bottoms in the inner valleys. Most marshes have been drained for agricultural purposes. The remaining Popjikah wetland is significant as a black-necked crane (*Grus nigricollis*) refuge (www.geoanalytics.com/bims/bt.htm).

Peatlands

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols nor gley soils exist in Bhutan.