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73RD SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

An announcement was made by the National Assembly Secretariat in early July that the 73rd session of the National Assembly would be held "sometime during September-October." However, till the end of September the Assembly Secretariat has remained tight-lipped about the exact dates. The government is apparently taking stock of the situation arising from the formation of a political party by northern Bhutanese in exile and a number of dissident publications doing the rounds in Thimphu and elsewhere before deciding on the dates. "Drukki Selwai Melong", "Silent Suffering in Bhutan" and "The Bhutan Review" are reportedly circulating even in some remote villages. To curb the circulation of documents critical of the government, the *Dzongdags* (District Administrators) in each district have been instructed to make special efforts to collect all "seditious" literature.

With increased dissidence visible in the east, *Dzongdags* from both east and south have reportedly been called to Thimphu. It is believed that dates for the next session of the Assembly will be finalized only after the outcome of the meeting with the *Dzongdags* from these "sensitive" areas.

It may be recalled that after lengthy deliberations on 17 October 1991 during the 70th Session of the National Assembly three years ago, "reflecting his commitment and dedication to removing the *ngolop* (anti-national) problem," His Majesty the King made a pledge "to abdicate if he did not find a lasting solution to the *ngolop* problem" within three years.

CAMP SADAKO 1994

With a view to raising awareness and informing the Japanese people about the problem of refugees worldwide, young Japanese volunteers visit refugees in different parts of the world each year. This year the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal have been chosen for the programme **Camp Sadako '94** named after the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata.

An 11-member team of young Japanese volunteers under this programme arrived in Kathmandu on September 18 and left for the refugee camps in eastern Nepal after two days of orientation. The four-week long programme will allow the members of the team to be attached to NGOs working in various sectors in the camps. This will provide the young visitors an opportunity to interact with the refugees and be informed firsthand of the circumstances that led them to flee their country and be turned into refugees.

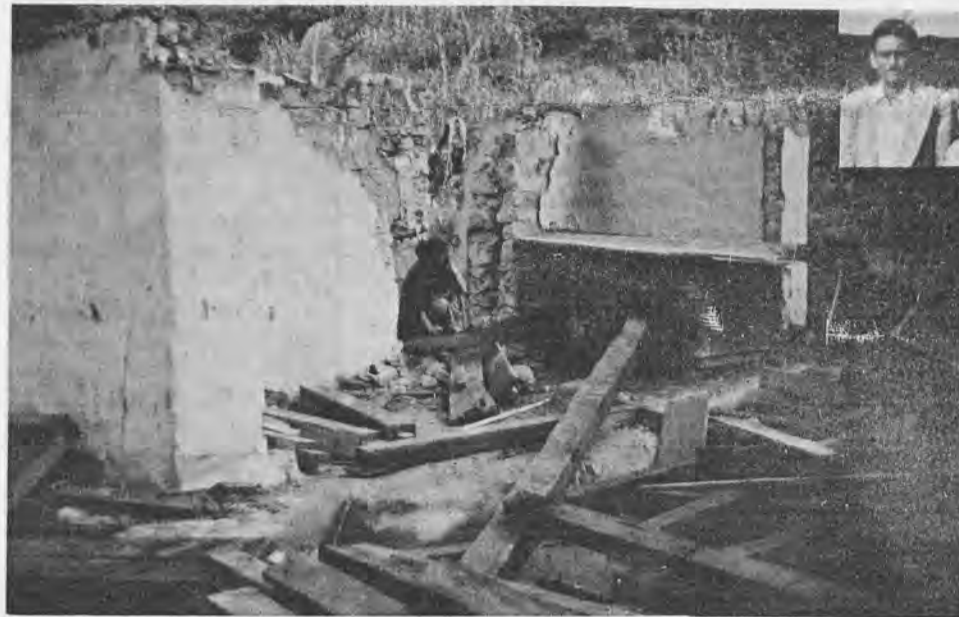
The team represents different sections of the Japanese society, which includes, among others, University students, private sector employees, a journalist and a medical doctor. Upon returning home at the end of the programme, individual members are expected to share their experiences in their community.

FROM KACHIN TO KHUDUNABARI

"I am fully determined to live and die where I was born and brought up. I shall be indebted to Your Gracious Majesty for Your Majesty's most benevolent consideration please." Thus read a desperate appeal to the King by Nirmal Gurung of Kachin, a remote village in Tendu *gewog* of Samchi district, as a last resort to stay back in the country.

Ordered to leave the country by local authorities who said that only direct intervention from the King could save his family from eviction, Gurung travelled with his wife to Thimphu to make his appeal. He managed to submit a petition but was denied an opportunity to appeal directly to the King. While Gurung persisted and was still trying to get an audience, his son came to inform him that their house had already been demolished.

"After the house was destroyed, we slept in the cowshed for two nights. Then the *Karbari* (assistant village head) came along with other villagers and burnt down the cowshed, too. So, we had to leave," said his two daughters. Neighbours were forced by security forces to help demolish the house and sheds. Valuables and livestock were taken away. Some of the animals were slaughtered to feed the demolition party, the daughters stated. Having no other option, the Gurung family



Nirmal Gurung (inset) and the demolished house

gathered together at the border town of Phuntsholing and left the country, arriving at Kakarvitta in eastern Nepal on August 20. The family was granted refugee status and is now in Khudunabari Camp.

48 year old Nirmal Gurung holds Bhutanese citizenship identity card number 15-P-10-0009476. A relatively prosperous farmer by Bhutanese standards owning 55 head of cattle and cardamom fields under *Thram* (land deed) number 602, Gurung was born and raised in Kachin village. His now-demolished house numbered KC/59. His father Mahabir Gurung, born in Bhalukhop vil-

lage in the same locality, died in 1985 at the age of 75. The entire Gurung clan in this locality has followed the practice of inter-marriage among cousins so there is no dispute regarding the Bhutanese nationality and citizenship of members of this family.

Along with Nirmal's family, 12 other Gurung families from the same village, all related to each other, were also evicted. They arrived two weeks before Nirmal Gurung and his family adding to the large Bhutanese refugee population of about 86,000 in the UNHCR-run camps in Nepal. Personal motives may have played a

part-role in their forced eviction, according to the evictees, since most of the land belonging to these families have been transferred in the name of the *Dungpa* (Sub-divisional Officer) and the son-in-law of *gup* (village head) Tenzin Dukpa. However, the use of security personnel in the demolition of homes and reluctance of the monarch and central authorities to intervene in the case clearly point to complicity at the highest level. Condoning the high-handedness of local officials only proves that for the regime it is a matter of the ends justifying the means.

CNAS MEET ON BHUTANESE REFUGEES PROBLEM IN NEPAL

The Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, organized a Round Table Discussion, 'Bhutanese Refugees Problem in Nepal' on September 9. Introducing the programme, Executive Director of CNAS Krishna Khanal said that despite the gravity of the problem posed by the presence of over 85,000 Bhutanese refugees, the issue had not received adequate attention except for occasional media coverage. The programme by CNAS was thus intended to bring together intellectuals to deliberate on possible ways of finding an early solution to the problem.

Initiating the discussion, Prof. Lok Raj Baral of Tribhuvan University provided a brief background about the problem and the present status of talks, and went on to suggest ways to resolving the issue. While preferring a bilateral approach, Prof. Baral said that "given the Indian leverage on, and friendship with, both Bhutan and Nepal, any positive Indian gesture is always welcome." Recommending caution regarding India's involvement, however, "how far the immediate Indian intervention would be desirable would have to be evaluated by Nepal," he said. Acknowledging

the key role of the Royal Government of Bhutan and particularly the King, he added that "a marked flexibility on the part of the Bhutanese King alone would help resolve the crisis."

With speakers scrambling for time to speak, the discussion mainly centered on the Government of India's role in resolving the current refugee crisis. Members of Nepal's dissolved Parliament Hiranyalal Shrestha, C.P. Mainali and Sindhunath Pyakurel and others including Dr. Shanta Thapalia, Bhim Raul and Sushil Pyakhurel spoke strongly on the need to involve India. Journalist Ramesh K.C. stressed caution while seeking India's mediatory role, and said that such involvement should be well defined and should in no way overshadow Nepal's own national interests.

Noted scholar Rishikesh Shah opined that lack of vision in national politics was the reason for the current refugee situation. Nepal's former Foreign Secretary, Jagdish Rana called for a change in the present strategy and recommended stepping up diplomatic efforts. He said that both official and unofficial channels should be utilized in the pursuit of finding an

early solution to the problem facing two friendly neighbours.

Sridhar Khatri similarly called for renewed diplomatic efforts. "Diplomacy is the art of the possible," said Khatri and reminded the gathering that both countries had much to gain from good relations. Khatri further added that prolonged negotiation may be in Bhutan's short term interest but will contribute to long-term instability once the displaced citizens start mobilizing people within Bhutan.

Intervening in the discussion, Om Dhungel of the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB) said that since the bilateral talks appeared to be heading nowhere, there was a need to involve both India and the international community, particularly the donor countries in the solution process. Another participant representing the refugee community, Narayan Katel of the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) called for India's involvement while Khagendra Baral of the Students Union of Bhutan (SUB) appealed for a collective effort to pressurize the Royal Government so that it would be forced to resolve the current refugee problem.

TALKS POSTPONED

The fifth round meeting of the of the Bhutan-Nepal Ministerial Joint Committee scheduled to be held in September was deferred. According to a Press Release issued by the Nepalese Foreign Ministry the two governments mutually agreed to hold the next rounds of talks after the Nepalese general elections slated for mid-November this year. The fourth round meeting was held in Thimphu last June.

The news of the postponement has disappointed the Bhutanese refugee community. "We thought it was only Bhutan wanting to prolong the talks, but this time Nepal seems to have sought a postponement. So who do we look towards to get us back home," said one refugee in despair.

DASAIN GREETINGS

The Review family wishes all readers a very happy Dasain. May this auspicious occasion give us all the courage to survive, and the faith to look forward to the day when victory of good over evil will ultimately prevail everywhere in the world.

The Bhutan REVIEW

ERROR OF JUDGEMENT

The Bhutanese refugee community had little to cheer about this September. Not unexpectedly, the fifth round meeting of the Nepal-Bhutan Ministerial Joint Committee scheduled for the month was postponed. With election fever having gripped the Nepalese polity, the 'irksome' business of having to address the refugee issue appears to have been gratefully relegated to the back burner by Kathmandu.

It is true that little is expected from the bilateral talks, at least within the current framework, and only the truly hardened optimist will detect a light at the end of the tunnel. However, considering that this, by her own choice, is currently the only forum available to Nepal to try and make the Bhutanese see reason, the facile manner in which it has apparently been agreed to defer the talks until after the polls in Nepal is shocking.

While nothing substantive may have resulted even had the two delegation met, the fact that there has been a postponement will serve Bhutan well. Thimphu has consistently insisted that it wishes to speedily resolve the refugee crisis, and it is Kathmandu that has shown scant interest. The King himself has been known to regularly expound this view. Under the circumstances, even if it is only the rare gullible visitor to the Dragon Kingdom who comes back convinced by this royal display of righteous intent, having proposed or even "mutually agreed" to defer deliberations, Nepal has played right into Thimphu's hands once again.

The well-oiled Bhutanese propaganda machinery can be expected to go to town with this latest bit of opportunity. If the immature Bhutanese official feeds diplomats and journalists the "we-told-you-they-are-not-interested" line, the monarch and his senior ministers displaying greater finesse will no doubt take great pains to express their "understanding" of Nepalese political "priorities".

Thimphu's task of manipulating the media and convincing the international community has been considerably simplified with this fresh "evidence" of lack of urgency on the part of Kathmandu to resolve the refugee crisis. As it is, considering the magnitude of the problem and the desperate desire of both Nepal and the international community to see it quickly resolved, it will not be easy for His Majesty's Government to convince even well-wishers that domestic compulsions have rightfully or justifiably interfered in the efforts to find a solution to this national crisis.

Indeed, given the united "national" character of the Nepalese response to the Bhutanese refugee problem -- manifest in the national consensus which has evolved among all political parties in the country regarding the manner in which His Majesty's Government of Nepal would work towards resolving the problem -- it is unfortunate that the process of formulating this solution should have been forced to give way to domestic political preoccupations. For, even if the current caretaker government may have lost the moral authority to transact business on behalf of the Nepalese people in all other spheres, by virtue of the all-party agreement it still had the authority and, more importantly, the responsibility for going ahead with trying to find a solution to the Bhutanese refugee crisis. Given that it affords Thimphu yet another opportunity for propaganda for starters, the postponement of the fifth round, sadly, is more than a simple matter of shirking responsibility -- it may quite possibly cost much more in the long run.

Over a year into bilateral negotiations, it is clear that Thimphu's strategy of prevarication has been largely successful. But even the Bhutanese will not fool themselves into believing that such a policy will last forever; they must recognize that sometime soon reality will have to be faced. Meanwhile, however, any delay not of their own making surely helps. Any contributions, therefore, even unwittingly made, to the Royal Government's strategy of putting off having to deal with issues likely to serve up undesirable solutions, can help neither His Majesty's Government nor the refugees' cause.

Unfortunately for the refugees, ever since the bilateral talks got off on the wrong foot with the fiasco of categorization in the early rounds, Thimphu continues to benefit from Kathmandu's seeming indifference. The "error of judgement" in the postponement of the fifth round meeting joins a long list of "concessions" and "compromise" made by the Nepalese side. The reluctant Bhutanese regime brought into the docks -- in the form of the bilateral talks -- through international pressure, has used these "concessions" to turn out, ironically, the aggressor, instead.

It is necessary for Nepal to recognize and concede that in Bhutan they have a shrewd and competent adversary. An adversary capable of using every minor "error of judgement", gracious "compromise" or generous "concession" to its advantage. Much needs to be done between now and the next round of talks. Much can be accomplished. Bhutanese refugees wait in the hope that the commitment and firm resolve necessary to satisfactorily solve the problem of Bhutanese refugees on Nepalese soil will be demonstrated by His Majesty's Government in the days ahead.

FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Pierre Sane, Secretary General, Amnesty International

Most governments that continue to deprive their citizens of their political and civil rights are today on the defensive, resorting to all kinds of justifications for their failures to respect the international standards of civilized behaviour. One of their recurrent justifications is the development imperative, or as it is usually called, the "full belly thesis".

Simply put it says that freedom is a luxury for the starving masses and can only be bestowed upon them once the primary needs of food and health have been fulfilled. Proponents of the "full belly thesis" would point to the history of the industrial revolution in Europe or to the success of the four Asian dragons to vindicate their stand, insisting on the need to focus the energies of the population towards meeting basic needs. Individual dissent from this collective endeavour should in this vision be rightly quelled.

Many of us reject this vision. Are we then working against development, at least in the eyes of the proponents of the "full belly thesis"? Do we all have the same understanding of what development is and ought to be?

The development discourse has evolved historically in the post-war era to reflect the changes in the international political economy, the shifts in academic theories and the changing ideas and practices of development agencies.

Today most agencies define development as a process combining "sustainable growth, participation and equity". But many analysts have argued that in practice over the past 50 years an invariant has remained: namely national economic growth. Equity was seen as either trickling down or added as an afterthought, while participation remained restricted to elites.

The startling failure of this model calls for the articulation of a new development discourse. A discourse that will have to be centred on the enhancement of the dignity of human beings and preservation of our common heritage.

That new development discourse will have to first close the gap between "talk and action" and be informed by the "many possible development routes" which emerge as the consequences of struggles among different groups in society.

The new discourse should also integrate the contributions of new social movements such as women, environmentalism and human rights which question the sustainability of just 'any' growth and who call for a worldwide strategy of equality, sustainable growth, and justice.

Finally, this new discourse ought to be based on the concept of "substantive participation" as the new invariant, thus seeing people as the real and only agents of their development and their history.

As we enter the 21st century the challenge of protecting "humanity and nature" has become a

global one. Today the process of globalization of the world economy is taking a faster pace, as shown by massive international speculations with large foreign investments chasing the best returns and large-scale migrations of people in search of a better life.

In addition, the multiplicity of economic, social and cultural exchanges is reinforcing the sense of belonging to a global community. The wind of democratization has swept away military dictatorships of Latin America, many autocratic regimes in Africa and the communist states of Eastern Europe.

However, or maybe as a result of this process, the attachment of blood, race, religion and ethnicity is growing and in some cases taking a violent form. Global modernization, with its powerful, structural economic and social transformations and loss of identity, is resisted and has revived in many places the attachment to an identity opposed to the 'other', leading to exclusion and intolerance. Most ethnic wars in eastern Europe and Africa, the growth of religious fundamentalism and sectarianism in the Middle East, North America and parts of Asia, the rise of extreme right in Europe, and mounting racism, antisemitism and xenophobia are proof of the strong attachment to cultural identity which is at times expressed in violent ways.

This double process of globalization and particularization is putting a strain on the legitimacy of the nation-state, already weakened by a global recession it cannot control and the particularistic demands it is unwilling or unable to satisfy. As a result, economic and social entitlements and rights are being curtailed more and more and the income gap is widening in many societies, with poverty on the increase both North and South, fueled by unemployment, homelessness and cuts in social services. Civil and political rights are under special threat, due to lack of commitment or inability of governments to bring an end to civil wars, to combat mounting social intolerance, religious extremism and racism at home and to promote human rights internationally.

The question for us, therefore, is how are we going to develop the global counter-movement that will protect "humanity and nature" from the logic of a global development process that may in many countries destroy the very fabric of society?

For decades, at least since the idea of universal rights was embodied in the Universal Declaration, governments of all ideological persuasions have sought to throw us off track. Under the 'old' world order (the East/West division) the conflict of values, in terms of organization of the economy, the society and of relationships between the individual and the state, appeared to go hand in hand with differing -- and often dia-

metrically opposed -- notions of what those basic human rights actually were. For governments in the West, the emphasis was on individual freedoms, civil and political rights, natural rights (measured by absolute yardsticks), and international protection. In the Eastern bloc, governments emphasized collective freedoms, economic and social rights, historical rights and national sovereignty. Squeezed between the two blocs, governments of the 'non-aligned South' tried to articulate their own special needs in terms of economic development, and thus their human rights emphasis was on the right to development.

Yet if we go back to the origins of the Universal Declaration, adopted in 1948, these 'conflicting' rights were regarded as not only inextricably linked, but essential to the world order that was to emerge from the slaughter of the First and Second World Wars. Informed by these terrible experiences and by the experience of the New Deal era in the USA, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his address to the United Nations in 1941, outlined his four essential freedoms:

"In future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

"The first is the freedom of speech and expression -- everywhere in the world.

"The second is the freedom of every person to worship God in his own way -- everywhere in the world.

"The third is freedom from want which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peace-time life for its inhabitants -- everywhere in the world.

"The fourth is freedom from fear which, translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation would be able to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour -- anywhere in the world."

This he said, "is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a world attainable in our own time and generation."

Roosevelt's vision is an important one. He underlined not only the traditional civil and political rights but also the freedom from want, which has given rise to the concern with economic and social rights.

There followed international treaties and covenants covering everything from civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to racial and sexual discrimination. Their principles are far-reaching. Even if imperfect, the guidelines for the defence of human rights -- all human rights -- are in place.

[Courtesy: Human Rights - the new consensus, Regency Press (Humanity) Ltd., London.]

A TIME FOR CHANGE

- Anon

"Where there is oppression, there is resistance." Mao Zedong declared decades ago. During the last few months the Great Helmsman's neighbour, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, right across the southern border had reason to remember his dictum as hundreds of seditious pamphlets entitled *Druk [Gi] Selwai Melong* -- literally the Clear Mirror of Bhutan -- were clandestinely circulated among the King's supposedly loyal subjects. So begins an 8-page document circulating even more clandestinely in the Bhutanese capital since early this year. And, as with all things forbidden, copies have found their way into the hands of most of Thimphu's educated residents. Interestingly, the document has originated from the capital itself.

A Time For Change comes down hard on the current system of government which it says facilitates rampant abuse of power and recommends, albeit simplistically, reforms in the national institutions to make them more effective. The document does not draw upon ethnic considerations to make its points. In fact, but for an introductory paragraph stressing the crucial role of Sharchops in the Bhutanese polity and pointing to their current discontent as the ominous signs of the times, there are no further references to any of the ethnic groups in the Kingdom.

No one has taken credit for authoring this highly inflammatory document which targets royalty and privileged layer of the bureaucracy for severe criticism. Clues point to possible involvement of the expatriate community as the document appears to be an internal paper prepared for a donor agency. If that is indeed so, then the extraordinary display of disgust for the current system is surprising given Thimphu's untiring efforts to woo the international community.

The document attempts a brief assessment of the main political institutions and shows how they have been made impotent by the regime. The bureaucracy which wields "enormous discretionary powers" essentially manages all affairs of the state. The King appoints all top civil servants who "hold office at the pleasure of His Majesty." The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) which was established in 1982 "to streamline administrative procedures," published civil service rules in 1990 "to respond to the changing needs." The rules and regulations were formulated purportedly to achieve "administrative efficiency" and to safeguard "individual rights" but, the document points out, the 178-page publication "does not mention a word about appeal procedure." Instead, "when an individual appeals for protection of his basic rights, it is viewed as a challenge to the system."

About the legal system in the country, the document has this to say: "The highest court of appeal in Bhutan is the King. And the King is above the law. The High Court was established in 1968. The High Court judges were and are appointed by the King. The overwhelming majority of the judges do not have legal background. Two of the recent judges appointed to the High Court were a physician and a principal of a High School with 30 years of teaching experi-

ence. When the judges do not know ABC of law how can they dispense justice?"

The poor state of the national legislative body, the *Tshogdu* (National Assembly), and its use as a "rubber stamp" by the King and his bureaucracy, is brought out through a comparison of the remuneration provided to *chimis* (Assembly members). With an annual salary of Nu 10,800, the *chimi* is paid less than the lowest paid government employee, the janitor who receives Nu 12,000. The document, which has as its main thrust the need for increased effectiveness of national legislators and the judiciary, seeks to prove that low salaries attract poor quality of people as "elected" members with the result that "the resolutions passed by the National Assembly do not reflect the view of the constituencies." Since "the position of *chimi* is attractive to only marginally educated Bhutanese who cannot make a living as a farmer," it is only natural, therefore, that the King and his nominees in the *Tshogdu* "use the National Assembly as the rubber stamp to get credibility [for] their policies and objectives."

The Royal Advisory Council (RAC), comprising people's elected representatives as opposed to senior bureaucrats and ministers appointed by the King, has been empowered, on paper at least, with wide-ranging powers over issues of national significance. However, since the problems of quality discussed under *chimis* automatically apply for RAC members too, the Council has never attempted or been able to challenge the bureaucracy or exercise any authority. The document believes that even this potential threat of from the RAC has been minimized through the recent reduction in the term of councillors from 5 to 3 years and barring them from standing for reelection.

The most important decision making body, the Council of Ministers (*Lhengyal Shungtsog* or Cabinet) has members who "were and are appointed by the King. The King does not require [since he had the Assembly rules amended] the concurrence of the National Assembly with regard to the appointment of High Court judges and ministers."

The document provides detailed examples of specific cases where power and authority have been flagrantly misused. It begins with the "Saga of the Sawmill". Kabji Penjor received government approval in the late eighties for the establishment of a large sawmill and joinery in Wangdiphodrang. He sold off his other businesses and secured additional loans to import technology and equipment from Europe. But, with everything in place, Penjor was shattered when all his efforts to obtain raw materials (timber) for this government-approved project failed. Aware of the tremendous profit potential, the King's father-in-law (*Yab*) Ugen Dorji, who "will do anything for personal aggrandizement," made an offer to buy the factory and allegedly thwarted Penjor's every move to obtain timber from the government. The King refused to intervene. Refused raw materials, ostensibly on environmental grounds, and unable to meet financial obligations, Kabji Penjor was eventually forced to sell out to the waiting *Yab*. Not surprisingly,

since within a week after the factory changed hands, the same government department has ensured a steady supply of wood.

Yab Ugen Dorji also appears as the central figure in the second example of misuse of power where the Royal Monetary Authority (RMA) was coerced into providing Singye Group of Companies owned by the royal father-in-law with loan at concessional rates. This was engineered by Ugen Dorji threatening the management of RMA and forcing its Board of Directors (all also members of the Cabinet) to approve the conversion of his loan from working capital available at 17% to term loan available at 15%.

The document also states that "the King presented government house worth Nu 5,000,000 to the daughter of the Chairman of the Dhendup Group of Companies." The Chairman of the Dhendup Group is the brother of the *Yab*. The list of such misuse, the paper says, is long.

"The faith of the people in national institutions has plummeted to a new low," and "the middle employees are disillusioned and have lost faith in the system," because rules are made only to protect privileges and benefits of royalty and senior officials. While all top officials directly indulge in business in the form of "apple orchards and real estate", and actively support their children and families involved in profitable ventures, other civil servants cannot be involved in or have relatives doing business. The decision of the government last year to ban the import of reconditioned cars from Japan, on environmental grounds, by middle-level employees has also been seen as a blatant way of ensuring that royalty and privileged officials continue to benefit from the artificially high and exorbitant resale value of old cars. To prove its point, the document points out that there is no ban on the import of "fuel inefficient" secondhand vehicles from India.

Ordinary government circulars become laws, and laws can be retroactively enforced in Bhutan. Laws are backdated "not only to suit the convenience of the bureaucracy but also for personal vendetta." Kunley Wangdi, former diplomat and former husband of Her Majesty Queen Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, who served time in US prisons for his involvement in smuggling of US \$55 million worth of heroin is now in Bhutanese prison based on a recently promulgated retroactive law which actually became necessary only to spare royalty from embarrassment when Wangdi suddenly decided to return home. The document wonders aloud whether the same law will apply to Princess Deki, the King's aunt and also an ex-wife of the same Kunlay Wangdi, currently serving a sentence in Taiwan for smuggling of parts of endangered species when she returns home.

Theoretically, the National Assembly and Royal Advisory Council have enormous powers to monitor the executive which controls information, money and regulatory powers. In reality these bodies are mere "observers". The document, therefore, recommends that the salaries of *chimis* be raised to attract competent and knowledgeable legislators. The term of RAC members should revert to 5 years

with scope for reelection and the National Assembly should approve nominees of the King for the position of Judge and Minister. With these simple actions, the authors naively believe, national institutions will be adequately strengthened. The report proposes a time-frame of September 1996 for an empowered National Assembly to approve new ministers and judges.

Change in Bhutan, the document states, is necessitated by the need to protect individual rights, in the absence of which people will insist on group rights which could take an uncontrollable turn. The authors may be short on solutions but they have recognized the problems. It is indeed **A Time For Change** because "with the passage of time the monarchy could not keep pace with change and there is need to restore political equilibrium among the Bhutanese without which there cannot be political stability."

"IN QUOTES"

"The most important problem facing the government of Bhutan today is the shortage of qualified manpower and a budgetary constraint for development activities, especially in the social sector, according to the Planning Ministry... Delays and cuts in donor contribution, which were caused by a general global recession, would largely affect development activities in the social sector, said the [Planning] Minister. "As a result, we may not be able to meet some of the global goals without the matching technical assistance and funds," he said."

Kuensel, September 3, 1994.

"As for Indian security forces entering Bhutan, India fully respects our territorial integrity."

Dawa Tsering, Foreign Minister, quoted in The Times of India, New Delhi, September 7, 1994.

MEDIA SCAN

THUNDER IN THE DRAGON KINGDOM

...The mandatory allegiance to "King, Kingdom and Culture" is being replaced by a more materialistic aspiration to owning a "Toyota, House and Apple Orchard". A former expatriate says that 24 years ago there were only 100-odd vehicles in all of Bhutan, with a majority belonging to the royal family. Today you see as many on market day in Thimphu alone. The current construction boom in Thimphu is another indicator of the growing desire for property, as is the increasing number of apple orchards all over the country owned not by full-time farmers but by members of this elite.

But even as this secular elite has gained ground, the monks, who once enjoyed a position of preeminence, have gradually receded into the background. And yet it is the monk order which provides the link with the past -- and tradition -- and gives the country its distinct national identity. Indeed, the present monarchy has absorbed the religious iconography of the monk order, giving itself not only legitimacy but also a divine halo.

Michael Aris, the Tibet scholar, writes in 'Medieval Views of Bhutan': "If the heavy weight of monastic tradition bore down on free enterprise, secular and spiritual, on the positive side, it sometimes succeeded in curbing exploitation by rapacious officials and in healing the wounds of civil strife." But, today, as Bhutan makes her way tentatively into the modern world, ending her centuries-old isolation, the tension between the tug of modernizing forces on the one hand and the pull of tradition on the other is beginning to be felt.

In the south, there is the challenge posed by Lhotshampas, the Bhutanese of Nepali origin, as well as the post-1958 Nepali migrants. In the east, there is the beginnings of discontent as the Sharchops feel their area has been neglected...

The Sunday Times of India, September 11, 1994.

HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTH ASIA - A Regional Perspective

...The realization of human rights in South Asia is closely linked to a multilateral agreement over stopping ethnic eviction, guaranteeing nationality rights and religious tolerance. A restructuring of the polity in countries of South Asia as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements remain the requirements towards [ensuring] the human dignity of peoples of the region.

The need for such a perspective can be substantiated through any number of examples. Take the Bhutanese case for example. According to the annual report of the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan, till November 1992, 72,256 refugees from south Bhutan had taken shelter in Nepal. The 'One Nation, One People' policy pursued by Bhutan as elsewhere in South Asia has resulted in 84,256 people living in camps in south-eastern Nepal.

Bhutan's Home Ministry speaks of a 'demographic siege on Bhutan'. Southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin had migrated and settled there a century ago. Now ethnic fear of the Drukpa culture being swamped by the Nepalis has mixed with the anti-monarchy movement in south Bhutan.

Without a multilateral framework the Bhutanese problem cannot be solved. India occupies the area between Bhutan and Nepal. There is activism by refugees via India. Bhutan receives 70 per cent of its foreign aid from India and is further bound by the 1949 treaty. An Indian participation remains essential to a satisfactory solution of the southern Bhutanese question...

The Right to Housing, April-June 1994, Bombay.

ETHNIC CLEANSING IN BHUTAN -- ABC TV

Sally Neighbour, Asia Correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), was in Nepal this March to file a report on Bhutanese refugees. Prior to visiting the camps in eastern Nepal she also went into Bhutan as a tourist. The following is the full transcript of her report aired on the national television network on 17 May 1994.

The next story comes from Bhutan, west of here (Cambodia) in the Himalayas. It's one of those countries that everybody has heard of but seem to know precious little about. Perched as it is high in the Himalayas between India and China you can imagine it would be a genuine heaven on earth. But according to Sally Neighbour, there's another side to magical, out-of-the-way Bhutan. And it's not a very pleasant one at that.

It's near dusk at the United Nations Refugee Screening Centre at Kakarvitta, eastern Nepal. Another day, another family has arrived.

[A newly arrived refugee awaiting screening]: "We feel very sad. The reason we left -- how we left -- how we were chased out it's all very confusing. I really don't understand. I feel that I have no future -- my life is over. But I hope I can find some future for my children. That's all."

Inside its cement and thatch compound the United Nations determines their fate. By nightfall their fate is sealed. Refugee status granted, they begin the final leg of their unwanted journey to a strange new home.

This is the Timai refugee camp in eastern Nepal. It's one of eight camps in this area that are now home to 85,000 refugees. They've come here over the past four years from the neighbouring Kingdom of Bhutan. They're victims of one of the most intense campaigns of ethnic persecution in the world.

Mangala Sharma and her family have lived here for the past two years. They were evicted from the country which has been their home for five generations.

"My daughter is the fifth generation born in Bhutan -- like my great grandmother was born in Bhutan -- then my grandmother who is in front of me, she was born in Bhutan, then my mother, then myself, then my daughter. I brought her here when she was one month old. Now all of us, we're living in Timai Refugee Camp."

Mangala and the others here are southern Bhutanese, Nepalese-speaking citizens of Bhutan. They're the victims of what appears to be a deliberate campaign by the Bhutanese Government to wipe out its ethnic Nepalese community which makes up almost half the country's population.

It began, Mangala says, with the census, which the Government claimed was to identify illegal immigrants. So when they began evicting Bhutanese citizens, there was strong and sometimes violent opposition. It was then the authorities unleashed a campaign of terror against the ethnic Nepalese.

"People were taken into custody. They were threatened, raped young girls were raped and many young boys were forced into forced labour. All the schools were closed and all the schools were turned into local prisons. And the hospi-

tals were banned for local people." [Grandmother]: "Our house was destroyed. Most of the big houses in the village were destroyed. All our property was taken our cows and everything. We left at night with only what we were wearing. I couldn't even see -- I had to use a stick. I didn't bring anything."

The story of Mangala Sharma's family is typical of the stories told by the 85,000 refugees. Everyone has harrowing tales to tell. But none of them can tell you why they're here, why they were forced out of Bhutan. And so we traveled to the remote and isolated mountain kingdom to try and find out why.

It's a journey few people make. Bhutan is one of the most closed countries in the world. The brochures call it the last Shangri-la, but tourism is not encouraged. Fewer than 3,000 tourists visit each year. The government keeps them out by charging 300 dollars a day. Journalists aren't encouraged either -- TV crews are charged a minimum of 12,000 dollars which ensures most stay away. We went as tourists, instead, and filmed with a tourist video camera.

Like all tourist we were met on arrival by an official guide who would accompany us everywhere we went. They were certainly right about Bhutan being blissfully untouched by the rest of the world -- its like being in a different time. The colour brochures say its the mighty Himalayas that have kept Bhutan protected from the outside but the Government has played a major role, too. It was only in the 1960s that roads and communication links with Bhutan's neighbours were opened up. Televisions and satellite dishes are still banned. In the Government's own words, "Bhutan has chosen to remain deeply shrouded in its jealously guarded isolation."

The Bhutanese capital Thimphu, population 20,000, is as bustling as it gets. It's from here that the King of Bhutan rules his subjects and the Royal Government pursues its policies of sovereignty, self-reliance and cultural preservation. Our guide explains: "We don't want westernization, we want modernization."

"Not westernization?"

"Yeah. Usually all the developing countries, as they get modernized they become westernized. So our Government is trying to check that."

"How is the Government protecting the culture of Bhutan?"

"First of all they have this rule of the language -- the Dzongkha language. It is compulsory in schools."

"So the language of the ruling ethnic group is actually compulsory?"

"Yeah. And secondly the dress. We have to wear this."

"So, this is compulsory?"

"Compulsory when you're in town. At home it's up to you. But once you step out of the house, it's compulsory. If you are a

Bhutanese, you have to wear these clothes."

To a foreigner's eyes, the compulsory wearing of the national dress seems just a part of Bhutan's charm, like the colourful mountain festival where the people turn out in their finery to celebrate an ancient Buddhist culture. Cultural preservation is the Government's catch-phrase, but what's worth preserving is the culture of a small ruling elite, the Drukpa people, descendants of Tibetans who ruled Bhutan for three hundred years.

"What does the Government think are the dangers to the culture? Why do they have to try so hard to preserve it?"

[Guide]: "They feel that if they don't put any restrictions then the people will not... they'll discard their traditional clothes and wear western clothes. And slowly, slowly it'll just become a museum piece."

"So does the Government encourage festivals like these?"

"Yes, it does. [Pointing to some women] You see the dresses they're wearing? And the white clothes they are wearing [Pointing to *kabneys* (white ceremonial scarves) worn by some men] -- all these are provided by the Government. And the Government also provides separate funds for these kinds of festivals."

But the truth is, preserving the culture has become a euphemism for staying in power. The ruling Drukpas make up only 20% of the population. The Nepalese-speaking southern Bhutanese on the other hand make up almost half, and their numbers are growing. The rest are the native Bhutanese. The Government's greatest fear is not westernization but losing its stranglehold on power.

And so in the name of preserving the culture, the King and his Government launched a campaign to cleanse Bhutan. They called the policy "One Nation, One People". A draconian system of ethnic classification was introduced. Tens of thousands of citizens of Nepalese descent were stripped of their citizenship. Many of them come from families who've been in Bhutan for generations. In the crackdown that followed, one hundred thousand people fled the country. Most are living in the refugee camps across the border in Nepal.

The Nepalese-speaking community in Bhutan which still makes up 40% of the population now lives in an atmosphere of fear. The two hundred thousand ethnic Nepalese in Bhutan no longer dare celebrate their culture. Their language is now banned, their religion, Hinduism, forced behind closed doors.

We managed to lose our guide long enough to go in search of a Nepalese-speaker willing to talk. Those still in Bhutan fear that any wrong step will have them, too, thrown out of the country. This man agreed to be interviewed

only on the condition that we totally disguise his identity.

[In a darkened room] "My family was stripped of their citizenship and they had to move out of Bhutan. They just had to go because they received a lot of threatening from the police and even the village head. You know, he was telling my parents to move as soon as possible, so they had to go."

"What's it like here for the Nepalese-speaking community still in Bhutan?"

"Well, it's difficult. Very difficult."

Nepalese-speaking Bhutanese now need a special certificate from the government to get a job, to get training, or even to enroll their children in schools. All designed, it seems, to force those remaining to leave.

"We are afraid, of course, because we might end up behind bars at any time. Nobody's happy. Everyone is staying here only because they were born here, they were brought up here. Once we go out of the country means you lose everything. You lose your citizenship. You lose your land. Your land will be seized and you'll be homeless finally."

Back in Nepal, it's clear that the refugee crisis has strained relations between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan. Three rounds of talks have made virtually no progress towards finding a solution.

"Prime Minister, what is your government's view of Bhutan's policy of literally forcing out citizens of Nepalese descent?"

"Those Bhutanese refugees are -- most of them are, Bhutanese nationals. And they are being evicted forcefully."

"Do you find Bhutan's policy shocking?"

"It's of course shocking. As a matter of fact, I'm committed my government is committed -- to human rights also. So on the grounds of humanitarian ground we have to look to the Bhutan problem very sincerely."

"So far there appears to have been really no progress towards resolving the issue. Do you think that the Government of Bhutan is really genuine about finding a solution?"

"Because the progress is slow, the attitude, you can just conclude what is the attitude of the

Bhutanese Government. They don't want to solve it very quickly. So they want to just go very slow."

"What solution does Nepal want to this problem?"

"I think the solution is very, very simple. Let us identify who are the Bhutanese citizens, and who are not. Those Bhutanese citizens, they should be taken back to Bhutan. That should be the only solution to the problem."

Bhutan's unwanted citizens can only pray that one day the Government will agree to take them home. For now, there doesn't seem much hope. Neither peaceful resistance nor a campaign of violent attacks by some dissident groups has shaken Bhutan's resolve. The campaign of eviction is still going on.

The Government of Bhutan justifies its policy by recalling the fate of its old neighbour, the former Kingdom of Sikkim. There an uprising by a Nepalese majority led to Sikkim being taken over by India in 1975. Bhutan claims that it could meet a similar fate and so the systematic removal of Bhutan's Nepalese-speaking community continues. At present another census is being undertaken. People with relatives here in the refugee camps are being told that they too must leave Bhutan. Everyday new refugee families arrive.

[At Puja site, Mangala]: "They're giving thanks for everything. Like food and what God has done for me."

"Do you think the people here in the camps feel that God has forgotten them?"

"No, I don't think they feel. Because they are very strong -- they're very strong believers. When they're refugees, the culture and religion is more important. Because you feel all alone, and you feel like you have lost everything."

It's pure faith that keeps the people here believing that one day they'll return home.

For Mangala's grandmother, it's her final wish. "I want to return -- to live on my own land, to die there. That is my wish."

Sally Neighbour there. And as you saw, the only way Sally could get away with that report on Bhutan's secret ethnic cleansing was to be extremely secretive herself.

Location	District	Refugees	Students
Timai	Jhapa	8,209	3,275
Goldhap	Jhapa	7,830	2,877
Beldangi I	Jhapa	14,725	4,985
Beldangi II	Jhapa	18,281	6,889
Beldangi II Ext.	Jhapa	9,617	3,281
Sanischare(Pathri)	Morang	16,704	5,401
Khudunabari(N)	Jhapa	7,004	3,819
Khudunabari(S)	Jhapa	3,587	
Total		85,957	30,527
Cumulative births:		3,947	
Cumulative deaths:		2,548	
The above figures are as of August 31, 1994.			