

The Bhutan REVIEW

Monthly

News, Views and Reviews

VOL 1 No. 10

October 1993

Rs. 3/-

ADDITIONAL WFP ASSISTANCE FOR BHUTANESE REFUGEES

World Food Programme (WFP) which has been assisting His Majesty's Government of Nepal to cope with the Bhutanese refugee problem has announced a US\$ 1.74 million expansion of its current relief operations. This was notified in a WFP press release on September 30, 1993. This additional assistance will meet the food requirement of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal for the period October to December 1993.

Under this program WFP will provide 4,968 metric tonnes of rice, pulses, vegetables, oil, sugar and salt to cover the basic needs of the refugees. An additional 110 tonnes of blended foods, sugar and vegetable oil will be provided as supplementary food for children under three years, pregnant and lactating women, to patients and elderly persons.

WFP which has so far provided 22,600 tonnes of emergency food aid at a cost of US\$ 7.90 million

is also considering the approval of further support to the Government of Nepal for a period of eighteen months starting January 1994 at a cost of over US\$ 11.00 million.

The basic food commodities are distributed through the Lutheran World Service and the supplementary foods through the Save the Children Fund (SCF/UK).

ADDITIONAL AUSTRALIAN ASSISTANCE TO BHUTANESE REFUGEES

The Government of Australia which provided emergency assistance of AUS\$ 100,000 last November for the much needed water and sanitation projects in the refugee camps has announced an additional assistance of AUS\$ 105,000 for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. The announcement was made by the Australian Minister for Development Cooperation, Mr. Gordon Bilney.

Australia's aid agency, AIDAB, will provide AUS\$ 100,000 through the Lutheran World Service (LWS) for upgrading shelters in Beldangi II camps where the original shelters have deteriorated and are in urgent need of repair/replacement. An additional AUS\$ 5,000 will be provided to OXFAM/UK to purchase books and materials for the non-formal education program in the camps.

LWS as the main implementing agency for the UNHCR is responsible for, among others, shelter, drinking water and sanitation in the camps while OXFAM/UK has been involved in adult literacy and minor income generation projects targeted mainly towards women.

NEPAL - BHUTAN TALKS : CATEGORIZATION AGREEMENT

The first meeting of the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Ministerial level Committee set up in Thimphu last July to resolve the problem of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal was held in Kathmandu from 4-7 October 1993. The Committee comprises three members from each side.

At the meeting in Kathmandu, the Bhutanese side was led by Home Minister Dago Tshering who had been personally responsible for directing most of the atrocities perpetrated by the security forces on southern Bhutanese. The other two members of the Bhutanese delegation were Home Secretary Jigme Thinley and High Court Judge D.N. Katwal. Interestingly, Katwal a man with no personal views has been the Royal Government's convenient Man For All Seasons - he was also a member of the team to 'investigate' the atrocities perpetrated by the local administration in Chirang in December 1991 when also, coincidentally, the leader of the investigating team was none other than the Home Minister himself, the very

person to whom the local civil administration must report.

Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kedar Bhakta Shresta, and Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, S.K. Regmi, were the members of the Nepalese delegation led by Home Minister Sher Bahadur Deupa.

After three days of deliberations, the draft from Thimphu with minor modifications appeared as a joint statement. The Bhutanese delegation had apparently arrived in the Nepalese capital with seven categories of refugees in mind. This was reduced to four during the discussions. According to the joint Press Release, all the people in the refugee camps will now be placed in the following four categories:

1. Bonafide Bhutanese if have been evicted forcefully
2. Bhutanese who emigrated
3. Non-Bhutanese people
4. Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts

Though the leader of the Bhutanese delegation is reported to

have said, "we also have felt a sense of urgency so that we can bring about a quick solution to the present problem", the next meeting simply to determine the mechanism for verification and classification of the refugees is to take place after a lapse of four months in February 1994. Once the people are placed in the above four categories, the two governments will specify their positions on each of the categories and reach a mutually acceptable agreement which will provide the basis for a resolution of the problem.

After the meeting with the Nepalese Prime Minister in Dhaka during the seventh SAARC Summit, the Bhutanese monarch had accepted the fact that Bhutanese citizens have been forcibly evicted from the country and had declared that the Royal Government would be fully responsible for this particular category. However, by adding "if" in the first category above, even this admission appears to have been retracted.

A government which cannot produce evidence of a single

case of legal and formal emigration in its entire history now has thousands of "voluntary emigrants" since 1992, people who have allegedly fulfilled all formalities before being expelled from the country. It implies that any government may coerce its citizens into signing "voluntary" migration forms and force them to leave the country; this will then be taken as absolute proof that the individual has voluntarily renounced his/her citizenship.

The fourth category allows the Royal Government to find yet another excuse to deny the basic right to nationality to its citizens who have opted to dissent in the face of blatant oppression. By current Bhutanese law it is a criminal offense to speak or write against the Government. Thus, anyone not falling under the first three categories can easily be placed in the fourth category.

The joint statement has raised many questions. Does the classification process imply that Bhutan will get its way and eventually refuse to take back people who have "emigrated" or people "who have committed criminal acts"? Does Nepal stand ready to convert all these people overnight into Nepalese citizens? Will the voices of the refugees be heard or will they be forced to accept what is "mutually acceptable" to the other sides?

The outcome of the talks have been greeted with dismay not only by the refugees but also the local media and intellectuals irrespective of party affiliation. The refugees, who have been often been criticized for petty bickerings, have responded with a single voice. While acknowledging the assistance and support of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, the refugee community as a whole and the local media have expressed serious concern that the Nepalese government has agreed to be party to classification of citizens of another country.



Smiling Bhutanese Refugee Children—Evictees, Emigrants or Criminals ?

BHUTAN - INDIA ANNUAL PLAN TALKS

The Indo-Bhutan Annual Plan Talks, the forum for determining Government of India inputs to Bhutan's development plans and budgets, concluded on September 29 in Thimphu with both sides expressing satisfaction on the outcome. Over the last few years, the end of each Plan Talks has exposed some reversals in Royal Government priorities and policies. It was not very different this year.

One of the major objectives of the Department of Roads (now the Public Works Division under the Ministry of Communications) during the Sixth Plan was to phase out the presence of Project DANTAK, which has a large presence in the country, and take over not only the task of maintenance of existing roads but also the construction of new roads in the country. (The Indian Defense Ministry's Border Roads Organization operates as Project DANTAK in Bhutan). But with the signing of the

agreement on Kurichhu Hydroelectric Project, in the words of Shivshankar Menon, Joint Secretary (North) of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, "DANTAK would take up the major task of strengthening the Samdrup Jongkhar - Tashigang highway along with the construction of a road from the highway to the project site in Gyepshing, Mongar and the project buildings."

"Besides major works to be done on the national highways and bridges with the help of Project DANTAK, a joint team will conduct a feasibility study for a bypass at Sorchen, on the Phuntsholing-Thimphu highway, which has been plagued by landslides during rainy season. Project DANTAK also reported that the Langjophakha and Lungtanzampa bridges will be completed within the next year," added the official weekly *Kuensel* highlighting the increased future involve-

ment of Project DANTAK in the development efforts of the country.

"Self reliance", the theme of the Sixth Five Year Plan which ended in 1992, is supposedly still high on the agenda of the Royal Government. In the past, projects were initiated only after ascertaining the availability of national manpower to implement and maintain such projects. However, during the last few years there has been a major reversal on this priority objective. The just concluded Plan Talks with the Government of India included discussions on as many as 90 projects covering almost all sectors ranging from manpower-intensive major industrial projects to improvement of Paro airport, survey, education, livestock, agriculture, broadcasting and even telecommunication, a sector which was earlier planned to be developed totally with Japanese assistance.

Other highlights of the talks was the increase of Rupee standby credit by the Government of India to the Royal Government from the existing Nu. 100 million to Nu. 250 million. This is expected to greatly ease the cash crunch in the already depleted Royal treasury. For the Seventh Plan period (1992-1997) of the Royal Government, the Government of India has committed Rs. 1,500 million. The increasing assistance (at least on paper) promised to Bhutan despite the human rights situation and the resultant displacement of over one-sixths of the country's population appears to have strengthened the hands of the Royal Government for continuing its discriminatory policies.

The Bhutan REVIEW

BUCKSHOT IN THE ROYAL FOOT

Thimphu's portrayal of the recent agreement with Nepal on the question of Bhutanese refugees as a diplomatic success and the reportedly grand reception accorded to delegation leader Dago Tshering on his return to Bhutan is deserving of sympathy. One can only feel pity for a regime forced to seek solace from contrived sense of accomplishments even as the progressive exposure of its lies and contradictions turns the ferocious thunder dragon to docile domestic cat.

Obviously, Thimphu, which began with the argument that people in the camps were those evicted from north-east India and poor Nepalese, now sees no contradictions in acknowledging that they are Bhutanese citizens, albeit of various denominations. Neither is Thimphu embarrassed over having to concede that Bhutanese citizens have been forcibly evicted (the *if any* qualifier in the Joint Press Release despite the King's earlier definitive statement on the issue may be one cause for Thimphu's elation), nor does Thimphu see any contradiction in claiming that thousands fall in the category of 'voluntary emigrants' while in the same breath maintaining that it is no easy task to categorize 85,000 people who are, according to *Kuensel*, "economically motivated to prove that they are Bhutanese refugees." Instead, in the futile attempt to avoid confronting the truth and postponing the inevitable, what Thimphu sees in the recently concluded understanding with Nepal is tremendous scope for further haggling and opportunities for procrastination.

The Royal Government was undoubtedly pleased with the initial reaction of Bhutanese in exile who unanimously denounced the accord reached between the two governments at the Joint Committee meeting. The refugee community's dismay, however, reflects only the immediate disappointment and concern over the Nepalese government decision to be a party to categorization of Bhutanese citizens in a process that can only be unpleasant. Bhutanese Refugee Camps, so designated by the UNHCR and His Majesty's Government of Nepal, house Bhutanese citizens. If there are non-Bhutanese hidden among the refugees, they must be identified. This rightly is the sum total of identification and categorization efforts required from non-Bhutanese governments and agencies. His Majesty's Government of Nepal has obviously agreed to do more. While this decision, even if it was made to avoid a deadlock in the spirit of goodwill, leaves the refugees nonplused, Bhutanese in exile are not unduly perturbed. For the refugee community, the point of significance is that the Royal Government has finally been forced to concede, and agree in writing, that the problem of refugees in eastern Nepal is a problem of refugees of Bhutanese nationality.

Despite this confession, Thimphu clearly holds the belief that it has, as in the past, been clever enough to ensure that adequate loopholes have been created to achieve its own ends. But given the nature of the problem and the manner in which it must eventually be resolved, such devious means are unlikely to work. Meanwhile, the government continues to make a brave show of confidence and counts on its negotiating abilities to prolong the stalemate.

There are a variety of reasons and causes which have helped reinforce this external perception of Bhutan's special abilities, resulting in Thimphu being held practically in awe by observers impressed with the deft manner in which the nation has handled its affairs. Until the southern problem, however, the Royal Government has primarily been operating in a closed system where unilateral actions and decisions taken by the elite have needed neither justification nor explanation. In such a situation, where there is neither place for criticism nor mechanisms for exposure of failures, even the well known debacle of decentralization of the eighties could be touted as a true success story.

But for the Bhutanese regime this time, the talks over the fate of refugees isn't another case of negotiations over material goods, funds and good-neighbourly concessions - the problem involves people, both within and outside the country, their sentiments and their reactions. For the international community, too, the current talks between Bhutan and Nepal are of immediate interest and concern because the fate of thousands of people depends on these discussions - it is a matter that remains on the conscience of both individuals and governments who are even now providing for the refugees in the camps. The emphasis on the bilateral nature of these talks notwithstanding, therefore, the Bhutan-Nepal negotiations is not, and cannot remain, an issue between the two governments alone.

Despite this reality, it is evident from the recently concluded talks and subsequent excitement in Bhutan that Thimphu has opted to adopt the traditional method involving its vaunted skills of cunning and guile in a one-on-one situation. Such an approach, more suited to clandestine bilateral negotiations, will be severely tested when, for the first time, the Royal Government is faced with a situation of having to function in a transparent world where its every move and decision is open to debate and criticism by friend and foe alike. In these altered circumstances, the acknowledgement of bonafides of refugees in Nepalese camps is only the first shot fired by Dago Tshering onto the royal foot.

HIS MAJESTY RESPONDS

Since we published the letter written by U.S. Congressmen to the Bhutanese monarch, we reproduce below, without comment, the full text of the king's response - let it not be said that THE REVIEW has been unfair.

Hon'ble Congressmen,

I would like to thank you for your letter dated July 30, 1993, which was handed over to the Bhutanese Ambassador in New Delhi by two diplomats of the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi on August 18, 1993, with a request to forward it to me.

I was expecting the letter ever since it was carried by the June 1993 issue of The Bhutan Review which is published in Kathmandu. While it is surprising that the Bhutanese dissidents of Nepali origin published the full text of your letter more than a month before it was sent to me, I have noted that the final letter has been considerably toned down. The fact that the dissidents had access to your Caucus does not surprise us at all for we are aware that the Nepalese have tremendous reach all over the world. In contrast, my country which has a population of about 600,000 and which ended its century-old closed-door policy three decades ago has been the target of a well orchestrated disinformation campaign. We have only three diplomatic missions abroad (New Delhi, Dhaka and Kuwait) with diplomatic relations with 18 countries, two Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York and Geneva, no external publicity

division, and nobody to advocate our cause in the corridors of power in Washington or elsewhere.

I am writing this letter to you in the full awareness that as a nation which has been imbued by the highest values of Western civilization and the ideals of Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, your sense of justice and fair play will prevail. The crux of our problem is that we are a small country with a tiny population which is being inundated by a flood of economic migrants seeking a livelihood. It is impossible to stop these Nepalese immigrants who cross over the 720-km border of open land boundary that we share with India, particularly as the borders between India and Bhutan and India and Nepal are open and do not have any immigration checkpoints. Nepalese immigrants have successfully taken over political power in Sikkim and the Darjeeling Hills adjoining Bhutan in the west and are causing problems in the seven north-eastern states of India to the south and east of Bhutan. The aim of the ethnic Nepalese dissidents in Bhutan is to reduce the native Bhutanese population to a small minority as they have successfully done in Sikkim and Darjeeling, prior to usurping political power. You may be interested to learn that the Bhutanese dissidents enjoy the strong support of Communists and radical leftist parties in India and Nepal. It will be a sad day indeed for humanity if some members of the U.S. Congress are led astray by misinformation and make common cause with the votaries of an ideol-

ogy which has been thoroughly discredited in Europe, but which continues to flourish and prosper in our part of the world.

In our view, the Bhutanese dissidents have raised the banner of human rights, not out of genuine conviction, but in order to gain international support. The present problem in Bhutan has arisen not because of violation of human rights by the government but because of ambitious people who want to grab political power in Bhutan. The Bhutanese dissidents believe that the successful Nepali movements in Sikkim (early seventies) and Darjeeling (late eighties) can be replicated in Bhutan, but they have not been successful in Bhutan because conditions here are totally different. Nepal has a population of over 20 million with a growth rate estimated at 2.3% to 2.6%, which means that the annual increase of population is more than 500,000. The deteriorating agriculture due to large-scale deforestation and the few small scale industries of Nepal are unable to support this exploding population. Furthermore, it is estimated that there are more than 10 million people of Nepali origin in India, a good chunk of whom live in the two states of West Bengal and Assam bordering Bhutan in the south.

For the land-hungry and the job-hungry Nepalese of India and Nepal, Bhutan with its tiny population and abundant space coupled with a rapidly developing economy is in every sense a true Shangri-la. The challenge facing Bhutan today is how a tiny nation which is the last bastion of Mahayana Buddhism which once flourished in the Himalayas, with an unspoiled natural environment and a forest cover of over 60%, can preserve its distinctive identity and political integrity against the inroads of a more dynamic people who are migrating in large numbers to all parts of the world.

I appreciate the concern for human rights shown by the Congressional Human Rights Caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The concern you have shown for human rights is a concern which we share. Buddhism, which is a living tradition in Bhutan, is based on the values of compassion, tolerance, love, respect for all life, and universal brotherhood and sisterhood. Our people are devout Buddhists who have intense faith in moral and spiritual values. I can assure you that the allegations of human rights violations in Bhutan are false and baseless. In order to refute these allegations made by motivated persons, we invited Amnesty International to visit Bhutan in January 1992 and their report was published in December 1992. It is significant that the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva rejected all the charges of human rights violations made against Bhutan by human rights' bodies based in Kathmandu. I may also mention that the International Committee of the Red Cross on our invitation have been paying regular visits to Bhutan to carry out their internationally recognized mandate. Although we are a poor, least-developed land-locked country with a meagre 30-year history of modern development from our mediaeval past, we are fully committed to improving the human rights situation in Bhutan. In this task, we shall al-

ways be guided by the high standards of human rights set by your great country.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our keen resolve and firm determination to resolve the problem of ethnic Nepalese who have left our country due to a variety of reasons. A ministerial delegation from Nepal visited Thimphu last July on our invitation. Very soon, a ministerial delegation from Bhutan will visit Kathmandu to continue the dialogue. We are confident that through a process of dialogue and negotiation, the problem of displaced persons in the refugee camps in Nepal will be resolved before long.

(Jigme Singye Wangchuck)
King of Bhutan

SWEDISH KING ON A HOLIDAY TRIP TO BHUTAN "FOR SWEDEN - IN KEEPING WITH THE TIMES"

Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia accompanied by some close family friends arrived Bhutan on 21st October on a holiday trip. The Swedish Royal visit to Bhutan has raised many eyebrows - of all the places, why did the Monarch choose a country ruled by a government which has utter disregard for human values and democratic norms? For Bhutan, however momentary, the visit appears to have been morale-boosting.

The royal entourage which made a brief stop-over in Kathmandu on the way to Thimphu was met by His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal at the Tribhuvan International Airport. It is learnt from reliable sources that the Nepalese monarch took the opportunity to brief King Carl on the presence of Bhutanese refugees and the consequent problems faced by Nepal.

The King who presides over the yearly prestigious Nobel Prize awards ceremony in Oslo is certainly not in Bhutan to lend credence to the discriminatory policies of the Royal Government. King Carl ascended the throne 20 years ago stressing his desire to move with and meet the demands of the times through his declaration, "For Sweden - in keeping with the times". With the King's visit to Bhutan, the Scandinavian message must be heard clearly in Thimphu as well.

THE SOUTHERN BHUTAN PROBLEM - THREAT TO A NATION'S SURVIVAL

May 1993, Ministry of Home Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan

Bitter complaints that an innocent, just and equitable regime is unfairly subjected to undeserved criticism and false propaganda by dissidents has never dissuaded the Royal Government from its own aggressive campaigns of lies and half-truths. An annual feature over the past few years has been the publication of glossy documents purporting to contain the gospel truth regarding the situation and events in southern Bhutan. Taking over the task of disinformation from the Department of Information this year, the Home Ministry presents the 1993 edition which evidently is to be devoured in tandem with *A Brief Pictorial Summary of the Terrorist Activities in Southern Bhutan* published by the same Ministry.

The poorly edited 58 page document tells a tale of fantasy woven around an alleged plot hatched by "a nexus of illegal immigrants and vested interests among Lhotshampas" with the sole objective of "turning Bhutan into a Nepali dominated state." Based on distorted facts, twisted logic, bizarre conjecture and blatant lies, the story is so riddled with contradictions that, fortunately, it defeats its very purpose. "The naivety of the Bhutanese people and government" could be the only likely explanation for the audacious attempt by the regime to fob off its contention that "almost three decades passed before the Royal Government became aware of illegal immigrants" and that "Lhotshampas leaving Bhutan are emigrating and not being forced out." These are the premises upon which the Royal Government hopes to conclusively prove that the entire refugee problem is the creation of "politically motivated elements" to achieve the objective of "turning Bhutan into a Nepali dominated state."

Insurgency and Mercenaries: Thimphu has rightly given the movement considerable thought. Unfortunately, the person or persons responsible for analyzing dissident moves and developing scenarios is positively guided more by thrillers than plain intelligence or common sense. According to this document, the government has confirmed(!) that an insurgency plan forms the back-up strategy in the alleged bid by Nepalis to take over Bhutan. "Gorkha veterans and mercenaries" would be used in the "invasion from outside" once "a political agitation on some pretext or other" diverts international attention. "To that end cadres of young men are being trained in the forests near the refugee camps in Nepal by army deserters and retired Gurkha veterans. Arms and ammunition are being collected and stockpiled."

Attempts to justify its deliberate repression of a section of its citizens has prompted the regime to try and fabricate sinister designs and seditious plots from what have essentially been ad-hoc reactions to oppressive government regulations directed specifically against southern Bhutanese. In the process of providing logic and rationale to the reflex responses of the southern Bhutanese community, the government has come up with truly astounding theories - invasions, mercenaries and arms stockpiles! Equally astounding is the charge of young men undergoing training near refugee camps. Are both UNHCR and

the Nepalese administration so irresponsible that such activities take place under their very noses? Moreover, with the situation as it is, why the Royal Government believes dissidents would need some "pretext or other" for a political agitation is baffling. The line between naivety and plain stupidity is indeed very thin!

Migratory Nepalis: Preparing to face the truth that Bhutanese citizens are housed in the Nepalese refugee camps contrary to the regime's earlier claims of mostly non-Bhutanese people in the camps, the profound observation that "the Nepalis are the only truly migratory race in the Himalayas" and "being migratory people, Nepali farmers do not have a symbiotic relationship with the land like farmers in other countries" is the perfect explanation and answer for the rhetorical question "why such large numbers of Lhotshampas are emigrating despite the economic boom in southern Bhutan and the exemption of taxes as further incentive for them to stay?" The regime is apparently convinced that others will share its ridiculous assertion that all it required to uproot and dislodge well-entrenched families enjoying an economic boom was a little dissident enticement!

Perhaps justifying the conspicuous World Wildlife Fund presence and reflecting the hype built up in Bhutan over the Black-Necked Cranes which visit the country each winter, the migratory habits of Nepalis has obviously drawn the serious attention of the Royal Government. Since Jigme Thinley's startling revelations at the London Conference, it is evident that much additional research has been undertaken and the behavioural and homing patterns of Nepalis subjected to further scrutiny! **Government Efforts:** Having conceived the heinous plot of dissidents to "turn Bhutan into a Nepali dominated state" one way or another, the document next turns to the tremendous efforts being made by the benevolent government to do "everything possible to find a solution to the current problem." Naturally, these include the reopening of facilities in southern Bhutan "despite continued terrorist activities", restarting of development programmes in the Seventh Five Year Plan, waiver of taxes and exemption of labour contribution, and the King's personal efforts to dissuade 'voluntary emigrants' from leaving the country.

The contradiction is quite conspicuous; if the government believes in its own theories that southern Bhutanese intentions have been and will remain suspect - that there is "a migratory race waiting to cross over an open border", that Nepalese in Bhutan are intent on ensuring their political supremacy, and that "one more Himalayan race and culture will succumb to the relentless tide of Nepali diaspora" - why should conciliatory, sympathetic and clearly suicidal moves be made at all? Which is closer to the truth: that the government is indeed treating southern Bhutanese fairly because it is lying about alleged conspiracies, or that the regime is convinced its theories are right and is actually lying about the treatment of its citizens in the southern?

Bhutan-Nepal Talks: The Bhutanese version of the attempts to resolve the problem of Bhutanese refu-

gees in Nepal has been extensively covered in the document. There is emphasis on the high-level participation from the Bhutanese side and innuendo about breach of protocol by Nepal for despatching low-level functionaries as emissaries.

The causes for the deadlock at Dhaka have been explained and the draft Press Releases of both sides presented in full. The unabashed attempts by Bhutan to extricate itself with untruths is visible in its own presentation; even as the Nepalese draft reproduced by the regime clearly states that "...the King of Bhutan and ...the Prime Minister of Nepal met in Dhaka on April 9, 1993 and held discussions on the issues related to *Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal*", Koirala is berated for falsely blaming Bhutan for the breakdown in talks because "the Bhutanese side had refused [t]o accept the phrase *problem of Bhutanese refugees* although such a formulation was neither contained in the Nepalese draft nor was it ever discussed in Dhaka."

The assurance of the King that Bhutan "would accept full responsibility for all bonafide Bhutanese nationals who have been forcibly evicted from Bhutan" [not 'if have been' - Eds] has been reiterated. However, the government does not disclose its decision on the six other categories of people in the camps which allegedly include; illegal Nepali residents in Bhutan; imported Nepali labourers; dissidents, mostly criminals and terrorists; Bhutanese who have legally emigrated after renouncing their citizenship; and people from other parts of the region, including Nepal. Instead, it complains that Nepal consistently refuses to take a position on these alleged categories of people!

Categorization: Considering the line of arguments, not a single person of Nepalese ethnicity, whether in the refugee camps or in the country, would qualify as a Bhutanese citizen if the Royal Government had its way; if Citizenship Identity cards are produced they are to be declared as forgeries because "the Royal Government failed to take the precaution of printing the citizenship identity cards in a press specializing in such work, and had to be printed in a commercial press in Calcutta" at a trivial Rs 2.00 per card; land tax receipts which were insisted upon by census teams can now be invalidated because "payment of property tax in itself is hardly proof of Bhutanese citizenship" even if the samples reproduced in the document itself have dates in the 1920s and 1940s, years before the 1958 grant of citizenship by registration. Those that do manage to prove their bonafides are to be disowned as criminals and emigrants.

Citizenship Issues: The southern Bhutan problem is a creation not of the citizenship laws in themselves but in the manner of their implementation and interpretation. In fact, to protect their own as well as national interests, southern Bhutanese have insisted upon in the past and will support in future, stringent rules and regulations to control immigration. According to the Royal Government, however, the "refugee problem" has been "deliberately created by the dissident groups to circumvent Bhutan's citizenship laws" but that "the Bhutanese government (which otherwise) has le-

gal, moral and historical rights on its side." Can these supposed "legal, moral and historical" rights of one group of citizens be protected through sheer force and denial of similar rights to other bonafide citizens?

Survival or dominance?: The conclusion that "the main issue facing Bhutan is the question of its survival as a distinct political and cultural entity" and that "demographic pressure on Bhutan from Nepalis waiting for any opportune moment to cross over the porous border into Bhutan will forever pose a threat to its survival" sums up the Royal Government's thinking. Is this demographic threat real or conceived solely to suit vested interests? Whether real or imaginary, 'preventive and corrective' measures based on denial of basic rights to one half of the population cannot be the solution. This is the crux of the southern problem.

"IN QUOTES"

"Any documentary evidence whatsoever, (land ownership deeds or documents showing sale/gift/inheritance of land, tax receipts of any kind, etc.) showing that the person concerned was resident in Bhutan in 1958 is taken as conclusive proof of citizenship."

Anti-National Activities in Southern Bhutan, August 1992 - Department of Information, Royal Government of Bhutan.

"This is the kind of document produced by the people in the refugee camps as proof of their Bhutanese citizenship. Payment of property tax in itself is hardly proof of Bhutanese citizenship."

Caption under a Bhutanese land-tax receipt of the 1920s in *The Southern Problem - Threat to a Nation's Survival*, May 1993 - Ministry of Home Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan

MEDIA SCAN

ETHNIC CLEANSING IN BHUTAN: REFUGEE CRISIS IN NEPAL

The plight of Bhutanese nationals of Nepali origin, who had been terrorized by the Bhutanese Army and the Police to flee the country is grim and uncertain. Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Nepali Bhutanese have fled the country. In many southern districts of Bhutan, one will see villages completely burnt, houses ransacked, farms destroyed, schools closed and the villages completely deserted. The wave of ethnic cleansing being carried out by the Royal Government of Bhutan is a calculated move to depopulate Bhutan of Nepali speaking Bhutanese.

This has gone on now for more than five years but was unnoticed by the world at large. The tales of suffering of Bhutanese women and children of the ethnic minorities are heart breaking. Thousands of women have been raped, children savagely beaten, political prisoners tortured and murdered. Their suffering continues in the refugee camps, located in Eastern Nepal, where they have taken refuge from the atrocities committed by the Bhutanese Army and Police.

The future of over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees seems to be totally uncertain and bleak following the failure of the talks between the Nepalese Prime Minister and the Bhutanese king. The refugees were hoping against hope that the dialogue between two leaders would pave the way for their return to Bhutan, but their hopes have been belied because both sides were adamant on their respective stands, which resulted in the dead lock. Interestingly, there was major difference in opinion over the status of these migrants, whom Bhutan describes as "displaced persons" whereas Nepal considers them as "refugees". The influx of Bhutanese refugees started in 1991 and still continues unabated. The UN has already recognised the concerned Bhutanese as refugees which entitle them to financial relief, helping them survive, especially when not gainfully employed.

The Bhutanese King Wangchuck said the problem stemmed from the attempt being made by a minority within Bhutan to acquire a major share of economic political and social power. He also said that a number of these people were not originally from Bhutan but from North East India. The King said that he told the Nepalese Prime Minister that Nepal could not keep on providing shelter and protection to these anti-nationals and at the same time complain that Bhutan was expelling these people.

SAARC LINK 1993-2, Quarterly Newsletter of the South-Asian Human Rights Action Programme, Colombo, Sri Lanka

The Joint Committee constituted by Nepal and Bhutan has agreed to identify and classify into four categories the estimated 85,000 people living in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal. According to an official press release at the end of a three-day conference held in Kathmandu, the four categories were bonafide Bhutanese if they had been evicted forcefully; Bhutanese who emigrated; non-Bhutanese people; and Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts...

The Home Ministers said their Governments did not want the traditional ties between the two countries undermined. According to Bhutan Government sources, Mr. Dago Tshering said that the committee had been able to achieve an important task which was mutually advantageous. Both delegations shared a sense of urgency to bring about a quick resolution of the problem. Official observers said this was significant because the two Governments were grappling with heavy odds. Earlier, reports in the Nepalese media had said that the entire process was an exercise in futility.

The Hindu, New Delhi, October 15, 1993