

## **Bhutan's lower house of parliament votes to decriminalise homosexuality**

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***Bhutan's decision comes after several other Asian countries have scrapped laws restricting the rights of LGBT+ people. (File Photo)***

Bhutan's lower house of parliament voted on Friday to scrap laws criminalising homosexuality, local media and activists said, becoming the latest Asian nation to take steps towards easing restrictions on same-sex relationships.

The amendment to the penal code passed the 44-member National Assembly with just a single dissenting vote, the local newspapers Kuensel and The Bhutanese reported.

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"The biggest advantage we have with our current government is that they have already worked with us and they are well aware of our issues," Tashi Tsheten, the director of LGBT+ activist group Rainbow Bhutan told Reuters. "This is our first journey towards equality."

Bhutan's decision comes after several other Asian countries have scrapped laws restricting the rights of LGBT+ people.

India removed a centuries-old colonial prohibition on gay sex in September 2018. Last month, Taiwan became the first Asian territory to legalise same-sex marriage. Many people in Asia, though, still face persecution for their sexuality.

Bhutan, famous for its "gross national happiness" index, that formulates government policy based on the perceived happiness of citizens rather than potential economic development, first held elections in 2008. Before that, it was an absolute monarchy.

- Reuters