

The Bhutan REVIEW

Monthly

News, Views and Reviews

VOL 2 No. 7

July 1994

Rs. 5/-

DRUK NATIONAL CONGRESS LAUNCHED

The formal launching of Druk National Congress (DNC) marks a milestone in the struggle for human rights and democratic reforms in the country. In a widely attended press conference at a local hotel in Kathmandu on June 21, Rongthong Kunley Dorji, the founding Chairman briefed the media on the need for the establishment of the Party, its aims, objectives and future programmes. Discussing the prevailing situation in Bhutan, he said: "Because of the lack of human rights and an independent judiciary, the situation in present day Bhutan has deteriorated to such an extent that citizens are treated as 'oxen without horns' and forced to live under very oppressive conditions."

Bhutanese, both within and outside the Kingdom have welcomed the formation of this new political party. According to the founding Chairman, a prominent businessman from eastern Bhutan, the aim of the newly constituted Druk National Congress is to "bring recognition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Bhutan and also to protect these rights under the rule of law with an inde-



pendent judiciary." The DNC also vows to build a Bhutan where equal social and cultural opportunities will exist and fundamental human rights and prosperity for all will be guaranteed under democratic principles, said Party spokesperson Chencho Jigme Dorji, a former civil servant from Paro in western Bhutan. Highlighting human rights violations in the country, the Druk National Congress cites

the example of exodus of refugees from southern Bhutan into Nepal resulting from the discriminatory laws and the draconian manner of its implementation. The refugee problem, DNC says, has acted as an eye opener to the international community about the gross injustices that take place in the whole of Bhutan.

With active support from people within the country, the DNC will be operating from

exile for the time being. As a first step towards generating awareness and educating people about their rights, the DNC has published a booklet entitled "The Silent Suffering in Bhutan". Besides reproducing the Universal Declaration on Human Rights for the benefit of ignorant masses, the document highlights human rights violations in the country with specific examples and outlines some of the reforms it proposes in the country.

PROFILE

Rongthong Kunley Dorji was born in Bumthang, central Bhutan in 1939. Since his father was a government servant, Dorji travelled to different parts of the country during his childhood before settling down in Tashigang, eastern Bhutan in 1954. Over the years, he gained prominence as a successful businessman. Before leaving Bhutan, he was the Chairman of Rigsar Construction Corporation Pvt. Ltd. and Sharcho Transport Corporation, both conglomerates of businessmen from eastern Bhutan.

Concerned by the consistent neglect of eastern and central Bhutan, Rongthong Kunley started becoming critical of the inequitable policies of the Royal Government. He saw the dangers in the ill-conceived policy with regard to southern Bhutan and the blatant attempts by the regime to use the other ethnic groups against Bhutanese of Nepalese ethnicity. For his efforts to caution the people in the east and

62% PASS SLC EXAMINATION

Initially started to provide primary education, the schools in the Bhutanese refugee camps now offer education upto high school level. Of the 90 students who appeared for the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) Examination of Nepal in the first batch this year, 62% passed as against an overall pass percentage of 33% for the Kingdom. 9 students were placed in the first division, 43 in the second and 4 in the third division. The results are encouraging given the fact that many of the students who appeared for this year's SLC Examination had discontinued their studies for long periods.

For the last two years, DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) has been offering scholarships for post secondary education of refugee students. Considering the vast number of students who could not be accommodated within the DAFI scholarship programme, UNHCR has also offered additional scholarships this year. However, with the continuing increase in the number of students, further offers of scholarships will be required so that at least the most deserving candidates can continue their higher studies.

THE FOURTH ROUND OF NEPAL-BHUTAN TALKS

Bhutan-Nepal Ministerial Joint Committee has now completed a year of its existence. The latest round and the fourth such meetings of the Committee ended on 29 June. After two days of discussions with his Bhutanese counterpart, the Nepalese Home Minister returned to the capital with just an agreement to meet again in September next.

It is learnt that the two sides could not reach any agreement but issued a Joint Press Release at the end of the Thimphu talks. The Release states that "the Ministerial Joint Committee met in Thimphu to reach an agreement on the positions of the two Governments on the four categories of people in the refugee camps". Though the exchange of positions on each category of refugees was supposed to take place after the categorization was completed, according to the Press Release,

"the two sides exchanged each other's position on the four agreed categories through diplomatic channel towards the end of April, 1994." It further adds that "the Ministerial Joint Committee held extensive exchange of views and agreed to continue discussions in Kathmandu at its next meeting."

According to the Joint Communique issued after the first meeting of the Committee in Kathmandu last October, "it was also agreed that all the people in the refugee camps would be classified in the above four categories on the basis of verification. The mechanism for verification will be determined at the next meeting of the Joint Committee which will take place in February, 1994 in Thimphu." The Thimphu talks ended without reaching any agreement and the discussion on verification

mechanism continued during the third round of talks in Kathmandu. Now, leaving aside the task of verification and categorization, discussions have been held on the positions of the two countries on four "imaginary categories" of refugees. While it is natural for Nepal to put forward its proposal to repatriate all genuine Bhutanese back to Bhutan, for Bhutan to stick to its position that people who were once forced to leave the country have forfeited their right to nationality and thus the right to return home is sheer folly. From what has transpired so far, it is clearly evident that the bilateral talks will not lead anywhere as far as the safe and honourable repatriation of the refugees back to Bhutan is concerned. Since third party involvement is unavoidable, the earlier it is done the better.



his honest attempts to apprise the government of the pit-falls in such a strategy he was arrested by the government in July 1991 which accused him for supporting the southern Bhutanese. He was imprisoned for nearly two months without being formally charged or tried by a Court of law and subjected to extreme abuse and torture. He was "magnanimously granted pardon" by the King after he signed an agreement pledging his loyalty to the *Tsa Wa Sum* (King, Country and People). Because of torture in prison, he needed immediate medical attention. Also fearing further reprisals from the government he fled the country after his release in August 1991 and took sanctuary initially in India and later moved to Nepal. It took him a long time to recuperate and heal. Thereafter he spent a large part of his time painstakingly building up a network of dissidents within Bhutan.

The Bhutan REVIEW

PRICE OF PREVARICATION

"These were stringent terms and have been understandably criticised for their harshness by Indian historians. Nevertheless it is difficult not to accept the conclusion that Bhutanese methods of diplomacy largely contributed. Their practice, adopted also by the Tibetans forty years later, was to prevaricate for so long that ultimately they hoped problems would just solve themselves and unwelcome intruders would go away. If foreigners had to be encountered their patience must always be tried by never being offered what they asked for and for the more awkward issues to be simply ignored. This may have worked to some extent in the intricacies of relationships in the past with the Tibetans and even with Nepalese and Chinese but was fatal in dealing with an impatient western power." [Peter Collister in his book, 'Bhutan and the British', on the November 11, 1865 Sinchula Treaty between British India and Bhutan]

That the methods of Bhutanese diplomacy have undergone little transformation in over a century is obvious. Interminable prevarication in the hope that procrastination for long enough will simply lead to the disappearance of the problem itself, trying the patience of outsiders, and evading awkward issues remain the core of Bhutanese strategy when dealing with others.

The return of the Nepalese delegation to Kathmandu with nothing to show for the two days of talks in the Bhutanese capital was, therefore, a foregone conclusion. From the very beginning it was clearly evident that Thimphu would resort to every trick up its sleeve to try and delay the inevitable. With Bhutan having deviously introduced the ruse of categorization in the very first round of talks, the omnipresent virus essential to ensuring that negotiations would always be held *around* the problem rather than *about* the problem had been successfully injected. Along the way, they met with further success in their quest for means to prolong the talks, and even the initial agreement for establishing mechanisms for verification of the bona fides of those in the refugee camps became a casualty as the decision to exchange each other's positions on the different categories was inexplicably preponed.

Working to a set pattern, the Royal Government of Bhutan may rightly applaud itself for concluding yet another round of discussions without any progress. There is no doubt that every bit of delay serves to underscore the 'success' of the Bhutanese strategy in the short term. However, just as it is succinctly clear that the current policy of deliberate prevarication carries the distinctive trademark of Bhutanese diplomacy of over a hundred years ago, it is equally clear-cut that the end result can only be as disastrous for the regime. If history is being repeated after a century in terms of Bhutanese diplomatic strategy, then it would be amiss not to recognize the ominous possibility of "harsh" and "stringent" conditions on the regime in the eventual resolution of the current problem.

Inside Bhutan, the administration has admittedly had fleeting success in preventing open, country-wide calls for reforms by diverting national attention to the Government-created southern problem. After sowing the seeds of the crisis in the south, the government utilized every means to create a divide between northern and southern Bhutanese. Frequent Royal tours in the name of seventh Five Year Plan discussions were used to project all southern Bhutanese as common enemies. Ruthless policies were enacted to intimidate, harass and evict southern Bhutanese. But even while about one-sixths of the country's population suffers in refugee camps in Nepal, it has not meant liberation for the rest of the population which continues to reel under government suppression and people continue to be denied individual freedom and most fundamental rights.

However, the bluster and bravado notwithstanding, the beleaguered regime is finding it difficult to fend off international criticism abroad. At home, the government is finding it difficult to clandestinely suppress murmurs of discontent and dissent which is on the rise. Since the beginning of the engineered problem in the south, the Royal Government has played with the sentiments of the people, especially the eastern and central Bhutanese, by far the most oppressed ethnic group in the country. The people, however innocent they may appear, cannot be fooled forever. Even under the prevailing conditions where the slightest hint of dissent is dealt with severely, all Bhutanese are now beginning to realize the true intention of the Royal Government.

The recent launching of the Druk National Congress (DNC), a political organization formed by northern Bhutanese, is a vital step forward in the struggle for reforms in the country by the Bhutanese people. The establishment of this new rallying point which is not ethnic-Nepalese or refugee dominated, is something which has long been overdue, and the formation of a political party by non-southern Bhutanese is significant. It would be a mistake to overlook the implications and consequences of the founding of DNC as just one more addition to the host of organizations formed by Bhutanese dissidents in exile because it has the potential to eventually represent the final nail in the coffin for the powers-that-be in Thimphu.

What I Believe .. E.M. Forster

In the late 1930s, as the shadows of war were gathering over Europe, and also during the war itself, English novelist E.M. Forster wrote a number of articles and radio broadcasts about issues close to his heart, including free speech, tolerance, and liberal values. The best known of these is WHAT I BELIEVE, from which excerpts follow.

I do not believe in Belief. But this is an age of faith, and there are so many militant creeds that, in self-defence, one has to formulate a creed of one's own. Tolerance, good temper and sympathy are no longer enough in a world which is rent by religious and racial persecution, in a world where ignorance rules, and science, who ought to have ruled, plays the subservient pimp. Tolerance, good temper and sympathy -- they are what matter really, and if the human race is not to collapse they must come to the front before long. But for the moment they are not enough, their action is no stronger than a flower, battered beneath a military jack-boot. They want stiffening, even if the process coarsens them. Faith, to my mind, is a stiffening process, a sort of mental starch, which ought to be applied as sparingly as possible. I dislike the stuff. I do not believe in it, for its own sake, at all. Herein I probably differ from most people, who believe in Belief, and are only sorry they cannot swallow even more than they do....

This brings me along to Democracy, "even Love, the Beloved Republic, which feeds upon Freedom and lives." [Quotation from the poem 'Hertha' by A.C. Swinburne] Democracy is not a Beloved Republic really, and never will be. But it is less hateful than other contemporary forms of government, and to that extent it deserves our support. It does start from the assumption that the individual is important, and that all types are needed to make a civilisation. It does not divide its citizens into bosses and the bossed -- as an efficiency-regime tends to do. The people I admire most are those who are sensitive and want to create something or discover something, and do not see life in terms of power, and such people get more of a chance under democracy than elsewhere. They found religions, great or small, or they produce literature and art, or they do disinterested scientific research, or they may be what is called 'ordinary people', who are creative in their private lives, bring up their children decently, for instance, or help their neighbours. All these people need to express them-

selves; they cannot do so unless society allows them the liberty to do so, and the society which allows them most liberty is a democracy.

Democracy has another merit. It allows criticism, and if there is not public criticism there are bound to be hushed-up scandals. This is why I believe in the Press, despite all its lies and vulgarity, and why I believe in Parliament. Parliament is often sneered at because it is a Talking Shop. I believe in it *because* it is a talking shop. I believe in the Private Member who makes himself a nuisance. He gets snubbed and is told that he is cranky or ill-informed, but he does expose abuses which would otherwise never have been mentioned, and very often an abuse gets put right just by being mentioned. Occasionally, too, a well-meaning public official starts losing his head in the cause of efficiency, and thinks himself God Almighty. Such officials are particularly frequent in the Home Office. Well, there will be questions about them in Parliament sooner or later, and then they will have to mind their steps. Whether Parliament is either a representative body or an efficient one is questionable, but I value it because it criticises and talks, and because its chatter gets widely reported.

So two cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give it three. Only the Beloved Republic deserves that.

What about Force, though? While we are trying to be sensitive and advanced and affectionate and tolerant, an unpleasant question pops up: does not all society rest upon force? If a government cannot count upon the police and army, how can it hope to rule? And if an individual gets knocked on the head or sent to a labour camp, of what significance are his opinions?

This dilemma does not worry me as much as it does some. I realise that all society rests upon force. But all the great creative actions, all the decent human relations, occur during the intervals when force has not managed to come to the front. These intervals are what matter. I want them to be as frequent and as lengthy as possible, and I call them 'civilisation'. Some people idealise force and pull it into the foreground as long as possible. I think they make a mistake, and I think that their opposites, the mystics, err even more when they declare that force does not exist. I believe

that it exists, and that one of our jobs is to prevent it from getting out of its box.

In search of a refuge, we may perhaps turn to hero-worship. But here we shall get no help, in my opinion. Hero-worship is a dangerous vice, and one of the minor merits of a democracy is that it does not encourage it, or produce the unmanageable type of citizen known as the Great Man. It produces instead different kinds of small men -- a much finer achievement. But people who cannot make up their own minds, get discontented over this, and they long for a hero to bow down before and to follow blindly. It is significant that a hero is an integral part of the authoritarian stock-in-trade today. An efficiency-regime cannot be run without a few heroes stuck about it to carry off the dullness -- as much as plums have to be put into a bad pudding to make it palatable. One hero at the top and a smaller one each side of him is a favourite arrangement, and the timid and the bored are comforted by the trinity, and, bowing down, feel exalted and strengthened.

No, I distrust Great Men. They produce a desert of uniformity around them and often a pool of blood, too, and I always feel a little man's pleasure when they come a cropper....

The above are the reflections of an individual and a liberal who has found liberalism crumbling beneath him and at first felt ashamed. Then, looking around, he decided there was no special reason for shame, since other people, whatever they felt, were equally insecure. And as for individualism -- there seems no way of getting off this, even if one wanted to. The dictator-hero can grind down his citizens till they are all alike, but he cannot melt them into a single man. That is beyond his power. He can order them to merge, he can incite them to mass-antics, but they are obliged to be born separately, and to die separately, and, owing to these unavoidable termini, will always be running off the totalitarian rails. The memory of birth and the expectation of death always lurk within the human being, making him separate from his fellows, and consequently capable of intercourse with them. Naked I came into this world, naked I shall go out of it! And a very good thing too, for it reminds me that I am naked under my shirt, whatever its colour. **From *The Value of Dissent* published by the Civil Rights Movement, Sri Lanka.**

BHUTAN'S CRISIS OF IDENTITY.. Dr. Michael Hutt

Dr. Hutt who is with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, is no stranger to those seriously following the Bhutanese crisis. After visiting Thimphu and Kathmandu in autumn 1992, Hutt organized a two-day conference on Bhutan in London in March last year. Along with officials from the Royal Government of Bhutan, a large number of "Bhutan experts" in the academic and media circles made it to the meeting in which discussions invariably gravitated to the "southern problem". Although the Bhutanese refugee community was conspicuously absent because "diplomatic sensitivities" and veiled threats prevented the organizers from inviting dissidents, the conference nevertheless succeeded in raising the level of discussions, and awareness, about Bhutan's "southern problem" in the international community.

It is not surprising, therefore, that for someone who has closely followed the Bhutanese situation in the recent past and has additionally had opportunities for interaction with many "Bhutan experts" as well as representatives of both the regime, including the monarch himself, and the refugee community, Hutt's perceptions appear to be genuinely balanced. *Bhutan's Crisis of Identity*, an article contributed to the *World Book Year Book 1994, A Review of Events of 1993* published in London, Sydney, Tunbridge Wells and Chicago, under Asia: A Special Report is an example of the level of Hutt's appreciation of both the sufferings of the *lhotshampas* (southern Bhutanese) as well as the worries of the *drukpas* (northern Bhutanese) and his understanding of the critical implication of the current political conflict for the country's future.

The article very briefly summarizes the Bhutan's political history since its unification under Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel in the seventeenth century and rightly deals with subject of peoples who inhabit the country at greater length because it is, indirectly and in part, the source of the current crisis. The article provides the broad range of estimates of the three main ethnic groups, "Ngalong vary from 10 to 28 per cent, for the Sharchhop 30 to 40 per cent, and for the Nepalis 25 to 52 per cent," but warns that these figures "should be treated with caution."

Perhaps not wishing to confront the Royal Government's population politics, Hutt gives the impression of meekly accepting Bhutan's population clutter, appearing to have naively yielded to Thimphu's suggestions that "lacking census data, the Bhutanese government could for many years only estimate the size and ethnic composition of the population of Bhutan." He has opted not to delve deeply into the regime's sudden downward revision of the total population from 1.375 million in 1988 to 600,000 in 1991.

The varying population figures, however, tell a great deal about Bhutanese political strategy and subtlety, a fact observers and analysts would do well not to overlook. It is inconceivable for any administration in this day and age to be so off-the-mark about the total number of its own citizens. Unquestionably accepting any argument or justification for the overnight halving of population figures would in itself, therefore, be a questionable decision. The

Bhutanese policy of lying about the number of citizens is not new; in earlier times rulers hoped an inflated total would frighten off enemies and discourage attacks, and for obvious reasons, population figures have been intentionally and conscientiously manipulated subsequent to the settlement of ethnic Nepalese in the southern half of the kingdom in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Seeds of Conflict

Spoiling the picture of "a kingdom that is moving cautiously and pragmatically out of its medieval isolation" while maintaining its unique culture, "since 1990 Bhutan has been engulfed in a growing political crisis," leading "to insecurity and violence in southern Bhutan, and to the growth of a dissident movement led by southern Bhutanese in exile who are demanding radical changes in the kingdom's political system," and resulting in over 84,000 refugees by the end of December 1993 in refugee camps in Nepal administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

To address the reasons for the current crisis and to identify the seeds of the conflict, Hutt provides readers with a brief overview of the history of ethnic Nepalese settlement in the southern Bhutanese foothills during the late 1800's and formal grant of nationality to people of Nepalese origin domiciled in the country in 1958. Hutt quotes a figure of 60,000 ethnic Nepalese settled in the southwest of the country by 1932.

The government would like outsiders to believe that ethnic Nepalese were practically non-existent in Bhutan at the turn of the century, but two passages from the book 'Sikkim and Bhutan' by John Claude White who helped establish the Wangchuck dynasty would properly place the date and extent of ethnic Nepalese settlement in southern Bhutan. Writing about his first mission to Bhutan in 1905 Claude White observes: "But in justice to the Hah-pa it must be acknowledged that for the last fifteen years their winter grazing-grounds near Sipchu and the lower hills have been seriously curtailed by the increasing irruption of Nepalese settlers." And, summing up the type of people who inhabit the country, he notes: "The remaining inhabitants are Paharias, the same as those in Sikkim, who are creeping along the foot hills and now form a considerable community extending the whole length of Bhutan where the outer hills join the plains of India. With the exception of the Hindu Paharias, Buddhism is the religion professed throughout Bhutan." The book was published in 1909.

"Bhutan's monarchy is unlike those of most other monarchical states," Hutt writes and observes that the King "possesses neither absolute power nor divine authority." The first king was "elected" in 1907 with Claude White, the authority conceding the total presence by that time of Nepalese settlers across the full southern belt, in attendance. "But until the coronation of the third king in 1952 powerful families continued to govern the districts, with little interference from the centre."

From the grant of citizenship in 1958 until about 1980, "the Bhutanese government pursued a very successful policy of gentle

integration, and the Nepali Bhutanese played an important role in national life." But, according to Hutt, in the mid-eighties there was an abrupt about-face and "the government seemed to revise its confident, inclusive attitude to the southerners and apparently decided that they were a political threat." Hutt believes the regime's fears may have been heightened by events in Sikkim in 1974, the Nepali-led struggle for autonomy in India's Darjeeling district in the 1980's, and Nepal's democracy movement which reduced the status of the king of Nepal to that of a constitutional monarch in 1990.

The article recounts the stringent stipulations of the 1985 Citizenship Act and the census to "identify Bhutanese nationals" in the southern districts in 1988 which led to unease because "the authorities set excessively strict standards for documentation." Even those with citizenship cards were classed as non-nationals if they failed to produce documents that proved residency in Bhutan in 1958. Hutt cites the sixth Five-Year Plan (1987-1992) policy of "one nation, one people" and the introduction of the code of traditional Drukpa dress and etiquette which was applied over-zealously, "so much so that many Lhotshampas could not venture out of their homes in their everyday attire without facing the prospect of a fine or imprisonment." In 1989 the teaching of Nepali was stopped, ostensibly because of the introduction of a new primary curriculum, "but added to the Lhotshampas' feeling that their culture was being pushed to one side."

Political Unrest

Dissent grew in the south "because of what southerners thought was an attempt by the government to force out Nepali-speaking citizens, and to impose the Drukpa culture." Hutt covers the formation of the Peoples Forum for Human Rights (PFHR) in Nepal by Tek Nath Rizal in 1989, the arrest of 45 people between October and December 1989, the mass public demonstrations in southern Bhutan organized by Bhutan People's Party with PFHR in September and October 1990 "that were unprecedented in the kingdom's history"

"After the demonstrations, the Bhutanese army and police began the task of identifying participants and supporters, who were classed as *ngolops* (anti-nationals), and the flow of refugees out of Bhutan began. It reached a peak in May 1992, with 11,000 arrivals recorded for that month in the camps in Nepal. The refugees brought with them detailed allegations of torture, brutality, and rape." The Bhutanese government understandably "rejects the refugees' allegations and argues that it now faces a problem of terrorism in southern Bhutan." The government claims that people have been intimidated, government facilities destroyed, villages have been robbed, and that there are even instances of political assassinations. "However, while many crimes of violence and robbery in the south are now blamed on *ngolops* in Bhutan's only newspaper, it is not clear that all such crimes are politically motivated."

Bhutan was quick to disclaim responsibility over the growing refugee population, Hutt

writes. The regime argued that "the people in the camps were illegal immigrants, Nepali nationals, migrants from India, or southern Bhutanese who had left voluntarily." The authenticity of citizenship documents held by two-thirds of the camp residents was challenged by the Bhutanese government which "expressed the fear that a plot was afoot to turn Bhutan into a Nepali-dominated state."

Although talks between Bhutan and Nepal have begun and the Bhutanese have stated in a document published in May 1993 that "the royal government of Bhutan will accept full responsibility for any bona fide Bhutanese national who has been forcibly evicted from Bhutan," Hutt is certain that many matters still need to be clarified if the problem is to be resolved, "nor will any final resolution be sustainable if it does not take full account of the fears of the Drukpa Bhutanese, and of the grievances and aspirations of their southern compatriots."

"IN QUOTES"

"Today we share a common vision. It is a vision of democracy and prosperity. It is a vision of a world that protects and secures the rights and freedoms of all human beings."

U.S. President Bill Clinton, welcoming Emperor Akihito of Japan to the White House on June 14.

"Following *Kuensel* reports of February, UNHCR looked into the registration of persons accused of looting villages in Bhutan. Only in two cases could it be established that individuals concerned were registered in the camps, but had been reported missing since the previous year."

UNHCR Situation Report on Bhutanese Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Nepal, 01 February - 30 April 1994.

MEDIA SCAN

TROUBLE IN SHANGRI-LA

For decades the Kingdom of Bhutan has nurtured its image as the world's last Shangri-La. Nestled in the Himalayas, it is a jewel of environmental preservation. Its pristine forests, sparkling, icy peaks and rare flora and fauna have caused the World Wildlife Fund to dub Bhutan "one of the ecological wonders of the world." ... To jaded Westerners, the country's image is as lyrical as its moniker: the Land of the Thunder Dragon.

But there is nothing charming about Bhutan's suppression of its ethnic Nepalese minority. Since 1988, when Bhutan began cracking down on illegal Nepalese immigrants, tens of thousands have been forcibly evicted from the country, according to a 1993 U.S. State Department report. Thousands more have "fled voluntarily in the face of officially sanctioned pressure, including arbitrary arrests, beatings, rape, robberies and other forms of intimidation by police and the army," says the report. Nepalese who have stayed have been subject to attacks. ... Faced with fear and uncertainty, as many as 85,000 Nepalese have fled to eight United Nations-sponsored refugee camps in eastern Nepal.

But the Bhutanese government is not content simply to evict illegal immigrants. In 1989 the king promulgated a series of decrees to ensure that the remaining, legal Nepalese would be culturally assimilated into the Drukpa majority. The edicts declared the Drukpa language, Dzongkha, the official tongue and enshrined the traditional Drukpa garb and rules of etiquette as national standards, to be practiced in all public places.

"For us, this is a question of survival," King Wangchuck told NEWSWEEK. That may sound like hyperbole, but Bhutanese fears are not unfounded. Bhutan is wedged between two vast and populous countries - India and China - neither of which has hesitated to annex a neighbouring fiefdom in the past. Tibet is only the most famous example. In 1975, Bhutan's sister state of Sikkim lost its independence to India. As the Bhutanese see it, Nepalese settlers were partly to blame. It was to put down riots by the Nepalese, then 75 percent of the population, that the king of Sikkim invited Indian troops into the country. Thus entrenched, India engineered a farcical referendum in which 97 percent of the people voted to merge with India. The example of Sikkim still spooks the Bhutanese.

... While the violence has diminished over the past two years, the propaganda war continues to rage, with each side blaming the other for instigating attacks. ... Whoever is to blame, Nepal is benefiting from the refugee situation. Although the outflow of refugees has diminished, the eight camps continue to bring international donor agencies with money into the country. Bhutan, on the other hand, is eager to end the controversy. Many of its development programs have been stalled because of the insurgency, and the country has become the target of international criticism.

The king is now trying to placate the legal Nepalese and has even visited Nepalese families in southern Bhutan to reassure them. He now says Bhutan is willing to take back, "without any conditions, any genuine Bhutanese citizen who might have been forcibly evicted" - in itself an admission that some refugees were coerced into leaving. But such gestures may come too late. The country's image as a Shangri-La may already have been tarnished forever.

NEWSWEEK, June 13, 1994

The Silent Suffering in Bhutan

... DNC

Produced below are excerpts from "The silent suffering in Bhutan" published by the Druk National Congress.

STATE OF AFFAIRS

"After going through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and comparing them to what is happening in Bhutan, every Bhutanese can immediately observe that Bhutan's human rights record is extremely poor... The instances mentioned in the following pages are just a few of the innumerable cases of violations of basic human rights and the inhuman treatment meted out to the people..

The Government has always been creating and exploiting the religious and ethnic divide between the North and the South, but of late it has also taken upon itself to deprive the Buddhists themselves of the right to freely practice their own schools of thought.

The *Nyingmapas*, who co-existed harmoniously with the *Drukpa Karyupas* are now oppressed to the extent where free practice has become difficult. It is a custom among Buddhists in Bhutan that in whatever circumstances of need and sorrow, prayers are offered and blessings taken before seeking any help or remedy in both the *Karyupa* and *Nyingmapa* traditions, without differentiating between the two. But now, the Government has issued a circular stating that Government permission is required for all religious ceremonies that are conducted for the public.

Even within the *Drukpa Karyu*, the Government has mixed politics with religion for its own benefit. It has always been a tradition that the *Lam Netens* (Abbots) of each *Draktsang* (Monastery) were chosen from deserving candidates of the same *Draktsang*. Now, for the last few years, all *Lam Netens* have been appointed from the *Punakha Draktsang* only, leaving no room for the meritorious candidates from the other *Draktsangs*. Even the *Je Khenpos* (Chief Abbots) have been royal appointees, bypassing the normal traditional system of selection....

Even the members of the Civil Service and Security Forces who have been forced to uphold the interests of the regime have sometimes themselves become victims.

In 1988, Wangdi Gyeltshen, the maternal uncle of the Queens, wanted to purchase three acres of public grazing land jointly owned by thirty households in Haa Tsaphey. As the villagers declined the offer, Wangdi approached the Queens who in turn put the matter up to the King. The King issued a "KASHO" (Royal Decree) that the land was to be given to Wangdi Gyeltshen. The distressed villagers petitioned the King that they had nowhere else to graze their cattle. On receiving the petition, the King issued orders to the High Court to investigate and settle the case. The "JURY" comprising Chief Justice Dasho Paljor Dorji, and judges Colonel Gyem Tshering, Major Pem Tshering, Tshewang Penjore, Lam Sanga, D.N.Katwal, H.Homagai, Jigme Wangdi,

K.B.Ghalley and Sangay Dorji, after examining the case, gave their verdict in favour of the villagers. An agreement to this effect was drawn up and signed by the Chief Justice, Colonel Gyem Tshering, Major Pem Tshering, Tshewang Penjore, H.Homagai and Lam Sanga. The rest of the jury were absent during the signing of the agreement. A report was then submitted to the King. The King was outraged that his "Kasho" issued to Wangdi had not been adhered to and in the outcome that followed, the Chief Justice was suspended and the other members of the jury who were signatories to the agreement were terminated from their services. Six persons including Dimpon Lengo and Dimpon Naku from among the thirty petitioning households were sentenced to six years in prison and sent to Gasa to serve their sentence. A year later, after the political uprising in Southern Bhutan, they were released. The land is now owned by Wangdi.

Chapchap Rinchen Dorji, the Chirang Thrimpon (District Judge), authorised the sale of seized property in Southern Bhutan at a(n) underpriced value of Nu.4000/= per acre on the orders of higher authorities in Thimphu. Subsequently these properties were purchased by various senior officials from within the same circle. When the people of Chirang complained about the price, the incident was exposed and it became increasingly embarrassing to hide the incident anymore. The Thrimpon was blamed for authorising the sale, charged with misappropriating the authority of office and his services was terminated....

On the First of February 1992, when Sonam Drukpa, a royal attendant, shot dead Tankanath Pathak, a cowherd who was grazing his herd by the roadside in Chirang, the Chief of Police was sent to investigate the case. He was briefed by the Chief of Army before he left for Chirang. When he returned and filed the report on his findings, the bodyguard, policeman Ngawang Choeda, a Shar chop, who was assigned to Sonam Drukpa was charged with the murder and sentenced to twelve years in prison.

Some of the villagers of Punakha District, under duress, have had to sell their lands to the Government at compensatory prices for the purpose of building palaces for each of the Queens. Since these lands were their only means of livelihood and no more land was offered to them as replacement, some of the villagers refused or later petitioned the Queens for empathy. Those who did so were imprisoned. The lands have now been taken over by the Government and handed over to the Queens. The irrigation water supply to the dependent surrounding village households have also been cut off for use in the palaces which are being constructed on these plots....

A system of forced labour (Goongda Woola) is imposed on the people and those who refuse are imprisoned and fined. Some time back, about a hundred families fled Bhutan

after they were victimized for refusing to enlist in the army. Their leaders, Kangpara Latshap from Kurtey, Narphung Khotsa, Kanglung Sek Tala and others were imprisoned. Sek Tala was tied in a sack and thrown alive into the Punakha river. About 300 people from Decheling came back and had to undergo compulsory labour for nine months each as punishment. During the same period, the people of Paro too refused to enlist. Their leader Changa Thow and 30 others were imprisoned and some fled the country to escape the consequences.

About 3000 to 4000 Northern Bhutanese who fled then, now live mostly in parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal and other parts of India and Nepal.

Villagers and the general public are still forced to enlist in the security forces and report for conscripted labour, some of whom are used for personal and private business activities such as logging, construction, etc. This has always, and is still causing serious shortage of manpower to work in their own fields.

All lucrative projects have been syndicated by a select few and practically every Government contract has been awarded to them....

The Government publicises that it has been spending substantial amount of money in development activities but hardly anything has actually been done and in most places the situation is no better than what it was centuries ago. In parts of the Eastern region, people still live together with animals, in one-room houses which have roofs made of leaves and no locks on their doors as there is nothing to steal. Some need to even go out into the jungles looking for edible roots and leaves for their next meal. This is more common in Taba Damtse, Kheng District and the areas of Panbang, Nganglam, Decheling and Kulikatta and interiors of Deothang, Orong, Gomdar, Marsala and Shinkharlauri between Gaylegphug and Bhangtar, made up of mostly Shar chop settlements....

Additionally, royal visits immensely reduce the financial resources which finally make it to the districts as the expense for this too is met with from the same funds. The villagers are also made to donate commodities like rice, meat, etc. out of their meagre possessions and normally after these visits, members of the entourage even carry off what is left over of the rice, meat, liquor, etc. to their own homes....

Torture has been used as a normal means of suppression and extraction of predetermined confessions. Arbitrary arrests are made by the Royal Body Guards and Royal Bhutan Army and victims detained without knowledge about their whereabouts.

Dasho Shingkar Lam, who served as Deputy Minister, Secretary to the Late King Jigme Dorji, Speaker of the National Assembly and also as Secretary to the present King was arrested and tortured around 1975 as he was sus-

pected of possessing documents concerning the mistress of the Late King. He was released four months later after which he was made to resign. A year earlier to this incident, the then Shung Donyer (Deputy Home Minister) Shengnap Dhondup was imprisoned for twelve years and tortured. Police Chief Bap Dada was also arrested and tortured and even his relatives serving the government and in the monk body were expelled. Mongar Depung Kota and Talo Sangay Wangdi were also arrested and tortured to death....

People have been deprived of their nationality by contorting and implementing arbitrary laws. There are those who have been deprived of their nationality for having fled Bhutan to escape suppression because, as the authorities put it, their fleeing amounts to disloyalty and those who have had to flee after their nationality was revoked for other arbitrary reasons....

It is quite clear to most Bhutanese how the National Assembly is being used as a tool by the regime. All National Assembly Resolutions are predecided by the King and his Cabinet, and Assembly Members are briefed in advance as to what views they should present when the Assembly is in session....

In most Dzongkhags when the King plans to make a visit, Government officials are sent to brief the villagers as to what to say during the meeting with the King. Ever since the Southern problem started, the normal line of approach was for the King to mention how much money the Government is intending to allocate for development activities and how the Southerners are posing a threat to their development. Whereupon the villagers, as previously briefed, would rise up and express their willingness to volunteer for the cause and swear allegiance to the "TSA WA SUM", which would be widely publicised in Government Bulletins.

However, on the King's visit to Tashigang when a similar plan was formulated, Chungkhar Phuntsho Wangdi, ex-Councillor Jigme Wangdi and Rongthong Sonam Gyamtsho were sent to brief the villagers well in advance by the Zonal Administration. As usual when the King promised to provide more funds for development, the villagers requested for initiating the construction of the road to Bidung which was assured to them by him the year before. No amount of coaxing with the guarantee

of additional funds appeased the villagers who mentioned that the Southern Bhutanese had not done anything to them and humbly insisted on the fulfilling of the promises of the previous year. This unexpected incident led to the sacking of seventeen National Assembly Members, twenty one Gups (Village Headmen) and the suspension of the Dzongdag (District Commissioner), Dorji Namgay. Tashigang District was then split into two politically manageable districts - Tashi Yangtse and Tashigang....

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Can we shoulder the heavy burden of turning a blind eye to the oppression and sufferings of the entire population for the benefit of a few?

For generations our forefathers have lived under suppression and yet glorified the regime. Because the fruits of their actions, we are still back in the primitive ages, bereft of basic freedom and in constant fear even as a member of the United Nations. If we continue to make the same mistake, generations of our children will probably never forgive us.

The time has come for our neighbouring countries, the rest of the world and foremost the people of Bhutan to think deeply about the future of our children and our country. Even if we cannot give them the luxuries of the modern world, let us all come together to at least liberate them from the bonds of suppression and give them this most precious gift of all - the right to live as human beings that they rightly deserve....

We need to change for the better, an arrangement that will pave the way for a new democratic government to build a new constitution and rights and responsibilities that will establish the confidence in the system which is essential for the peace and prosperity of Bhutan and that these rights and responsibilities must belong to all men and women of every age, class and ethnic origin, balanced by responsibilities of fair contribution and law abiding conduct, to ensure greater freedom, security and opportunity.

We need to establish in Bhutan a participative and vibrant democracy to meet the aspirations of our people for democratic rights and social justice. We must bring awareness of the rights and responsibilities of every citizen and be proud once more of our society. And if work together, we know that we can succeed, as individuals and as a nation."

REFUGEE CAMP INFORMATION

Location	District	Refugees	Students
Timai	Jhapa	8,199	3,365
Goldhap	Jhapa	7,820	2,990
Beldangi I	Jhapa	14,703	5,054
Beldangi II	Jhapa	18,834	6,690
Beldangi II Ext.	Jhapa	9,599	3,575
Sanischare (Pathri)	Morang	16,725	5,250
Khudunabari (N)	Jhapa	6,991	3,206
Khudunabari (S)	Jhapa	3,469	
Total		86,340	30,130

Cumulative births: 3,839

Cumulative deaths: 2,574

The above figures are as of June 30, 1994.