

# The Bhutan REVIEW

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## ENVOYS TO NEPAL PRESENT CREDENTIALS

The new Bhutanese Ambassador to the Kingdom of Nepal, Nado Rinchen, presented his credentials to His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev at the Narayanhiti Palace in Kathmandu on April 22. In separate functions on the same day, Dr. S. Vogelgesang and S. Yoshida also presented credentials as the new Ambassadors of the United States of America and Japan respectively.

Ambassador Rinchen, who replaced Karma Letho as Bhutan's resident ambassador in New Delhi last January, is not new to Nepal. He was among the small band of Bhutanese officials who fled Bhutan in December 1964 to seek sanctuary and political asylum in Nepal allegedly after an abortive attempt by the then Acting Prime Minister Lhendup Dorji to seize power from his brother-in-law, the late King. Dorji and his associates were granted amnesty by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck when he succeeded his father. While some with successful business interests chose to remain behind in Nepal, Rinchen was among those who opted to return to Bhutan in 1973.

## CANADIAN DIPLOMATS TOUR REFUGEE CAMPS

Amidst growing international concern over the plight of refugees and the floundering Bhutan-Nepal bilateral talks, a delegation of Canadian diplomats visited the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal. The Deputy Chief of Mission Gordon Longmeir and First Secretary Dean Sherratt of the Embassy of Canada in New Delhi, which is also accredited to Nepal, were accompanied by the Director of the Canadian Cooperation Office in Kathmandu.

The Canadian team arrived in Jhapa on 8 April and returned to Kathmandu the next day. They visited Timai and Sanishare (Pathri) camps and observed procedures at the refugee screening centre on the Nepal-India border in Kakarvita. On the day of the team's visit to the screening post, 284 newly arrived Bhutanese refugees were being interviewed by officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and His Majesty's Government of Nepal.

The Government of Canada has been providing assistance to the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal through UNHCR.



## REFUGEES CONTINUE TO ARRIVE

Even as the third round of Nepal-Bhutan bilateral talks were being held in Kathmandu during the first week of April, 284 Bhutanese forcibly evicted from Dorokha in Samchi district reported to the refugee screening post at the Nepal-India border in Kakarvita. The new arrivals recounted how the earlier "Gaylegphug Drama" was reenacted: the people are first coerced into applying for migration; amid great media attention, the King allegedly makes an appeal urging the people not to leave the country; although the people have no desire or intention to leave their homes, the Government alleges that despite its best efforts and the inter-

vention of the monarch the people do not wish to stay in the country; finally a brief notice period is served and the people are forced to leave the country after completing necessary formalities which includes signing of "voluntary migration forms"

To preempt any criticism from the international community or the media, the Royal Government announced through the national radio and newspaper that the people would not stay back despite an appeal from the King urging them not to leave the country. It further quoted the people having stated that they were leaving the country since they were facing difficulty in sustaining themselves

with their present land holdings. This is ridiculous given the fact that Dorokha is one of the richest orange growing sub-districts in the country. The arrival of this batch of refugees, representing the single largest group to report to the screening post over the past one year, is most disturbing. It is also unfortunate that the evictions were timed to coincide with the third round of discussions of the Ministerial Joint Committee. This action, naturally, provides ample scope to fuel doubts over the sincerity of the Royal Government in working towards finding an early solution to the problem vexing both Bhutan and Nepal.

## BHUTAN-NEPAL TALKS

The third meeting of the Ministerial Joint Committee of the Royal Government of Bhutan and His Majesty's Government of Nepal took place in Kathmandu from 4-8 April, a week after the earlier scheduled date. The meeting was postponed at the request of the Royal Government purportedly on account of the sad demise of Royal Grandmother Rani Chuni Dorji on March 26 in Kalimpong, West Bengal, India.

As in the earlier rounds, the two sides were led by their respective Home Ministers. Although the earliest signals indicated little progress, hopes were raised when the Bhutanese delegation extended its stay in Kathmandu. However, the Joint Press Release issued at the end of the talks on 8 April was a source of disappointment not only for Bhutanese in exile but also for well-wishers and close followers of the bilateral parleys. While there are hints and promises, finally, of some field-level activities, the operative phrase of concern to refugees is that the next meeting will be held in June "to consider the position of both sides." Bhutan has once again bought some time.

The Joint Press Release states that the meeting was held "to determine a mechanism for verification of the four agreed categories of people in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal." Although this work was to have been carried out during the second meeting in Thimphu last February, this third meeting has once again "agreed to determine the mechanism for verification of the people in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal." In this regard, the meeting agreed to establish a "Joint Verification Team", comprising 5 members from each side. No time frame, however, has been specified either for the establishment of the Team or for the completion of its mandate. The Release also states that a proforma to be completed by the people in the refugee camps for verification of their status has been agreed.

In a surprising development, the latest meeting agreed to "exchange each other's position on the four categories" even before the process of verification and categorization has been initiated. This contradicts the understanding reached earlier between the two sides in October 1993 when it had been agreed that the two sides would specify their positions on each of the categories after verification was completed. With this altered condition, there is little hope that identification and verification activities on the ground will be initiated soon.

It was also agreed that the Ministerial Joint Committee will "review and consider" the continuation of the Joint Verification Team in case of irreconcilable differences during the process of verification.

Significantly, stress has been laid on the need for continuation of the talks within the bilateral framework. The Release states that "the two sides expressed their firm resolve and commitment to arrive at a lasting solution of the problem of the people in the refugee camps in Nepal through bilateral dialogue in the light of the Joint Communique issued in Thimphu on July 18, 1993 and Agreed Minutes of the first meeting of the Ministerial Joint Committee signed in Kathmandu on October 7, 1993."

The Bhutanese Home Minister was granted an audience by His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and the Bhutanese delegation called on Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

## CONTINUED WFP ASSISTANCE - EVERTS

During a two-day official visit to Nepal, the Assistant Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Daan Everts, visited Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal on 2 April. Everts was accompanied by Resident Representative of UNHCR Tahir Ali, Kaji Haq, WFP Country Director, Chairman of Nepal Red Cross Society Ramesh Sharma, and officials from His Majesty's Government of Nepal.

After inspecting the food supply activities carried out by WFP with the cooperation of UNHCR, Nepal Red Cross, Lutheran World Service and Save the Children Fund (UK), Everts expressed full satisfaction over the operations. Complementing the refugee management, a visibly impressed Everts remarked that "these camps are one of the best managed camps in the world." Besides inspecting the WFP food depots, the visitors who spent time in Beldangi and Goldhap also observed the non-formal education and income generating activities in the camps. A cultural programme in honour of the distinguished visitors was organized at Goldhap by the refugees.

Assuring refugees of continued WFP assistance, Everts said: "We will be behind them till 1995. And if their problem is not solved then we will go our way to find the resources for the refugees." The Rome based World Food Programme, the food aid arm of the United Nations has been providing food assistance to the Bhutanese refugees since early 1992. The current arrangement with His Majesty's Government of Nepal covers food assistance to about 110,000 Bhutanese refugees till mid 1995.

## BHUTAN ELECTED TO UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations this month elected Bhutan to the 53-member Commission on Human Rights. Ignoring the dismal human rights record of the Royal Government, the world body elected Bhutan to the Commission along with five other countries, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka on April 21. Unlike Bhutan, the five other countries have democratically elected governments. It is both ironic that a Government which believes, and has gone on record to observe, that "human rights is an issue of the rich and powerful countries" [72nd National Assembly of Bhutan, July 1993], should now be permitted to sit in judgment and help frame policies on human rights issues.



## The Bhutan REVIEW

### NOT A QUESTION OF NUMBERS

Notwithstanding the public display of 'commitment' by the Bhutanese Home Minister and his delegation who extended their stay in the Nepalese capital to wriggle out of an impending deadlock, it is obvious to most observers that the talks between Nepal and Bhutan are still heading inexorably towards an impasse.

At the end of the extended third round of discussions some seemingly tangible results appeared to have emerged, viz. the decision to establish a Joint Verification Team and the agreement over the proforma to be completed by refugees to help determine their status. In reality, all that was effectively achieved was an agreement to formally exchange the positions of the two Governments with regard to the four categories of people in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal, and a decision to meet this June "to consider the position of both sides."

The exchange of formal Notes is a mere formality since informal views have been exchanged over the course of the talks. For Nepal, the problem of refugees on her soil will be satisfactorily resolved when Bhutan takes back, in safety and with dignity, all refugees who are identified and verified as Bhutanese citizens. Bhutan, on the other hand, while demanding the return of a handful of "criminals" and deigning to readmit into the kingdom "a few thousands" genuine Bhutanese who may have been forcibly evicted, reportedly takes the view, citing Bhutanese laws, that those who have "voluntarily emigrated" cannot return.

That the Royal Government is adopting an untenable position and being unrealistically obstinate with regard to alleged "voluntary emigrants" would be an understatement. In expressing its inability to take such people back, it is indeed farcical that Thimphu has chosen to hide behind supposed laws of a judicial system which is itself under flak. By the regime's reckoning, citizens who have been **unwillingly** driven out of the country are barred from **willingly** returning to their homes, not so much by evil intentions on the part of the regime but by unbreakable Bhutanese laws!

Of those refugees falling in the so-called "voluntary emigrants" category, their placement in this grouping confirms at any rate that the government recognized their status as genuine Bhutanese citizens, at least until their "joyful" departure, videotaped by the administration in some instances as "evidence". This category of people, which Thimphu now refuses to readmit — by Royal Government's reckoning said to number around 50,000 — must surely count as an interesting group.

If the Royal Government is to be believed, these certified genuine citizens allegedly "voluntarily" give up everything for the lemming-like exodus. They apparently "willingly" forfeit an ordered life with the basic elements for survival and livelihood family, house, land, career, reasonable certainty over the future etc. — and opt for the ordeal of refugee-life. If government propaganda is to be taken seriously, simple villagers who may never have stepped out of their districts before have made startling decisions, renouncing their citizenship and deciding to head for the unknown. This, in the face of stiff "opposition" from the government and monarch himself who, "short of going down on his knees," did everything possible to convince the people not to leave. Yet, despite the thoughtful "hurdles" placed by the regime, villagers who may not ever in the past have seen both pen and paper together at a time, have successfully a) "applied" to emigrate, b) "reapplied" to confirm their keenness when applications were "rejected", c) convinced village heads, district administrators and district courts of their considered decision "as required by law", and d) executed the forms and documents to complete "all necessary legal emigration formalities". The feat is nothing short of stupendous not just because an illiterate villager with a frightened serf-mentality was able to accomplish this complicated task, but because the entire procedure generally took less than three days. Considering that the average villager lives more than a day's travel away from the district headquarters, the achievement of the "voluntary emigrant" takes on an even more mind-boggling dimension.

It is over the question of such alleged "voluntary emigrants" that the talks are likely to flounder. Given the large gap, both in principle and in terms of numbers, currently separating the two Government positions, any expectations that a compromise can be worked out would be overly optimistic. No doubt Thimphu already recognizes the pointless nature of this opening gambit but, nevertheless, hopes to use it to prolong bilateral negotiations, implying that a search is on for a numerical solution. This is unacceptable.

The issue of southern Bhutanese citizens and the consequent refugee crisis in Nepal is not a mathematical problem which has a negotiated set of numbers as the ultimate answer. What must be clearly understood, both by parties directly involved in the talks as well as others following the bilateral efforts, is that this is not a question of **how many** among the refugee population in eastern Nepal can go back home to Bhutan, but of **who** among the refugees has the right to return home.

## THIS AND THAT

### The Perfect System

Speaking to an Indian reporter in late 1990, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck maintained that "the political system of Bhutan will never be safe in the hands of one individual" because "the biggest flaw with monarchy is that the king holds so much authority and power not because of merit, but because of birth." [Sunday Magazine, 28 October - 3 November 1990]

Admittedly this humble sentiment makes for excellent copy. Knowing this only too well, the King has seldom let an opportunity slip by without somehow injecting this banality into every royal interview. The cliché is repeated with such regularity and consistency that royal subjects have understandably wondered when the monarch might actually begin to believe his own words.

Recently, however, the husband-wife team of Molly Moore and John Ward Anderson of *The Washington Post* came back from Bhutan with more than the standard: "The future destiny of the country must be shouldered by the Bhutanese and should not be in the hands of one individual." This time, His Majesty hastened to add: "For the last twenty years, I have been looking for the perfect political system that would be ideal for Bhutan, but I haven't found it yet!" [*The Washington Post*, 4 April 1994]

While others may draw their own conclusions, it is clear to us that His Majesty, in view of his long and lonely 20-year fruitless quest for the perfect system, will have the Bhutanese continue to live with, according to the monarch himself, a "flawed" and "unsafe" political system in which an accident of birth, not merit, places absolute power and authority in the hands of an individual.

### Endangered 'Bhutanese'

Writing to Himal Magazine [see MEDIASCAN], Chenchu Dorji attempts to correct a misnomer that has crept into the usage of the term *Drukpa*, and rightly points out that every Bhutanese, regardless of ethnicity, is a *drukpa*. While the media and those who do not know the meaning of an alien word can be excused, Dorji would himself be forced to concede that *drukpas* themselves are generally guilty of contributing towards this misconception.

The point that Dorji sought to make is that all Bhutanese — as understood with its connotations of nationality and citizenship, and not ethnicity, in English — are *drukpas*, consisting of *ngalongs* in the west, *sharchops* to the east, *hotshampas* from the south, and other smaller ethnic communities of Bhutanese citizens. However, with the *dzongkha* word '*drukpa*' interpreted in the eth-

nic context, and including only those northern Bhutanese in the west and east, there has been a common tendency to consider Bhutanese being made up of '*drukpas*' in the east and west, *hotshampas* in the south, plus other smaller communities.

Dorji's intentions, obviously, were to set the record straight for foreigners. Going beyond his concerns, however, it is being made painfully obvious that, of late, there is a more serious problem within the country over the question of defining 'Bhutanese'.

Recently the Samchi *Dzongdag* Jigme Tshultrim, apparently seeking to win sympathy for the regime's policies and actions, insisted of the world in an interview that "they should protect the Bhutanese" [see "IN QUOTES"]. Unquestionably, from the context of his statement the district administrator, in his pleas for protection, was not referring to the "Bhutanese citizen" comprising all the different ethnic groups, but to only those inhabitants of the kingdom from the west and the east viz. '*the drukpa*'. Thus, by inference, 'Bhutanese' has now come to mean the '*drukpa*' interpreted in the ethnic context, to the exclusion of all other ethnic communities in the kingdom.

Sadly, even while feigning to treat all citizens fairly and equitably, in recent years this racist distinction, where being Bhutanese must also mean being a *drukpa*, has set the tone for the Royal Government's policies. The ill-concieved policy of "One Nation, One People" is being taken to its dangerously literal end!

**Post Script** — If one wished to read anything more into this particular brief quote of the Samchi *Dzongdag*, one would need to be aware that Tshultrim comes from Tashigang district in the east which has its fair share of dissidents. Much as the government, primarily comprising the western elite, would like to wish it weren't true, there is no denying the fact that murmurs of discontent and disaffection in the east predates the southern problem. Also, while there is a great deal of fuss over the low population in the west, with a high population density *sharchopas* have little cause to seriously concern themselves with a problem of dwindling numbers. Finally, it is also hardly a secret that our *dzongdag* has been known to openly harbour noticeably high levels of *sharchop* provincialism. Thus, coming from such a source, it is quite likely that the "endangered species" theory was more a barb than a show of blind loyalty!

### Keeping Students Out

In the remorseless harassment and intimidation of ethnic-Nepalese citizens in the south, the Royal Government has recognized the "value" of targeting innocent children. And

once a strategy has been devised, governments around the world would be hard put to compete with the manipulative abilities of the Bhutanese administration which has methods to suit every purpose and situation.

Immediately after the public rallies in the fall of 1990, with the closure of all educational facilities in southern Bhutan, the first victims of government reprisals were school children. When schools in the north reopened after the winter holidays, understandably there was a rush of applicants from the closed schools in the south. Only non-ethnic-Nepalese students previously enrolled in the south were selectively granted admission. All ethnic-Nepalese applicants were instructed to submit "No Objection Certificates" (NOC) issued jointly by the District Administration, District Court and the Royal Bhutan Police confirming that all members belonging to the individual's family tree had been cleared of any "anti-national" activity. Because every household was represented in the public rallies, less than a handful of NOCs may have actually been issued. Thus, except for a few whose parents could afford the expenses for studies outside Bhutan, southern Bhutanese students either stayed home, became dissidents or were eventually turned into refugees.

In the latest development, it appears that students have once again become targets of the regime. The Royal Government has reportedly instructed all local administrations to deny "route permits" to southern Bhutanese students attempting to return to their institutions after the winter vacations. Thus, southern Bhutanese children, some who were already studying in the north before the crisis, and others who had the good fortune to have been admitted in institutes of higher learning in the north owing to a variety of reasons, are now stranded.

Travel within Bhutan has always required identification and verification stops at numerous checkpoints all over the kingdom. Since the southern problem, the number of posts and level of vigilance have increased. Besides the main international checkpoints all along the southern border, there are checkpoints at the southern ends of all north-south interconnecting highways, and a number of others along the east-west lateral route. Without authorization and valid documents, travel into and around the northern part of the country is not possible.

Denied travel documents, students from southern Bhutan have not been able to travel back to their institutions this spring. There are unconfirmed reports of a few desperate students who attempted to reach their institutes by avoiding the checkpoints. Their fate is not known.



**ABDUCTED FROM INDIA BY THE ROYAL BHUTAN POLICE**

**A Victim's Account**

**RELEASED AFTER FOUR YEARS**



I was lured to the house of an Indian person by Rohit Giri an acquaintance from Sibsoo (Samchi District) who had joined our group only a month earlier. We used Rohit to carry our letters to and from Bhutan because we believed the Royal Bhutan Police was not aware of his involvement in the dissident movement.

On the morning of December 23, 1989, Rohit came to check if I had any letters to be carried to Sibsoo. He also informed me that an important person in the locality was interested in meeting me. Since I had other immediate engagements in the morning, we agreed to meet in the afternoon to visit this person.

At around 1 PM that day we met in Jyotinagar and took a cycle rickshaw to the United Sales Agency, a motor parts shop in the central part of the town. Two Maruti Gypsy (jeeps) vehicles were parked in front of the shop.

The person we were to meet was outside the shop. Rohit had earlier claimed that the person was his relative, but I was taken aback to see that he was not an ethnic Nepali but an Indian plainsman. This person said that he had worked in Bhutan till some years earlier, and claimed that he had been thrown out of his job by the Royal Government in the 'surplus scheme' (a retrenchment exercise carried out in the mid-eighties which resulted in a quarter of all government employees, primarily Indians, losing their jobs). He vowed to help us in our struggle for justice and human rights because, he claimed, he was aware of the discriminatory policies and rampant corruption in Bhutan, and because he had this personal grudge against the regime.

He insisted that I accompany him to his residence nearby. I tried to excuse myself but Rohit was also insistent. We went to his flat which was on the ground floor of a two-storied building. At the house, Rohit first excused himself to go to the toilet and then left the house to buy himself a bottle of beer. I was left in the sitting room (living room) with a small child while the Indian went outside. A while later he returned with two cups of tea and some biscuits in a small saucer. While removing the tray he also took away the child, his daughter he said. He returned shortly and sat down beside me.

There was another room beyond the sitting room. The door to this room was shut. Just as I began to take a sip of tea, I heard a mild knock on the window pane. Moments later the door to the inner room swung swiftly open, making a peculiar sound. I turned to-

wards the door. A man in blue trousers and jackets rushed towards me. I turned towards the main door, but before I could react hands closed over my mouth and eyes. Then several other pairs of hands were all over me and I was wrestled to the floor. Two handkerchiefs were shoved into my mouth and a blindfold was placed over my eyes. I was then dragged into the inner room.

My legs were bound together and my hands were tied behind me. I was made to lie on the floor on my back. Three of my abductors then sat on my body, one on my groin, a second on my thighs and a third on my feet. A fourth person knelt over me and squeezed my head firmly between his thighs.

I heard the Indian person say something to the attackers, but I could not make out anything. I also heard someone else groan, making me believe that Rohit was also trussed up like me.

I became very uncomfortable and nervous after some time. In sheer desperation I mustered all my strength to push away the attackers. They got off me briefly so that I could turn on my side. I managed to loosen the strap around my mouth and pushed out the handkerchiefs with my tongue. I tried to scream to draw the attention of people outside the house, but no sound came out. The attackers then beat me up badly. They kicked and punched me. They gagged me once again and bound me tightly. I was then drugged.

I regained consciousness only when they took me out of the house that night. One of them carried me to the vehicle. It was very quiet. I was pushed inside at the back and a blanket was thrown over me. Four of them sat with me. They were whispering.

Probably after we crossed the city area the blindfold and gag were removed. At dawn we crossed the Kharbandi checkpost (about 3 km inside Bhutan — this is not the international checkpoint which is at the border itself, but an internal one where movement control of all citizens is monitored). We stopped for breakfast. One constable helped me get off the jeep and freed my hands. As I was getting down, I saw Rohit Giri, wearing a pullover, sitting in the front seat of a blue Maruti Gypsy. This vehicle (Registration SKN 1820?) along with the green Maruti Gypsy I had been brought in (Registration A/F - Applied For -) had earlier been parked in front of the United Sales Agency in

Siliguri.

Soon after breakfast I was made to lie down on the floor of the vehicle and once again covered with a blanket. There were six policemen in the vehicle, two in front and four at the back as we headed towards Thimphu. The one driving appeared to be an Officer.

I was taken out of the vehicle at the main door of Kuengachholing, the State Guest House, at around 2 PM on December 24, 1989. My hands and feet were untied in the vehicle itself and I was told to step out. The places where my hands and feet had been tied were bruised and burned by the choir ropes. I was swiftly marched into the Guest House where I was kept alone in a room with two soldiers of the Royal Body Guards standing on duty. I was served with good food and provided with cigarettes and tea at regular intervals. I was also given medication.

I was interrogated by an officer of the Royal Body Guards. He told me not to worry but to speak the truth. The Government understood that as a young man I had become involved in the movement only because of Rizal, he said. I had become a traitor and must undergo punishment, I was told. "But we will not kill you. You will be released when the situation gets controlled," the officer said. I was warned that I must speak the truth and tell him everything I knew and all I had done since I left college — who were my friends and colleagues, who we had met in India and Nepal, for what purpose, and what we had talked about. It was clear that the officer already knew every one and had detail information about all our activities.

I was accused of being the main culprit behind the disturbances in the Sherubtse College in Kanglung and also responsible for regrouping 'anti-national' dissidents after the 'arrest' of Tek Nath Rizal in Nepal a month earlier on November 16, 1989. I was imprisoned for over four years, the first three years in complete solitary confinement. I was moved six times during the four years of my incarceration;

The three months in Gasa Dzong were the most horrible. I was shackled and

Kuengachholing, Thimphu	24/Dec/89 - 04/Feb/90
Rabuna Prison, Wangdiphodrang	05/Feb/90 - 31/Dec/91
Gasa Dzong, Gasa	01/Jan/92 - 26/Mar/92
Royal Bhutan Police Hq, Thimphu	27/Mar/92 - 28/Aug/92
Upper Thimphu Jail, Thimphu	29/Aug/92 - 15/Jan/93
Thimphu Central Jail, Thimphu	16/Jan/93 - 22/Feb/94

handcuffed during the entire twenty four hours, and confined to a dark dungeon throughout my incarceration there. I was brought out in the sunlight for half an hour only on Sundays. It was extremely cold, the food was poor and I was not given medicines. I nearly died in Gasa.

**"IN QUOTES"**

**FROM THE WASHINGTON POST...**

"For the last 20 years, I have been looking for the perfect political system that would be ideal for Bhutan, but I haven't found it."

**His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.**

"We are an endangered species. They protect wild animals from extinction. They should protect the 'Bhutanese'."

**Jigme Tshultrim, Samchi Dzongdag (District Administrator).**

"There's too much wishful thinking behind the intent to preserve their cultural identity."  
**Western aid official in Bhutan.**

**MEDIA SCAN**

**DRUKPAS ALL**

I am a Bhutanese citizen and I belong to the 'Ngalong' community. I have been living in exile for the last three years (and in Nepal since July 1993) and have been a silent political observer of the unfolding political crisis. These past few years, I have observed that the media, including HIMAL, and other organisations have only looked at the 'Lhotshampa' angle; the rest of Bhutan has been completely ignored. While I am inclined to sympathise with my Lhotshampa brethren, I would also like to point out the following observations and feelings — these views are personal and in no way connected to the machinery of any political or non-political organisation.

That the present political crisis in Bhutan which has led to an exodus of refugees and asylum seekers to Nepal is the making of the Royal Government of Bhutan is a fact beyond doubt. The main factors leading to this crisis can be directly attributed to the lack of understanding of the people's sentiment and misinterpretation of the concept of 'nationalism' on the part of the Royal Government. Nationalism is not 'Driglam Namza'; it must come from the core of an individual's mind.

I am a Ngalong, but I am against the drastic implementation of the social customs and traditions of my community on other communities who have their own customs and traditions. These customs and traditions get in the way of living even in our own community but people have not been able to voice their misgivings due to fear of incarceration and the wellbeing of dear and loved ones. This rule, the Driglam Namza, is now being disregarded by the members and younger generation of the elite ruling class, while the ordinary citizen must bear the brunt of the men in blue, should they try to follow the way of the elites. The wool the Royal Government has pulled over the eyes of the ordinary citizens is not going to last for long...

The term 'Drukpa' has been used time and again to refer to citizens of Bhutan from the Western districts. It is important to know that the word "Druk" means Bhutan and "pa" the inhabitants of the country. Hence, any citizen must consider himself/herself a 'Drukpa' regardless of which community he/she is from.

I condemn the categorisation process demanded by the Royal Government with regard to the population in the refugee camps. Their concern should be with two categories only, viz. national and non-national. The Royal Government must realise that this process [sub-categorisation of Bhutanese citizens] is an internal matter and not the concern of any other government.

The propaganda of ethnicity as propagated by the Royal Government carries no merit. The oppression meted out on the Lhotshampas is the only aspect that has come to the knowledge of the world as they have been forced to flee Bhutan. But what of the oppression of the other communities? The ordinary citizens of Bhutan have never had any say in the affairs of the government, their minds have been enslaved by the ruling oligarchy. The Lhotshampas in exile have faced hardship and turmoil, but they, at least, are able to express themselves freely. But the communities that remain within the country, too, are suffering under the heavy yoke of the present regime; they too want reforms in the country.

The reforms and changes in Bhutan should be based on the aspirations and betterment of Bhutanese citizens without compromising the sovereignty and national integrity of the country. To this effect, the Royal Government, on its part, must show goodwill by respecting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which it is a signatory.

We must create a situation in which the people of Bhutan can once again live in peace and tranquility as they did before 1988. Like-minded people must work towards an achievable goal that is appropriate for Druk-Yul and its citizens.  
**Chencho Jigme Dorji, presently in Jorpati, Kathmandu.**  
**Mail, HIMAL (Mar/Apr 1994), Kathmandu.**



**'Ethnic Cleansing' Charges Echo in Himalayan Bhutan**  
**By John Ward Anderson and Molly Moore - Washington Post Service**

**INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE**

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, April 6, 1994

SAMCHI, Bhutan — Rameshoo Ghaley and more than 40 relatives and neighbors fled their native village near here last month after police demolished their homes and threatened to kill them, charging they helped anti-government terrorists destroy a local bridge.

Mr. Ghaley said the villagers had nothing to do with the bridge-raiding. Instead, he said, the villagers had been forcibly evicted from this isolated Buddhist kingdom — their homeland for generations — because of their ethnic Nepalese and Hindu heritage.

Refugees accuse the government of Bhutan, a kingdom of about 600,000 in the Himalayas, of expelling up to 15 percent of its population in three years to be rid of people it does not consider true Bhutanese.

The refugees charge that the monarchy is intent on preserving its national culture, noting that all citizens are required to wear native dress and buildings must conform to traditional architecture.

"They told us to leave the country," said Mr. Ghaley, who was stopped at a border checkpoint en route to southeastern Nepal, where 85,000 people now live in refugee camps.

Mr. Ghaley said the refugees were legitimate citizens of Bhutan who had been thrown out by security forces.

There are reports of brutalization, rape and torture. Officials deny committing atrocities or forcing citizens from the kingdom.

But the officials assert that their country and culture are being swamped by so many illegal Nepalese immigrants in the south that they might soon outnumber the indigenous, ruling-elite Drukpas, Tibetan Buddhists who inhabit the mountainous north.

Unlike more high-profile conflicts, the problems in isolated Bhutan have remained nearly invisible to the world.

Closed to outsiders for centuries, Bhutan has diplomatic relations with only 18 countries. The kingdom limits the number of tourists, journalists and other foreigners admitted and restricts the travels of its citizens abroad.

Inside the country, the government requires all citizens to wear robe-like clothing, bans television satellite antennas and discourages marriages of its people with non-Bhutanese. The efforts to protect the nation's culture and traditions has coincided with the kingdom's leap, in a single generation, from medieval society to 20th-century state.

"We did not have military might or economic strength," said King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, 38. "Our only safeguard was to follow a policy of isolation. Obviously, we paid a very heavy price. When everybody else was busy starting

schools and building roads, we were totally and completely isolated and had no development program."

Until 1962, Bhutan had no roads, no electricity, no hospitals, no schools and no postal system. While the country remained what the World Wildlife Fund has labeled "one of the ecological wonders of the world," with 5,000 species of plants, 160 species of mammals and more than 770 types of birds, the people of Bhutan suffered some of the highest poverty, infant mortality and illiteracy rates in the world. Then, in the early 1960s, King Wangchuk's father, at the time the reigning monarch, recognized the need to enter the modern age. "We started from scratch," his son said.

Concerned about China's domination of Tibet in the north, Bhutan turned to India which surrounds it on three sides, and abdicated its foreign policy decisions in return for New Delhi's financing most of the country's budget. India built the first paved roads and paid to send promising Bhutanese to schools in the Indian hill states so they could bring administrative skills back home.

Bhutan nurtured relations with small, nonthreatening European nations. Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland financed programs to build schools and medical clinics, improve agricultural production and train civil servants. The country depends on foreign aid for 65 percent of its annual budget but is aiming for self-sufficiency.

Today, with 90 percent of its people engaged in subsistence farming and a literacy rate of about 38 percent, the country is struggling to increase its standard of living and evolve into a more modern society without destroying its environment, culture and religion.

"We're trying to modernize our country, not Westernize it," said Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering. "We have not allowed satellite TV. We feel it will erode our country in no time — within a year or two our value system would change."

Many of Bhutan's brightest young people, sent abroad for education, return with ideas that clash with the country's efforts to protect its culture.

Higher education levels and blossoming private businesses are luring young people off the farms and into rapidly growing towns, raising fears that there will not be enough labor to tend the fields, and that outside-world problems of urbanization will begin to blight Bhutan. Already, officials say, crime rates and drug use are rising. Posters nailed to bridges and trees along sidewalks warn residents of the perils of AIDS.

"There's too much wishful thinking behind the intent to preserve their cultural identity," said a Western aid official who has watched

the country's rapid change. "Twenty years ago they could have said, 'We'll stay isolated.' Now it's too late. There are too many educated young people."

Bhutan's isolation has also contributed to confusion over who is to be believed in the dispute about the treatment of the country's ethnic Nepalese. There are few independent experts, and travel restrictions impede verification of claims that ethnic Nepalese have been brutalized and forced out.

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Inside the country, which is about half the size of Virginia and has a smaller population than Fairfax County, the government requires all citizens to wear robe-like clothing, bans television satellite antennas and discourages marriage of its people with non-Bhutanese.

Although television is forbidden, VCRs are proliferating. The Zoom Video Cassette Library in the capital, Thimphu, offers "Master of the Universe" and "Immaculate Conception," hardly programs the country's culture-conscious leaders would recommend.

SAMCHI, Bhutan — A reporter for *The Washington Post* visited the refugee camps in Nepal and was given relatively free access to travel inside Bhutan's Samchi district with a government-provided guide, translator and police escort.

Evidence suggests that contrary to government claims, many bona fide Bhutanese citizens were harassed, brutalized and evicted from the country in what refugee leaders charge was a depopulation program in the south. In large swaths of Samchi district, farms are abandoned, terraced gardens untended and rice paddies overgrown.

It is equally clear, however, that many of the 85,000 people in Nepal's refugee camps were never legitimate citizens of Bhutan, but have been drawn from India and areas around the camps by the promise of free food and shelter.

Furthermore, both sides appear to have overstated their cases.

For instance, eager to get international attention and sympathy, some refugee leaders claimed that government security forces massacred more than 300 ethnic Nepalis in Samchi in late 1990 — a charge that Amnesty International investigated and said was unfounded.

On the government side, as recently as 1990 Bhutan exaggerated its population at 1.4 million, although today they put it at about 600,000 citizens. The high figure evolved from 1971, when the king arbitrarily ordered the population set at 1 million, believing Bhutan needed at least that number to be admitted to

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the United Nations.

Government officials claim that a 1988 census revealed both the true population and the extent of the illegal immigrant problem in the south. The government has not released the census.

"We are convinced that the great, overwhelming majority of these people came from Bhutan, resided for a long time in Bhutan and possess documents that support their claim to citizenship, such as government-issued identity cards, tax receipts and land taxes," said Tahir Ali, head of the Kathmandu office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which runs the eight refugee camps in Nepal.

Nepalis began migrating to Bhutan at the turn of the century, working in mosquito-infested lowlands of the south that were anathema to the northern Drukpas. The migrants and their families were allowed to become citizens if they lived here before Bhutan's citizenship law was enacted [in] 1958.

When Bhutan launched its first development programs in the early 1960s, tens of thousands of Nepalis were invited in to serve on work crews. But even though they married Bhutanese, bought land and raised families here, those Nepalis and their children are not considered citizens of Bhutan.

To complicate matters, the 1958 citizenship law has been amended twice, each time with stricter requirements that critics charge can be used to retroactively strip people of their citizenship.

Thus "tens of thousands were declared to be illegal immigrants and forcibly evicted from Bhutan," according to the 1993 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report on Bhutan. Other fled "in the face of officially sanctioned pressure, including arbitrary arrests, beatings, rape, robberies and other forms of intimidation by the police and the army."

A government pamphlet disputes such claims, declaring that the camps are havens for terrorists trying to destabilize the country.

Officials frequently cite the example of Sikkim, a neighboring

kingdom that was annexed by India after the native people became a minority and monarchy was toppled.

Camp officials say the inflow of refugees has dropped to less than 100 a month from 10,000 a month in early 1992. The governments of Bhutan and Nepal are negotiating, but with refugees entrenched in Nepal, Bhutan is in no hurry to settle the matter.

**Credibility Problems**

A recent news story in *The Rising Nepal* stated that Chakma refugees from Bangladesh were being settled in Bhutan. According to the report, the Royal Government of Bhutan was allotting the land of ethnic-Nepalese evicted from southern Bhutan to Chakma refugees from Arunachal Pradesh. The article may have caused consternation, worry, or even satisfaction in some cases, but anyone with basic knowledge of geography and current affairs would have laughed along with us over this preposterous piece of reporting.

It is possible that this news item was inserted solely to compete with another fantastic tale that appeared a fortnight earlier in *The Kathmandu Post* regarding the alleged visit of a Bhutanese princess to the Nepalese capital. The front-page story attempted to weave an intricate connection between the Nepal-Bhutan bilateral talks then being held, Bhutanese royalty and the dissidence movement. According to the figment of a Post reporter's imagination, possibly helped along by some other irresponsible elements, Ashi Sonam Choeden Wangchuck, the eldest sister of His Majesty the King, was reportedly in Kathmandu and living as a house-guest with a Bhutanese dissident.

What the reporter, or those responsible for planting the story, expected to achieve remains a mystery. But, the newspaper in question did not earn itself much credit. The paper was neither apologetic nor sorry that readers were misled and wrongly informed. There is little hope when a paper which finds out it has been guilty of unethical coverage expresses neither remorse nor regret.

**REFUGEE CAMP INFORMATION**

Location	District	Refugees	Students
Timai	Jhapa	8,215	3,365
Goldhap	Jhapa	7,929	2,990
Beldangi I	Jhapa	14,714	5,054
Beldangi II	Jhapa	18,753	6,690
Beldangi II Ext.	Jhapa	9,518	3,575
Sanishare(Pathri)	Morang	16,691	5,250
Khudunabari(N)	Jhapa	7,170	
Khudunabari(S)	Jhapa	3,015	3,206
<b>Total</b>		<b>86,005</b>	<b>30,130</b>

Cumulative births: 3,540  
 Cumulative deaths: 2,537

**The above figures are as of March 31, 1994.**