

The Bhutan REVIEW

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RTM in Geneva

The biannual Round Table Meeting (RTM) between the Royal Government of Bhutan and its development partners is scheduled to take place in Geneva on January 17. As part of the preparatory process, the Royal Government held discussions with various governments and multilateral donor agencies towards the end of the year. While Planning Minister Chenkyab Dorji led a delegation to India, United Nations Headquarters in New York, European Headquarters in Brussels and Switzerland, Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering visited the United Nations Office in Geneva, Denmark, Austria and The Netherlands. At the end of the "sensitization" tours, the ministers described the meetings as "successful".

One of the conclusions of the November 1992 Meeting of the European Communities on Development Co-operation states that "the Community and Member States reaffirm their determination to give priority to their support for areas for positive action...in particular the setting up of new democratic institutions, strengthening the rule of law and encouragement of wider public participation". It further states that "these areas could be supplemented by action in other areas such as: the promotion of a free press and other media; the participation by minorities in the benefits of development assistance and in wider political processes; the underpinning of peaceful settlement of internal and regional conflicts; the support for political exiles wishing to return to their country of origin". As the international donor community prepares to address and discuss Bhutan's immediate needs, perhaps the long term interest of the country will not be forgotten. The meeting is an opportunity for donors to display their "determination to give priority to their support for areas for positive action..."

Prisoners released

The continuing efforts by the international community, particularly the London based Amnesty International to get the release of illegally detained political prisoners in Bhutan has been bearing fruits. The year end saw "royal pardon" to another 17 "detainees arrested for anti-national activities" bringing the total number of political prisoners released so far to 1,683.

Many of the "detainees" released on December 26 were held in custody for the last four years without formal charges or trial.

Bhutan is 6,423 square kilometres smaller than it was believed to be in the past. The official weekly newspaper *Kuensel* reported on December 3 that studies of satellite imagery and intensive ground surveys have revealed that "the total area of the kingdom is 40,077 square kilometres and not 46,500 square kilometres as it was previously documented." While making the new figures public, the Royal Government has stressed that the correction merely reflects new estimates of the land-mass and "not a change in the national boundary."

The magnitude of "error" attributed to past surveyors by the Royal Government must be considered against the following ground conditions: Bhutan is roughly 300 kilometres east to west, and 150 kilometres north to south. The revelation implies that in the past the government took into its calculations excess area equivalent to a strip of land over 21 kilometres wide running east to west, or a strip nearly 43 kilometres wide running north to south. The very idea that such an "error" is possible is preposterous.

Such a startling revelation would have had a shocking effect anywhere else in the world, where the suggestion of an error of over 16 per cent in the simple process of measurement and calculation of a defined area would be received with both consternation and ridicule. The knowledge that this could not be possible would be followed

The problem in southern Bhutan was a creation of the Royal Government. However, the ill-conceived strategy is slowly back-firing on the regime. The problem is no longer confined to the south. The formation in June last year of the Druk National Congress (DNC) by northern Bhutanese, headed by a prominent eastern Bhutanese businessman, calling for democratic reforms and respect for human rights in the country was a big blow to the government's policy of divide and rule. Against this background, the Royal Government despatched a delegation headed by the *Dzongdag* of Samdrup Jongkhar district accompanied by at least five police officials to the state of Arunachal Pradesh in northeastern India to discuss the possibility of the return of Bhutanese mostly from eastern districts who have been living in exile for many years because of repression in Bhutan.

Forced labour is practiced in Bhutan in various forms. In view of the nation's limited manpower, people have come forward to contribute to development works whenever necessary. The increasing demands of royalty and "superiors" for a share of the conscripted

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The most convenient method known to history to define the location of any territory of a political State is to take recourse to maps and the one* on the opposite page may help to determine the geographical location of the ancient land of Bhutan.

As far as the area of Bhutan is concerned, it had hitherto been stated to be approximately 18,000 square miles. This is confirmed by the calculations made by Karan and Jenkins in their scholarly work: *The Himalayan Kingdoms*.³ Again, there is a reliable publication of the Information Service of India on Bhutan which not only confirms the aforesaid area, but also gives the length and breadth in the following words:

"Bhutan has an area of about 18,000 square miles, roughly rectangular in shape and extending about 200 air-miles from east to west and about 100 air-miles from north to south."⁴

The position, however, seems to have since been fully cleared through an official survey and measurement conducted by the Survey Department of the Royal Government of Bhutan insofar as *Kuensel*, the weekly official bulletin of the Royal Government of Bhutan, confirms that the total area of Bhutan is 18,000 square miles.⁵

The Nomenclature 'Bhutan'

The territorial extent described above has been known to recorded history as Bhutan, though there are various theories put forward as to the derivative meaning of that name. In the old Tibetan texts Bhutan was called 'Land of the Mon' (*Mon-Yul*) referring to the Monpa, aboriginal inhabitants of the Himalayas, who had found a retreat in the south-east of the country. Another characteristic name of these regions was 'Realm of

*The map has been obtained from the Surveyor General of India and published by his kind permission.

³Karan, Pradyumna P., and Jenkins, William M., Jr., *The Himalayan Kingdoms: Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal*, p. 27.

⁴*Bhutan and Sikkim*, published by Information Service of India, Political Office, Gangtok, Sikkim.

⁵*Kuensel*, the Weekly Official Bulletin of the Royal Government of Bhutan, Vol. VI, No. 12, dated November 14, 1971, p. 10. Under the column 'Information Box', the *Kuensel* gives the following question and answer:

"N. Gyeltshen, Thimpu

Q. How did you find out that the total area of Bhutan is exactly 18,000 square miles and by whom was the measurement done?

A. I have a survey map in my office which you may come and see sometime and measure the area yourself. The survey and measurement was officially conducted by the Survey Department."

A page from *BHUTAN: A Kingdom in the Himalayas* by Nagendra Singh,
'Constitutional Advisor to the Government of Bhutan'.
Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 1972. 200 pp

Bhutanese officials visit Arunachal Pradesh

workforce, however, meant more frequent stints for the rural population. Unable to cultivate one's own land and at the same time to provide the frequent free labour contribution demands, many people especially from the east and south left the country during the past few decades. Over 5,000 such people from eastern Bhutan are presently living in the north-eastern hill states of India.

Worried by the prospect that these people in exile may join dissident groups, the Government now wants them back in the country. On the other hand, there are a few people belonging to India's Arunachal Pradesh state who have been permanently domiciled in Bhutan. The Royal Government has proposed that these people be repatriated to India in exchange for some 3,000 eastern Bhutanese in exile in that state.

The delegation which visited Itanagar, Bomdilla and Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh during the third week of December, however, declined a meeting with representatives of Bhutanese living in the area. There were also reports of the Home Minister Dago Tshering visiting the eastern states of

India to convince the people to return. In another confusing development, however, the *Dzongdag* of Samdrup Jongkhar reportedly toured the district prior to visiting Arunachal Pradesh and warned the people, especially in Shinkharlauri, that anyone facilitating the return of Bhutanese in exile would be dealt with severely.

In 1983 the Royal Government allowed a batch of some 300 eastern Bhutanese in exile to return from Shillong in Meghalaya following unrest in that state. Among the many who fled the country to avoid extreme taxation in the early 1960s, the returning *Shillongpas* were used as manual labourers in the Dungsam Cement Project in Nganglam on minimum wages. Despite assurances, they were denied all citizenship rights, including their request to be allowed to re-register in their former villages.

In a related development, following the October 22-29 raids on alleged Bodo militant camps inside Bhutanese territory by the Indian paramilitary Border Security Force, a secret high level meeting between the representatives of the two gov-

ernments took place in Gaylegphug. The 18-19 November meeting was attended by Home Minister Dago Tshering and *Dzongdags* of the southern districts for Bhutan, and for the Government of India by the Chief Minister of Assam and senior police and administrative officials of the state.

by alarm over the possibility that many areas and its residents might be found to lie outside the country's limits. Obviously no one was perturbed in Bhutan, for no questions were raised - possibly because most Bhutanese are aware that no one lives in the rarefied atmosphere around Kula Kangri, Bhutan's (formerly?) highest mountain. The new "estimates" will soon find consistent application, nonetheless. The precedent has already been set for such revisions. Only just over two years ago, the fictitious population of the country stood at a little over 1.4 million and was growing at a healthy (?) 2.2 per cent until His Majesty decided to admit to a visiting journalist that the number of his subjects in fact totalled only around 600,000. With this royal disclosure, Bhutanese statistics changed overnight. Two long years down the road, without a policy decision on the hypothetical growth rate to be incorporated, the estimated total remains the same. Cows, yaks, horses, and even poultry, are counted and tabulated to the nearest whole number - citizens, it appears, are much more difficult to count!

Will Bhutan's area remain the same, inexplicably grow or shrink further? It would be unwise to hazard a guess. Already a measured, calculated, determined and fixed figure [see Box] has mysteriously shrunk, there is nothing to prevent that from happening again.

Report '94

BHUTAN: Rights and Refugees, Report '94, the third in the series of annual publications by the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB) has been released. The 40-page document briefly summarizes the human rights situation in Bhutan and provides an update on the Bhutan-Nepal bilateral talks aimed at resolving the Bhutanese refugee problem in Nepal. It also carries extracts from select publications of 1994 on human rights practices in Bhutan. Besides detailing some case-histories of people evicted from Bhutan and accounts of prisoners released during the year, *Report '94* summarizes events and developments of 1994 related to the current crisis in the country.

Report '94 is available from the offices of the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB) in Kathmandu and Jhapa.

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The Bhutan REVIEW

1995 - ANOTHER YEAR OF HOPE

Time flies, it is said - but only the good times, it is implied. However, for those of us forced into exile, the worst of times seem to fly even faster. Even when we do not want that they should. Now 1994 too has gone, and we are still to away from home. It is paradoxical that while it seems to take us an eternity just to get through each vacant, empty day, yet we look back to find how quickly still another year has slipped by. And once again, all too soon, it is time for the customary retrospection.

The past year departed seemingly leaving a bad taste in the mouth. It wasn't just the spirited attitude of the King in New Delhi that caused Bhutanese refugees to bid 1994 farewell in a despondent fashion. In fact, much as the monarch's tough-talk may have been aimed to intimidate dissidents and His Majesty's Government before the next round of bilateral talks, given the nature of the King's revelations, only his own position and esteem will have suffered in the end. Nonetheless, a refugee community already frustrated by months of inaction could not be blamed for being further dejected by their monarch's stubborn posture.

True, the bilateral talks between Bhutan and Nepal was a disappointment. During the year, the three rounds of negotiations brought the two sides no closer to a resolution. After the June "deadlock", to aggravate matters, any hopes that further parleys within the year would help steer the two sides towards agreement on basic issues was lost when political instability in Nepal resulted in temporary derailment of the process itself. And so the situation remained until the end of the year.

The unplanned prolonged hiatus served Bhutan well. For six long months Thimphu earned a respite as the world focussed on other issues and regions. When the spotlight did return to Nepal, only naturally, Nepalese politics rather than Bhutanese refugees received more attention. For many governments, and some individuals, whose conscience was pricked by the plight of the victims of the Royal Government's repressive measures, but who, at the same time, had no desire to rock the Bhutanese royal boat, could also shrug comfortably and point to the suspended talks to justify deferring their own decisions. Delays in the outcome of bilateral efforts meant a convenient excuse for their own lack of initiatives. For the refugee in his hut, the extended period of inactivity and protracted silence meant even greater frustration and despair.

But 1994 was not as disastrous a year as the general year-

end gloom might seem to suggest. In so far as initiatives for a resolution of the problem of southern Bhutan and the issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are concerned, the year had its share of important occasions. Foremost was the visit of the Assistant Secretary of the U.S. State Department to both Bhutan and the refugee camps. Likewise, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights made it a point to speak to representatives of refugees in Jhapa after his discussions with the King and his officials in Thimphu. And although reports from various sources have reported alleged government repressive measures in the past, Amnesty International, the London-based international human rights group, specifically indicted the Royal Government on charges of forcible evictions in a special report on forced exile from Bhutan released in August. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continued to visit Bhutan to monitor the condition of prisons and prisoners in the Kingdom. More significantly, the UN Human Rights Commission's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited the country in October.

In the refugee camps too, there were visitors. Many made the trip to check on the welfare of the refugees. Some went to the camps to monitor assistance programmes. But, a great many visited the camps and talked to the people to determine the truth about why and how they had come to become refugees. And, apparently most were satisfied from their interviews and observations that the Royal Government was guilty of repressive and unfair means to oust legitimate citizens. Consequently, as opposed to the previous year, a large number from the diplomatic community representing influential countries publicly demonstrated their concern and support for refugees denied their rights by the government. Thus "repatriation on the basis of internationally recognized norms and laws", and other such sentiments were expressed in public fora.

It is not surprising, of course, that Thimphu refuses to publicly acknowledge the significance of these visits. For a regime that still keeps up a pretense of all-is-well - and has the means and official mechanisms to convey and control this impression to its public - it was but natural that even the visit of a delegation charged with investigating reports of arbitrary arrests and illegal detention could simply be classified as routine.

But try as the regime might to downplay their importance, these events of 1994 will play their role in resolving the problem facing Bhutan today. The bluster of the Royal Government has not been matched, and cannot be matched, by the truth necessary to defend its current unjust policies before the world. So, as a new year begins, the Bhutanese refugee community continues to look forward to the days ahead with optimism and hope. 1995 could still be the special year for many in the camps.

Unfinished Business of the 20th Century

The effort to advance social development, and to make the most basic benefits of progress available to all, is a cause which, in various forms, has inspired men and women throughout the ages. But it is a cause which has only begun to gain significant traction in this century. And it is this historical context which is the strongest argument against pessimism.

For ten thousand years, civil societies have almost invariably been structured by, and for the principal benefit of, a small proportion of their members. And for most of those ten thousand years, this state of affairs has been promoted as normal, natural, and necessary. Codifying this tendency in a famous book, the 19th-century Italian scholar Gaetano Mosca noted:

"Among the constant facts and tendencies that are to be found in all political organisms, one is so obvious that it is apparent to the most casual eye. In all societies, two classes appear - a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class - always the less numerous - performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent."

Only against this background of the astonishing geographical and historical durability of these "constant facts and tendencies" can the scale of this century's achievements be seen.

Almost every previous era, for example, would have found absurd, if not treasonous, the notion that society should be organized in the interests of the many, or that benefits of knowledge should be shared by all. In ancient Egypt, in pre-colonial India, and in Europe from the days of the Druids of the Middle Ages, the written language, and access to religious texts, were deliberately restricted in order to preserve the status and power of the few.

Until comparatively recent times, that power has not been allowed to travel very far from the centre of any society. Even the celebrated direct democracy of 5th-century Athens was a government of the few, by the few, for the few, with no place and vote for women, for manual labourers, for free men without sufficient property, or for the 60,000 - 80,000 slaves and chattels who tended the cradle of democracy. Almost 2,000 years later, in the new Athens of Renaissance Florence, power and privileges were also concentrated, except for the briefest periods, in the hands of 150 families whose combined wealth exceeded that of 90% of the Florentine citizenry: only those of "status and substance" could hold office, and they did so "for the benefit of the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and lowly." Similarly, in the France of the Enlightenment, the idea that the mass of the people existed to serve the state and its elite was reflected in legislation that specifically exempted the land-owning nobility from taxes but forced those who tilled the land to pay more than a quarter of their incomes to finance the

wars, the pageants, and the cha-teaux of the state.

Divine Sanction

Such extremes of elitism were maintained not only by force but by an underlying ethic which sought to present this state of affairs as divinely approved. China's mandarins justified their exclusive rule on the basis that they alone could interpret the will of the gods; Islamic leaders have sometimes invoked the same principles to justify the exclusion of people from participation in government; and long before the British raj attempted to authenticate its rule in India with the stamp of duty and religion, Hindu elites had refined their own methods of ensuring that the lower orders knew their place.

Even when in direct contradiction to the most basic teachings of religion, such class divisions have insisted on their divine legitimacy. The Christian message, for example, has often been corrupted to serve the "rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and lowly" and to let the latter know that their inferior status was ordained by God: in Sunday schools and churches throughout the Christian world today, a favourite hymn continues to remind the faithful that "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God gave them all their station, and ordered their estate." [All Things Bright and Beautiful]

This idea of a class born to rule, and to enjoy thereby a virtual monopoly of privilege and progress, has survived in one form or another - aristocrat over peasant, white race over black, European over Asian and African, owner over worker, male over female - even through the great liberal revolutions of the modern era. The American Revolution of 1776 left slavery intact. The French Revolution of 1789 resulted not only in dictatorship but, as Marat complained in the 1790s, in the replacement of an aristocracy of birth by an aristocracy of wealth. And in the following century, the independence movements of Latin America brought to power governments which, in the words of historian Emilia Viotti da Costa, "took no account of the mass of the population, whom they feared and despised." Similarly, 20th-century struggles against colonialism in Africa and Asia have often resulted, as Rajni Kothari has written, "in no more than a transfer of power from one elite to another."

Unfinished Business

Only in this century, and particularly in the last 50 years, have these "constant facts and tendencies" begun to be transformed.

Half a century ago, over 50 nations in Africa and Asia were ruled from London, Paris, Lisbon, Brussels, or The Hague. Half a century ago, the National Party was about to introduce formal apartheid in South Africa. Half a century ago, communism, which had substituted the party for the class that was born to rule, was establishing itself across Eastern Europe and beginning its advance into many areas of the developing world. Half a century ago, women in France and Japan did not have

the right to vote. And half a century ago, across much of the United States, a black person could neither vote, nor serve on a jury, nor eat in certain restaurants, nor occupy a bus seat if a white person was standing.

As an overall indication of this change, it need only be noted that 50 years ago only a small percentage of the world's people had a voice or vote in the selection of those who governed them; today, the proportion has risen to between half and three quarters.

Many societies are still divided into unaccountable rulers and unconsenting ruled. Many more remain divided into privileged few and impoverished many. In most, the basic benefits of progress have not yet been made available to the majority. Nonetheless, one would have to be not just a cynic but a recluse to deny that this age-old order is being shaken in our times. At a minimum, the underlying ethic that has endured for so much of human history is clearly losing its grip on human affairs; there is hardly any society in the world today where the idea of a class born to rule, an idea defended by moral philosophers and political leaders from Aristotle to Churchill, is accepted as right, or normal, or in the nature of things...

Sea Change

This is the historical context of the struggle for development that is now reaching such a critical stage. And the particulars of that

struggle - including the setting of goals for the protection of children and the attempt to bring such services as immunization, basic health care, family planning, water and sanitation, or primary education to all communities - are part of the attempt to carry this struggle through to its completion. They are the manifestation of the idea that the most basic advantages of progress should be put at the disposal of all; and they are the embodiment of the principle that society should be organized in the interests of the many rather than the few.

Completing this historic process is the chief unfinished business of the 20th century. And on our success or failure will depend the outcome of the race against time. Only if this cause is seen through to a conclusion in the years immediately ahead will it be possible for the world to cope with the problems of population growth, environmental deterioration, social disintegration - and the challenge of sustaining new democracies. From UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children 1995*

New Year Greetings

The Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB) and the *Review* family wishes all readers and well-wishers a very Happy New Year. Born in exile in January 1993, *The Bhutan Review* has also completed two full years. We take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude and thanks to numerous friends who have generously contributed making the publishing of the *Review* and other HUROB publications possible.

THE ROYAL INTERVIEW - THE KING IN NEW DELHI

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck never ceases to surprise. And the bombshells, when they do explode, invariably seem to be hurled from the safety and security of distant New Delhi.

Almost two years ago to the day, the monarch chose the Indian capital to give a hard-hitting interview to an Indian daily. Not satisfied with attacking dissidents, the King lambasted the Nepalese government and was most uncharitable towards the Nepalese leadership. Coming from someone who until then had successfully nurtured an image of an understanding and moderate monarch desperately fending hard-liners within his government, the rhetoric was uncharacteristic.

That it indeed was a case of an inexplicable and irregular rise in metabolism seemed to be true as the fireworks soon subsided. Back in Bhutan, His Majesty once again assumed the role of a level-headed and reasonable statesman skillfully weaving a blend of culture, identity, environment etc. before rapt special invitees. The spewing of illogical propositions alongside the fire and brimstone were left to the Ministers and other functionaries. In the course of the two years since the outburst, the carefully sculptured royal image was resurrected and the original propaganda strategy restored - moderate, rational leader versus hard-line, irrational officials.

Whereas the cool mountain air of Thimphu seemingly does wonders for His Majesty's mental health, enabling the monarch to expound on issues with clarity and conviction, helping convert even

the most sceptical (but previously vetted and softened) journalist, the Indian capital appears to have a strange effect. On a private visit to New Delhi this past December the King spoke at length to Ramesh Chandran of *The Sunday Times of India*. And, as he did two years ago, he opted to reveal more of himself in the Indian city than he usually has done in his own capital city Thimphu. And, as in the last instance of the thunderous Great Revelation, discerning readers have been left gasping on this occasion, too. If the January 1993 tirade served only to prove that the moderate monarch hype was an engineered myth, the convoluted logic and preposterous suggestions of the December 1994 interview does much damage to the royal "erudite" image.

The tone and direction of the interview are set by the correspondent's synopsis of the Royal Government's version of the southern Bhutanese crisis which precedes the actual interview. Thus, the crux of the problem is this: "the results of an official Bhutanese census [in 1988] astonished rulers in Thimphu" because the "Lhotshampa population had swelled dramatically in comparison to the indigenous Drukpas" as illegal Nepalis had flocked to southern Bhutan "attracted by fertile land, free education, free medical care and a welter of agricultural subsidies offered by the royal government". "Alarmed by apocalyptic visions of 'Greater Nepal' and being marginalized in their own country, measures were rapidly implemented to 'legitimise' Bhutanese citizens. King Jigme decreed that the 'Driglam Namzha' - meaning 'traditional values and etiquette' - be enforced to promote

Bhutan's national identity." Southern Bhutanese reacted with mass demonstrations in five southern districts. "From nasty propaganda campaigns targeting the King as a wicked despot, their movement gradually degenerated into grotesque violence," leading to "disembowelling, beheadings, and awful injuries inflicted by Khukris," Chandran summarizes on behalf of the Royal Government.

It isn't surprising, therefore, to find the King responding to a series of leading questions obviously framed to allow the monarch to best present his views. Unfortunately for the monarch, he still manages to tie himself in knots. Because the very foundation of his entire argument is suspect and rests on untruths, even with an accommodating accomplice, His Majesty looks less the sharp, logical and perceptive person he has often been made out to be.

"Two factors emerge with unmistakable clarity: One, resolution of southern Bhutan's crisis, and second, enduring friendship with India," states Chandran. Unfortunately, on the first account, nothing could be further from the truth. Has the correspondent cheated us by printing out a transcript that is completely different from his actual conversation with the King? Nowhere in the interview has it been stated or even implied that the monarch desires a solution. The focus is on controlling the situation in the south, not on solving the problem there. In fact, two factors do indeed "emerge with unmistakable clarity": One, the deliberate attempt on the part

of the Bhutanese monarch and his government to delay resolution of southern Bhutan's crisis, and second, the willingness of some in the media to sell themselves for a price.

Coming as it does, shortly before the next round of bilateral talks between Bhutan and Nepal, the bluster and tough approach of the King as part of negotiating strategy is not surprising. However, for someone known for his erudition and articulation, facets of his personality that Chandran faithfully did not fail to observe and extol, that the King hoped to get away with some absolutely nonsensical ideas is extremely naive.

To begin with, His Majesty apparently implies sinister international designs when he makes absurd accusations that the refugees camps in Nepal are special with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) providing preferential treatment and facilities denied refugees elsewhere. It reflects very poorly on the King's understanding of the role, functions and authority of an international organization of which his own nation is a member, if he believes that such special considerations are possible. It is also especially painful for Bhutanese to find their monarch chipping away at his own "erudition" by still insisting that refugees, in addition to lavish facilities, receive "3 dollars a day". Considering that the refugee population averaged 70,000, 80,000 and 85,000 during 1992, 1993 and 1994, according to the King, an astronomical sum of 498 million dollars have been disbursed in cash to Bhutanese refugees over the last three years. (For the record, the total cumulative expenditure

so far for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is only around 50 million dollars.)

Indeed, one detects a hint of envy as His Majesty lists the facilities provided to refugees in Nepal. According to him, these attract poor Nepalis to the camps. Let alone the poor from the region, with His Majesty's detailed enumeration of facilities that include "gas stoves" and "free housing, free electricity, drinking water, proper sanitation, free monthly rations, nutritional sustenance, free clothing, blankets, education upto class 10, and 3 dollars a day," UNHCR may soon have its hands full trying to keep away the well-to-do from America and Europe wanting to live as refugees in Nepal!

To support the argument that the refugee camps in Nepal house people who are not Bhutanese citizens, the King utilizes the opportunity to describe the horrendous economic plight of the "10 million Nepalis in India, nearly 20 million in Nepal and 87 per cent of them are surviving on subsistence farming." The King will have the readers believe that these people are drawn to the camps for the free handouts. If it is indeed the case, as His Majesty takes pains to impress upon the readers, that mere mortals are guided solely by such material considerations, his own statistics would have 27.1 million people of Nepali origin knocking on the doors of the refugee camps in Nepal. This has not happened. Fortunately for the world, contrary to the King's views, mankind has not yet degenerated to such base levels that every shred of

dignity and pride is so easily discarded.

The interview abounds in other inconsistencies and contradictions. While these inconsistencies have been conveniently overlooked in the past by a dotting media and some among the donor community, the Royal Government cannot get away with repeating them forever. His Majesty puts some of the illogical arguments presented by his government in his own words. The resourcefulness with which the same expressions are conveniently used on different occasions by both the King and his officials would be praiseworthy, but for the fact that even for the gullible outsider it is becoming extremely difficult to believe. On the one hand, the government says, "southern Bhutan stood out as a beacon" to impoverished Nepalis in the immediate past because of the "free education, free medical care" etc., but now people from this same southern Bhutan are allegedly attracted to the refugee camps and are "voluntarily" emigrating for "free" housing, education etc.

The Royal Government bases its "illegal economic migrants" theory on the claim on the extremely good quality of life in southern Bhutan. On the one hand, Nepalis were allegedly attracted to bountiful southern Bhutan and the "free education, free medical care" etc. Yet His Majesty claims to be trying to win over southern Bhutanese by improving the economy of the south through increased budget allocations for the region. This sudden need to improve the economic lot of people in southern Bhutan is hardly consistent with the standard refrain of the government that this region is

the most well-to-do throughout the kingdom. Meanwhile, even as the time to make good on his promise to abdicate for failing to resolve the problem in three years has come and gone, it is reassuring to find out from this interview ("That's how I got the 4.91 billion rupee funds for Southern Bhutan!") that the threat was never real!

His Majesty has clearly pinned his hopes on procrastination. He insists that principles must be resolved to deal with the four categories (three of which comprise Bhutanese citizens) of people in the camps before verification can begin. While doing everything to ensure that a third of southern Bhutan's population is prevented from returning home, "Our strength will be in winning the hearts and minds of the people of south Bhutan," the King avers. It would appear obvious to even a simpleton that real strength lies in resolving the problem facing Bhutan.

MEDIA SCAN

"Two years ago [actually three, Ed.] the somnolent proceedings at the National Assembly in Thimphu were thrown in a turmoil after an electrifying suggestion offered by Bhutan's widely admired monarch. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck caused consternation among his subjects by declaring that if the "crisis" in southern Bhutan was not solved, he would abdicate in favour of a better system that could peacefully resolve the problem. It was an idea that he repeated to this correspondent and *The Sunday Times of India* last June. For most Bhutanese it was inconceivable that there could be a better system of governance than the existing enlightened monarchy. For outsiders, it may have been mystifying to hear about a "crisis" which should provoke such an extraordinary remark from a popular young monarch.

Bhutan is perhaps the one country that gets consistently swathed in clichés by travel writers or political analysts -- and almost each of the cliché could be accurate: Shangri-La, Druk-Yul Land of the Thunder Dragon, Hermit Kingdom -- all of them redolent of exotic images of snow leopards, awesome Dzongs (monastic fortresses) and red-robed monks sitting in benediction before fluttering butter lamps. Somehow insurgency and political anarchy seems misplaced in the world's last bastion of Mahayana Tantrik Buddhism. Yet, southern Bhutan's lush virgin forests, cardamom fields and luxuriant orange orchards are being stained by bloodshed. This is an underrated and perhaps under-reported insurgency by the world's media -- all the more surprising since it provides an intoxicating brew for a riveting story: an allegedly "despotic" king, a xenophobic local population, a "nasty" police force, human rights violations, charges of ethnic cleansing, refugees, scheming foreign agencies -- all unfolding in two ancient Himalayan kingdoms -- one Hindu, the other Buddhist...

On a private visit to New Delhi last week to attend the wedding of Madhav Rao Scindia's son, King Jigme spoke at length to *The Sunday Times of India* in his swank suite at the Oberoi...

Q: These eight refugee camps in Nepal have generated controversy. Are the figures of 80,000 southern Bhutanese plausible?

A: It is definitely exaggerated. Let me explain. The main camps at Jhapa is one of the best run refugee camps you can find anywhere. The UNHCR and the NGO's do not provide such facilities for refugees in Somalia or Bosnia. Visitors to these camps in Nepal are amazed at the facilities provided there and say they are far better organized than any villages in Nepal.

Q: These camps seem to have drawn considerable attention in European capitals...

A: Precisely. In the West, they cannot comprehend why should anyone want to become a refugee, lose his job, home, land and all facilities that go with it such as food, drinking water. What they don't understand is the situation in our region is totally different. Our levels of education and income are all at a different level. Coupled with the fact that there were 10 million Nepalis in India, nearly 20 million in Nepal and 87 per cent of them are surviving on subsistence farming. Many of them don't own land, have no access to electricity, water, sanitation facilities. Many work as construction labourers and if you work very hard and you get paid 14-15 rupees a day as wages. You cannot afford to send your children to school or get medical care. Compare this with the facilities available in Jhapa. You get free housing, free electricity, drinking water, proper sanitation, free monthly rations, nutritional sustenance, free clothing, blankets, education up to class 10, and 3 dollars a day. There are eight vocational training programmes and income generating vocational training schemes. And, above all, if you work outside the camp, whatever money you earn is extra. Even cooking utensils, gas stoves, soaps are given free...

The Sunday Times of India, New Delhi - December 18, 1994.

"IN QUOTES"

From *The State of the World's Children 1995*.

"No longer are people willing to accept that societies should be so organized that progress, knowledge, and rights, should remain the monopoly of the few."

"Many of the changes needed to implement today's development consensus run directly counter to deeply entrenched vested interests."

"The underlying ethic [that 'unaccountable rulers' may lord over the 'unconsenting ruled'] that has endured for so much of human history is clearly losing its grip on human affairs."

"Despite the set-backs, the march towards democracy across so much of the world in recent years therefore represents the beginning of a change which, if sustained, could fundamentally alter the prospects for development in the decades ahead."

1994 The Year in Review

JANUARY:

The World Food Programme (WFP) announces further assistance valued at US\$ 11.00 million for Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal.

The Charge d'Affaires Michael Malinowski of the Embassy of the United States of America in Kathmandu and Chief Counsellor John Moore of the Canadian Embassy in New Delhi accompanied by Tahir Ali, Representative of UNHCR in Nepal visit refugee camps in eastern Nepal.

Home Secretary Jigmi Thinley from Mendegang in Thimphu district and the Secretary in the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) Khandu Wangchuk from Dopshari in Paro promoted by the King to the post of Deputy Ministers, further raising ministerial representation of west Bhutan to 85.71 per cent.

Through another Royal Command, Yeshey Zimba, Sangay Ngedup Dorji and Thinley Gyamtsho promoted to the rank of Secretary to the Government.

Refugees arriving at the UN screening centre report increased intimidatory tactics by local authorities in the south, raising concerns of another possible exodus.

FEBRUARY:

Lyonpo Sangye Penjor, a distinguished and respected personality in the country reportedly dies in an accident on February 6, 1994 at the Duenmang hot spring in Shemgang district.

The United States State Department releases the Human

Rights Report for 1993 which covers human rights practices of all member-nations of the United Nations plus a few other countries. In its entry on Bhutan, the Report observes that, "there remained serious concern about the Government's human rights practices." Overall, the report is more critical than in the previous year and questions many government claims and denials.

Many senior diplomats based in Kathmandu as well as New Delhi in India visit the refugee camps. Visiting dignitaries include the Ambassadors of the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, France and Austria and diplomats from Denmark, Finland, USA, Australia, the Netherlands and the EEC. The group is accompanied by Nepalese Home Secretary B.R. Pokhrel, officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and UNHCR representative in Nepal, Tahir Ali, South Asian expert Prof. Leo Rose from the University of California, Berkeley, USA, is in the group.

The second meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee of the Royal Government of Bhutan and His Majesty's Government of Nepal takes place in Thimphu.

111 Bhutanese from different southern districts forced to leave the country report to the UNHCR screening post in Kakarvita in eastern Nepal.

"Royal pardon" granted to 83 prisoners including 23 alleged "anti-nationals".

The Canadian government announces additional assistance of 700,000 Canadian Dollars for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

MARCH:

UNHCR signs an agreement with His Majesty's Government of

Nepal under which it would provide NRs 10.801 million for the management of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Ms Robin Raphel accompanied by Michael Malinowski, Charge d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu, Chakra Prasad Bastola, Nepal's Ambassador to Bhutan, James Smith, Resident Representative of the World Bank, Tahir Ali, Resident Representative of the UNHCR in Nepal and other officials visit the refugee camps.

Deputy Minister Leki Dorji moved from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Communications and former Ambassadors Karma Letho and Paljor Dorji (both of Deputy Minister rank) placed as heads of Royal Advisory Council and Environmental Secretariat respectively. Dr Kinzang Dorji promoted to the rank of Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture. Foreign Secretary Tsewang J. Rixin transferred to the Ministry of Health and Education.

In Nepal, cutting across party lines and ideological differences, representatives of various political parties in the Nepalese Parliament on March 20 express grave concern over the slow progress in the bilateral talks with Bhutan.

A team from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

visits the refugee camps in eastern Nepal for filming a documentary on the Bhutanese refugee problem. The film is broadcast on the national television network in May.

The third round of Nepal-Bhutan talks scheduled for 28-31 March is postponed on Bhutan's request on account of the demise of the maternal Royal Grandmother Rani Chuni Dorji. The meeting of the Joint Committee rescheduled for 4-7 April.

APRIL:

Daan Everts, the Assistant Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) on a two day mission to Nepal visits the Bhutanese refugee camps.

The rescheduled third round of Bhutan-Nepal talks are held in Kathmandu from 4-8 April.

284 southern Bhutanese forcibly evicted from Dorokha in Samchi district report to the UNHCR screening post in Kakarvita at the India-Nepal border.

Reports on Bhutanese refugees and the southern problem are carried by *The Washington Post* and *International Herald Tribune*.

Deputy Chief of Mission Gordon Longmeir and First Secretary Dean Sherrat of the Embassy of Canada in New Delhi (which is also accredited to Nepal) and the Director of the Canadian Cooperation Office in Kathmandu visit the refugee camps.

The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations elects Bhutan to the 53-member Commission on Human Rights.

The new Ambassador of Bhutan to Nepal, Nado Rinchen presents his credentials to His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev at the Narayanhiti Royal

Palace in Kathmandu.

Bhutan: A Movement in Exile, a 640-page book co-authored by Dr D.N.S. Dhakal, a Bhutanese activist, and Christopher Strawn from the University of Wisconsin, USA, released.

MAY:

HUROB starts publication of *The Bhutan Review* in Nepali, coinciding with the beginning of Nepalese year B.S. 2051.

Only two weeks after arriving in the country, the new Ambassador of the United States of America to Nepal, Dr Sandy Vogelgesang visits the Sanischare (Pathri) refugee camp in Morong.

Representing major mass media in Finland, a group of journalists who planned to cover issues ranging from tourism to development cooperation in Bhutan denied visas by the Royal Government.

Amnesty International launches a worldwide appeal for the release of Prisoner of Conscience Tek Nath Rizal who has been in Bhutanese prison since November 1989.

The High Court in Thimphu sentences 7 political prisoners to various prison terms ranging from 10 years to life.

The World Food Programme (WFP) announces reduction of its assistance to Bhutan over the next four-year cycle by two-thirds.

At the initiative of Jerry Clewett and his wife Ruth who are

serving in Nepal under the umbrella of United Mission to Nepal (UMN), Churches Committee for Refugees from Bhutan (CCRB) formed in the United Kingdom.

JUNE:

Of the first batch of 90 Bhutanese students from the Beldangi Secondary School who appeared for the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations of Nepal, 62% pass as against an overall pass percentage of 33% for the Kingdom.

Rongthong Kunley Dorji, the founding Chairman formally announces the launching of Druk National Congress (DNC) at a widely attended Press Conference in Kathmandu.

The fourth round of Bhutan-Nepal Joint Ministerial Committee meeting held in Thimphu.

JULY:

The National Assembly Secretariat in Thimphu announces that the 73rd session of the National Assembly will be held sometime during September-October.

Amnesty International (AI) releases its Annual Report for 1994 covering human rights situation between January and December 1993 in 151 countries including Bhutan.

Ms Akiko Naito-Yuge takes over as the new UNDP Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator for United Nations Systems Operational Activities for Development in Bhutan.

Jose Ayala Lasso, the first United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights pays an official visit to Bhutan.

Mangala Sharma, a Bhutanese refugee and Chairperson of Bhutanese Refugees Aiding Victims of Violence (BRAVVE) spends a month in the

United States of America under the South Asia Human Rights Activist Visitor Program of New York-based Freedom House.

AUGUST:

Jose Ayala Lasso, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights on a four-day official visit to Nepal visits the Bhutanese refugee camps at Goldhap and Beldangi.

Himal, a bi-monthly magazine published from Kathmandu which devoted an entire issue to the crisis in Bhutan and Bhutanese refugees two years ago, once again focuses attention to the Bhutanese crisis in the cover story **House of Cards - Fearing for Bhutan** in its July/August 1994 issue.

After spending about four years in prison without formal charge or trial, 19 political prisoners released from Chemgang prison near Thimphu.

Amnesty International releases a 17-page report *BHUTAN: Forcible Exile* on August 25.

After being forcibly evicted by the Royal Government authorities, Nirmal Gurung alongwith 12 other Gurung families from the remote village of Kachin under Samchi district join the over 86,000 fellow refugees from Bhutan in Nepal.

SEPTEMBER:

His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Royal Government of Bhutan mutually agree to defer the fifth round of Bhutan-Nepal talks earlier scheduled for September.

The Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu organizes a Round Table Discussion on 'Bhutanese Refugees Problem in Nepal' on September 9.

An 11-member team of young Japanese under the auspices of **Camp Sadako '94** arrive on a four-week visit to the Bhutanese refugee camps.

New York based 'Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights in Nepal' organizes a rally in New York on September 15 to protest human rights violations and suppression of fundamental freedoms in Bhutan. D.N.S. Dhakal, General Secretary of the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), who was on a visit to the United States also addresses the rally.

OCTOBER:

In her address to the 45th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme Mrs Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR) expresses her desire to initiate separate discussions with both Bhutan and Nepal to find a solution to the Bhutanese refugee problem.

Ms Robin Raphel, the United States Assistant Secretary of State accompanied by an aide from the State Department in Washington D.C., George Sibley, visits Bhutan.

18 people (eyewitness accounts indicate a substantially higher toll than that reported by the government) were reported dead or missing after the lake which is the source of the Phochu sent a deluge of water that carried away property, livestock and people in Lunana and Punakha.

A six member delegation of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights visit Bhutan.

A 4-member team from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visit Bhutan. This is ICRC's fifth visit.

NOVEMBER:

A number of Bhutanese dissident groups attend the Second All India Consultation of Human Rights Activists in New Delhi organized by the South Asian Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC).

In Bhutan, following the October 22-29 raids on alleged Bodo militant camps inside Bhutanese territory by the Indian paramilitary Border Security Force, a secret high-level meeting between representatives of the two Governments takes place in the border town of Gaylephug in Sarbhang district.

In the mid-term polls in Nepal the ruling Nepali Congress loses out to the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxists-Leninists) which forms a minority government.

DECEMBER

Bhutan shrinks in area by over 15 per cent overnight! The total area of the kingdom is 40,077 square kilometres and not 46,500 square kilometres previously documented, the government states. Wrong tallies showed 1.4 million citizens in the past, now there are admissions of faulty measurements and calculations, too.

His Majesty the King attends the wedding of the son of Madhav Rao Scindia in New Delhi. He uses the occasion to speak to *The Sunday Times of India* about the problems in south Bhutan and the special Indo-Bhutan relationship.

17 "anti-nationals" are granted amnesty, bringing the total number benefitting from "royal pardons" to 1,683.

REFUGEE CAMP INFORMATION

Location	District	Refugees	Students
Timai	Jhapa	8,247	2,903
Goldhap	Jhapa	7,911	2,814
Beldangi I	Jhapa	14,981	4,858
Beldangi II	Jhapa	18,486	6,902
Beldangi II Ext.	Jhapa	9,266	3,179
Sanischare(Pathri)	Morang	16,924	5,367
Khudunabari(N)	Jhapa	7,075	3,533
Khudunabari(S)	Jhapa	3,681	
Total		86,571	29,556

Cumulative births: 4,709

Cumulative deaths: 2,642

The above figures are as of December 31, 1994.