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CLIMATE OF FEAR STILL EXISTS - ROSS DANIELS



Addressing a widely attended press conference organized by the Nepal Section of the Amnesty International on January 30 in Kathmandu, Ross Daniels, Chairman of Amnesty International singled out four countries in the region including Bhutan for deplorable human rights records. The respected human rights advocate said that a large number of citizens were forced to flee the country as a result of repressive measures in the country. He regretted that although it is a very serious problem, the Bhutanese refugee issue is virtually unknown in the outside world.

Ross Daniels, who is also a Professor of Human Rights in the University of Technology, Queensland, Australia said that the very question about whether the human rights situation in Bhutan has improved is meaningless: "The climate of fear still exists" and the people are not in a position to return. The situation in the country can be judged only when these people go back to their place of origin, noted the Amnesty International Chairman.

Daniels emphasized the need to involve the international community and called upon the countries which maintain relations with Bhutan to intervene to resolve the current crisis: "These countries ought to exercise their influence," he said. "Is it safe to return?" is presently Amnesty International's main concern, Daniels said, and added that focus should be on "how to get them (refugees) back home" rather than "how do we look after them."

In reply to a query about the international human rights mechanisms, Mr Daniels mentioned the practice of "countries (noted for human rights violations) making deals with one another" and expressed concern about the politicization of Human Rights mechanism in the United Nations system.

In recognition of his contributions to peace, justice and equality, the **International Forum**, a popular newsmagazine declared Ross Daniels International Man of the Year - 1995 and presented a citation on the occasion.

The 4-day marathon cycle rally in Indian territory by the Students Union of Bhutan (SUB), Youth Organization of Bhutan (YOB) and the Democratic Youth of Bhutan (DYB) under the auspices of the Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement (BCDM) served its intended purpose of bringing the Bhutanese problem before the Indian public. Even as cyclists were picked up by the Indian police at various points, the issue remained on the front pages of major Indian national dailies.

The cycle rally, with 151 cyclists taking part, was to commence at Siliguri in West Bengal on January 3 and end at Jaigaon at the Indo-Bhutan border on January 7 to coincide with the mass rally scheduled for that day by the BCDM. The programme went ahead despite the promulgation of Section 144 along the proposed rally route and tight security arrangements.

Three groups of cyclists were picked up by the Indian police at Panitanki, Naxalbari and Bagdogra, and deported to Nepal on January 2 and 3. On the afternoon of January 3, 96 cyclists were arrested at Panitanki when they defied the ban. Housed temporarily in a tea warehouse near Naxalbari, they were moved to Siliguri next day. Cyclists were also picked up in Siliguri (6 on Jan 4), Ethelbari (5 on Jan 5) and



Cycle rallyists face the Indian police at Panitanki on January 3. Photo: Dainik Basumati (Bengali Daily)

Birpara (25 on Jan 5). Among those arrested were the presidents of the SUB and DYB. The six arrested in Siliguri were released on January 5, while the others were detained in Alipurduar jail along with others arrested during the January 7 mass rally. They were released on January 12 and 14.

The Indian media gave the programme continuous coverage and there were urgent appeals from

the international community for the immediate and unconditional release of those in custody. In Siliguri, the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) demonstrated in Siliguri to protest the arrest of Bhutanese youths and the Communist Party of India (CPI-M) also protested against the Centre's intervention. Meanwhile, refugees in Timai and Khudunabari camps organized to-ken hunger strikes expressing soli-

arity with those in custody in Indian jails.

The 96 cyclists in Siliguri jail went on a hungerstrike starting from 10 a.m. on January 10 demanding their unconditional release. They were joined by fourteen representatives of the Coalition who also staged a hungerstrike in the heart of Siliguri town. All 96 were unconditionally released on January 13.

PEACE MARCH - STALLED IN INDIA

The Peace March organized by the Appeal Movement Coordination Council (AMCC) began as scheduled on January 14. 150 marchers were seen off at Damak, Nepal, by a huge gathering of friends, relatives and well-wishers. The marchers and thousands of supporters arrived at the Indo-Nepal border after three days to face a barricade at Panitanki. Since the Indian authorities refused to allow the march to pro-

ceed, the marchers courted arrest after the barricade was physically removed by supporters on the Indian side. 16 Indian nationals belonging to the Support Organization for Bhutanese Refugees (SOBR) were also arrested along with the marchers.

Following the arrest of the 150 marchers, a second batch of 300 refugee volunteers arrived at the Indo-Nepal border on January 23 to continue the march. The

AMCC has demanded the unconditional release of the 150 marchers and unhindered passage to Bhutan through Indian territory. The 300 marchers, who have not violated prohibitory orders, are camped on the Mechi bridge connecting Nepal with India have vowed to wait indefinitely on the bridge until allowed to proceed with the march.

The Peace March has received tremendous support and

extensive press coverage in the local media. Calls for the immediate and unconditional release of those held in custody by Indian authorities have not, however, been heeded. At the time of going to press, the stalemate continues.

UNHCR EXCOM CHAIRMAN IN BHUTAN, NEPAL

Ambassador Jacob Esper Larsen, current Chairman of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) visited Bhutan during the second week of January reportedly to acquaint himself of the problem of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. After an audience with the King and meetings with several ministers, Ambassador Larsen is reported to have told *Kuensel*, the Royal Government mouthpiece that "there is a genuine wish on the part of Bhutanese government to reach a solution."

From Bhutan, Ambassador Larsen flew in to Kathmandu where he reportedly held discussions on the refugee issue with officials of His Majesty's Government of Nepal including Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Though a visit to the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal is understood to have been in the original itinerary, the UNHCR Chairman who is also the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations in Geneva, neither met refugee representatives nor visited the camps.

PROTEST IN KATHMANDU

About forty Bhutanese, including a number of women and children, marched in a silent procession towards the Indian Embassy on January 5 to protest the arrest of cycle rallyists in India. Youths, mostly students expressing solidarity with fellow students arrested in India, carried placards calling for the Government of India's immediate intervention for the unconditional release of those in detention.

The procession was stopped by the Nepalese Police before it reached the Indian Embassy. The Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement (BCDM) Spokesman Om Dhungel handed

over a joint memorandum addressed to the Indian Prime Minister from the Students Union of Bhutan (SUB), Youth Organization of Bhutan (YOB) and the Democratic Youth of Bhutan (DYB), sponsors of the cycle rally, to an embassy official.

The appeal from the three youth groups invited the Indian Prime Minister's attention to the plight of Bhutanese refugees in India and Nepal and explained that the Cycle Rally was organized only to raise awareness in a peaceful and democratic manner. Giving details of arrests over the three-day period, the youth leaders ex-

pressed regret over the Indian police action, especially since "we have always been enjoying freedom of movement on Indian soil." The letter noted that "India is the largest democracy in the world and we always consider ourselves to be lucky to be her neighbour," and appealed for the Government of India's support in the struggle for bringing about "democratic changes and the establishment of Human Rights in Bhutan." The appeal urged the Indian Prime Minister to intervene "to bring about an early and amicable solution" to the present crisis.

The Bhutan REVIEW

CAUSE FOR DISQUIET

As the new year began, the Bhutanese crisis and the issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, long dormant, finally exploded into the front pages of the regional media. Largely on account of overreaction on the part of the Government of India and the consequent show of strength by the state government in West Bengal, a flurry of dissident activities which might have otherwise gone unnoticed made the headlines.

But for the decision of the Indian government to make a grand exhibition of looking after Bhutan's 'interests' and 'safety', the three programmes launched by Bhutanese in exile may have been largely overlooked by the media. Some youth cycling along crowded Indian roads, a gathering of a few thousand people, and a march on foot by a small group may have aroused little more than a passing interest. Instead, the media was drawn to these events as the state government, allegedly to deter a motley group of refugees from carrying out peaceful protests, deployed heavily armed police at the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders and positioned thousands of security personnel all along National Highway 31.

Within Bhutan, too, the Royal Government itself surprisingly chose to help the refugees' cause by making massive preparations to face a dissident 'onslaught'. Security was reinforced along the southern border, leave for civil servants cancelled and the local population exhorted to increase vigilance and 'defend' the country - all this, to meet the threat posed by 151 cyclists who had no programme of entering the country and 150 marchers arriving peacefully on foot from some 200 kilometres away! The strategy behind this decision on the part of the government; to blow out of proportion a passive demonstration of dissent - that, too, taking place outside the country - was obviously designed with the intention, or hope, of getting people in the country to close ranks. But, unfortunately for the government, the panic reaction also served a more self-defeating purpose - for the people inside, the actions confirmed that the struggle for democratic reforms continues and that it is gaining in strength.

Ironically, the spurt of activity was, in fact, a direct consequence of the frustration and despair in the refugee community. With the talks between Bhutan and Nepal stalled, the refugee issue seemed to have been almost forgotten. UNHCR was apparently suffering from fatigue, and Kathmandu appeared to have neither the time nor interest to revive the bilateral talks or to seek other alternatives. Finally, out of sheer desperation, if only to convince themselves that something must be done, the refugees were forced to act.

In view of the media blitz, the three programmes - marathon cycle rally, mass assembly and peace march - have together been seen by observers as evidence of "a new turn" in the Bhutanese dissident movement. While this renewed activism within the refugee community is cause for optimism, Bhutanese in exile would do well to treat the newfound vigour with caution: as much as dissidents may be invigorated by the 'success' of the recent activities, there is also definite cause for disquiet.

Despite the hardship and difficulty of life in exile, Bhutanese in exile have generally behaved responsibly so far. At the risk of being accused of lacking resolve, especially by many well-meaning sympathizers who, it would seem, prefer more action-oriented dissidence, the refugee leadership has acted with restraint. Even when the regime itself often appears willing to put its own interests before national aspirations and frequently adopts questionable, self-serving policies, refugees can proudly claim to have remained consistently loyal to national interests even in exile.

But, as the strain of life in refugee camps takes its toll and pressures from a despairing people begin to build up - especially when there are no visible signs of progress on the diplomatic front - the leadership will be increasingly called upon to take popular decisions. The situation is aggravated when the media itself and well-meaning outsiders suggest the need for more activism among the refugee community, some to see greater "empowerment" and others because they view such actions as the only means to put pressure on governments. While the idea is sound on both accounts, unless accompanied by moderating factors, there could be more to lose than gain. Popular decisions arising from leadership being forced to respond to grass-roots pressure, while temporarily serving to appease a frustrated community, can just as well swing the movement in uncontrollable and irreversible directions.

The Bhutanese dissident movement has come a long way since its tea-garden days in the Duars. Now, as political parties and activists feel compelled to follow popular dictates, one hopes that both sides, those in exile as well as those in power, will not fail to heed the warning bells - frustration and despair can constitute an explosive mix. True, the goodwill and support of the people in the region is essential, but if dissident leadership is forced by circumstances to believe that the only alternative left is physical confrontation and a return to Bhutan on the backs of other ethnic Nepalese in the region, the objective may well be easily achieved, but, sadly, the greater cause will have been hopelessly lost. Those stubbornly holding out in Thimphu would do well to ponder the consequences

IN THE INDIAN ENGLISH DAILIES - EXTRACTS

CYCLE RALLY TO PRESSURE GOVT - Siliguri, Jan 2: Supported by the Bhutan Coalition for Democratic Movement, the Druk National Congress, the Bhutan National Democratic Party and the Bhutan Peoples' Party will stage a demonstration at Jaigaon near Bhutan on January 7. A cycle rally will also be organized by the Students Union of Bhutan, the Youth Organization of Bhutan and the Democratic Youth of Bhutan. One hundred and fifty cyclists plan to begin the rally tomorrow from Siliguri and move along National Highway No.31 to Jaigaon. These cyclists aim to put pressure on the Bhutan Government to accelerate the process of finding a lasting solution to the present political crisis and the institution of human rights and democracy in Bhutan...

The Statesman
STATE IN FIX OVER 'LONG MARCH' OF BHUTANESE REFUGEES - Calcutta, Jan 2: The decision of different human rights organisations and local political parties to sponsor a 'long march' of refugees from Bhutan back to their country, after having spent several years in camps in Nepal - a programme slated for later this month appears to have put the West Bengal government in a fix.

The route the marchers propose to take will cut across North Bengal through the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar... Sources said the State authorities were undecided on whether the refugees should be allowed to participate in the march... The State Government is reportedly awaiting a final word on the subject from the Centre. The ramifications of the march - if undertaken - on India's relations with both Nepal and Bhutan have got to be taken into account, sources said... **The Statesman**

GOVT TO STOP BHUTANESE MARCH, CLAMPS SEC 144 IN SILIGURI - Jan 2: Prohibitory orders under Section 144 were imposed in Siliguri subdivision this evening to thwart tomorrow's rally by the Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement... The Darjeeling superintendent of police, Mr A.K.Maliwal, who met the superintendent of police of Nepal's Jhapa district this afternoon, said "Prohibitory orders will continue indefinitely. No rallies will be held till a formal magisterial permission." He, however, denied reports that Bhutanese refugees, who have started arriving at Bagdogra, were being arrested. The decision was taken after a high-level meeting at Writer's Buildings [housing state government in Calcutta] today. Sources said the decision followed instructions from the Centre... **The Telegraph**

CPM IN FIX OVER BAN ON BHUTAN RALLY - Siliguri, Jan 3: The Centre's refusal to take up the case of Bhutanese refugees living in India and Nepal has put the CPI(M)-dominated Left Front government in a tight spot. For the party, early repatriation of these displaced persons and introduction of democracy and human rights in the Buddhist kingdom is both a commitment and a matter of prestige. The fifteenth party congress of the CPI(M), held in Chandigarh in April, ratified the resolution

adopted by the fourteenth congress which asked Bhutan to ensure democratic rights for all ethnic groups... **The Telegraph**
90 BHUTANESE HELD ON NEPAL BORDER - Calcutta, Jan 3: About 90 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal who wanted to cross over to Bhutan through Indian territory were detained today at the Indo-Nepalese border at Panitanki in the Naxalbari Thana area of Darjeeling district today. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 Cr PC were promulgated in the Siliguri sub-division as well as the police stations on the Nepal and Bhutan borders... **Hindustan Times**
CPM SUPPORTS BHUTANESE CAUSE - Siliguri, Jan 3: The CPI(M) zonal committee has formally supported the movement of the Bhutanese refugees and condemned the arrest of a large number of cadres and leaders who are spearheading the movement for the restoration of the human rights of Bhutanese refugees.

In a statement issued in the presence of veteran leaders Ananda Pathak and Rama Shankar Prasad, the party criticised the "dual character of the government of India" charging that the feudal and autocratic government of Bhutan "has committed rape of the ethnic Nepali groups." The CPI(M) has called for an immediate solution to the problem. The party reiterated the earlier stand at the 15th party congress in Chandigarh where it has called upon the Bhutanese government to ensure democratic rights for all ethnic groups in Bhutan... **The Asian Age**

94 BHUTANESE REFUGEES TO BE KEPT IN JAIL, BAIL REJECTED - Siliguri, Jan 4: The 94 Bhutanese refugees who were detained by the police at Panitanki on Wednesday have been remanded to jail custody till January 18 after the accused rejected the personal released bond of Rs 100 each as per the order of sub-divisional judicial magistrate Bimalendu Biswas at the Siliguri court today. Ninety-six were detained by the police on Wednesday afternoon, after the police intercepted the cycle rally organised by refugee youth organisations. While 94 of them were produced in court on Thursday, the remaining two were admitted to hospital... **The Asian Age**

SURPRISE CYCLE RALLY TO EVADE DEPORTATION - Siliguri, Jan 4: With prohibitory orders in force, the Bhutanese refugees have decided to take out surprise cycle rallies culminating in a mass demonstration in Jaigaon in Jalpaiguri district on Sunday as their much announced cycle rally from Nepal yesterday was restricted on the border by the West Bengal police, reports UNI... **The Indian Express**

BHUTAN MINISTER CALLS ON CHAVAN - New Delhi, Jan 5: The Bhutan Home Minister, Mr Lyonpo Dago Tshering, today called on the Home Minister, Mr S.B.Chavan. Official sources described the meeting as a courtesy call, during which there was discussion on matters of mutual interest... **Indian Express**

BHUTANESE PROTEST INDIAN ACTION - Kathmandu, Jan 5: A group of Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal marched to the Indian embassy in the capital on Friday to protest the arrest of their countrymen in India early this week. The rally by the Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement, which is based in east Nepal, demanded the release of hundreds of refugees who were held in West Bengal... **The Asian Age**

VIGIL CONTINUES ON NEPAL BORDER - Siliguri, Jan 5: Tight security continued along North Bengal's border with Nepal and Bhutan with the police searching and deporting Bhutanese refugees sneaking in from Nepal. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 have been imposed in Jalpaiguri district, which has the longest border with Bhutan, besides Naxalbari and Bagdogra... **The Telegraph**
CPISUPPORTS BHUTANESE RALLY - Siliguri, Jan 6: More Indian organizations have extended support to Bhutanese refugees although uncertainty shrouds their proposed mass meeting at Jaigaon on the Indo-Bhutan border tomorrow.

The Bhutanese refugees have been planning mass cycle rallies to press for democracy back home. The CPI(M) central committee member, Mr Ananda Pathak, and the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League working president, Mr Chiten Sherpa, said they would attend the meeting despite the government's decision to ban it. The West Bengal unit of the CPI, a Left Front constituent, the All Gorkha Students' Union, the Manav Adhikar Suraksha Manch, and the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights have supported the agitation for democracy and human rights in Bhutan. The state CPI extended its support through a statement issued by its leader, Mr Piyush Ghosh, yesterday... **The Telegraph**
BHUTANESE REFUGEES DEFY BAN, HOLD BORDER RALLIES - Jaigaon, Jan 7: Bhutanese refugees led by several dissident leaders, today held demonstrations at two places near the Indo-Bhutan border, defying the ban on their rallies by the state government. The sudden appearance of the exiled Bhutanese leaders at Toribari and Mangalbari, 3 km from here, despite unprecedented security arrangements, took the state police, including the Rapid Action Force, by surprise. While some of the demonstrators had travelled over 250 km from their camps in Nepal, others arrived from Siliguri where they are camping since January 2. Police arrested 55 persons, including 12 women. The Bhutanese Coalition for the Democratic Movement, sponsors of the demonstrations, however, said 103 activists were arrested. About 75 persons were taken into custody yesterday.

In view of the elaborate security arrangements and the refugees' threat to hold a mass meeting at Jaigaon, the atmosphere in a large part of the Dooras, which has a 140-km-long border with Bhutan, was tension ridden. There was heavy deployment of police from Nagarkata to Jaigaon covering 80 km of National Highway 31

IN THE INDIAN ENGLISH DAILIES - EXTRACTS Contd. from page 2

and the road to Bhutan. Police searched houses of Indian Nepalis in the area and stopped all cars that passed by. At Jaigaon, the local residents, especially the Nepali-speaking people, were not allowed to move on the road. Most shops were closed as businessmen downed shutters out of fear. In spite of such tight security, the Bhutanese refugees led by the general secretary of the Bhutan National Democratic Party, Dr D.N.S. Dhakal, and the President of the Bhutan People's Party, Mr R.K. Burathoki, took out demonstrations at exactly 11 a.m. as declared by them... **The Telegraph BHUTANESE REFUGEES RALLY A SUCCESS, FEEL ARRESTED LEADERS - Siliguri, Jan 9:** While the success of the four day cycle rally by Bhutanese refugees from Panitanki to Jaigaon may have been limited due to continued arrest of the rallyists, the programme achieved its purpose. The refugees also exposed chinks in the police and intelligence armours. Hogging the front pages of the dailies ever since its commencement on January 3, the cycle rally's primary intention of "highlighting the gravity of the Bhutanese refugees problem" was served. The imposition of section 144 in the Siliguri and Jalpaiguri areas, the arrest of 96 cyclist refugees helped the rallyists to accomplish their intentions easily... **The Asian Age BHUTANESE INFLUX GOVT'S HEADACHE - Siliguri, Jan 10:** The Bhutanese refugees' efforts to shift their agitation from Nepal to North Bengal may snowball into a domestic problem for India despite its stance that their rehabilitation is a bilateral issue between Bhutan and Nepal... **The Telegraph BHUTANESE DETAINEES IN SILIGURI REFUSE FOOD - Siliguri, Jan 12:** Altogether 96 Bhutanese refugees, who were lodged in the Siliguri Special Jail on January 4 after they tried to launch a four-day cycle rally on Indian territory, went on hungerstrike yesterday demanding their immediate and unconditional release. Expressing solidarity with their imprisoned colleagues, who earlier rejected release on personal bonds, six more refugees belonging to different constituent parties of the Bhutanese Coalition for the Democratic Movement (BCDM), the sponsor of last week's cycle rally, also sat on a 12-hour hungerstrike at Hashmi Chowk, in the heart of the town, this afternoon... **The Telegraph BENGAL CALLS REFUGEES' RALLY A 'GIMMICK' - Calcutta, Jan 14:** The pro-democracy movement by Bhutanese refugees of Nepalese origin in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts has been described by state government officials "as an irritating publicity gimmick". Since the issue involved is an internal matter of Bhutan, the staging of demonstrations, rallies and the extension of local support by the All India Gorkha League is proving to be a headache for the state administration... **The Times of India TIGHTER BORDER VIGIL**

TO CHECK BHUTANESE MARCHERS - Siliguri, Jan 15: Vigil on the Indo-Bhutan border has been tightened and section 144 enforced in Naxalbari and other border areas to check the entry of 150 Bhutanese refugees who began their "appeal peace march" from Nepal to Thimphu via India on Sunday. The prohibitory section, invoked earlier in the area to check the cycle rally by the refugees, has been enforced in the border area in view of the latest move by the refugees. Organised by the AMCC, 150 Bhutanese refugees embarked on a peace march from Damak (eastern Nepal) to Thimphu via India to submit their memorandum to the Bhutan King. The Superintendent of Police A.K. Maliwal categorically stated that no processions or meeting will be allowed within the Indian territory... **The Asian Age SIKKIM MP FOR BHUTANESE CAUSE - Siliguri, Jan 16:** The Bhutanese refugees have found yet another supporter for their cause, the sitting MP from Sikkim, Ms Dil Kumari Bhandari. Speaking to reporters at Bagdogra airport, Ms Bhandari extended her support to the refugees agitating for their repatriation to Bhutan. "Indian may not want to disturb its relations with Bhutan but we cannot close our eyes when human rights are being violated in front of us," she said, claiming that the eviction of over one lakh [hundred thousand] people from their homes in 1990 was "nothing short of human rights violation." "We wish India could help to solve the problem and help them (the refugees) to go back to their home and hearth at the least," she said, adding that India being a democratic country has always sided with democratic movements in the past... **The Telegraph BHUTANESE REFUGEES REACH INDIAN BORDER - Calcutta, Jan 17:** At least 5,000 pro-democracy Bhutanese refugees of Nepali origin living in camps in Nepal, along with local Nepalese citizens, reached the Indian border near Kharibari police station in Darjeeling district this morning on their way to Bhutan. Mobilised by the Appeal Movement Coordination Council with support from Indian organisations like Akhil Vichar Manch, the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights, the All India Gorkha League and the Sikkim Sangram Parishad, the Bhutanese refugees' march is turning into a sensitive issue... The local police are under instructions to keep the marchers on the Nepalese side of the border. Efforts are on to persuade the marchers to retreat. The state government is keeping its fingers crossed that the situation will resolve itself without any kind of action having to be taken against the marchers. However, sources in Writers Buildings said: "New Delhi expects us to keep the marchers out. In case they venture into Indian territory, we would have to take action..." To compound the problems, the issue of Bhutanese refugees' fight for democratic rights and citizenship has split the state govern-

ment and the political leadership of the government. While the state government is going ahead with implementing the Union government's instructions on handling the Bhutanese refugees, the political leadership is in a dilemma. This is so as the CPM and its local associates in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district have extended support to the cause of Bhutanese refugees... **The Times of India 150 PEACE MARCHERS COURT ARREST - Panitanki, Jan 17:** The 150 peace marchers, on their way to Bhutan from the refugee camps in Jhapa district in eastern Nepal, courted arrest today at Panitanki, the last Indian outpost before Nepal. Besides the marchers, 16 human rights activists, belonging to various organisations and political parties, also courted arrest in presence of the District Magistrate, Darjeeling district. Sponsored by the AMCC, which is demanding the restoration of human rights in Bhutan and the earliest repatriation of refugees, the peace march began from Damak on Jan 14... **The Statesman LONG MARCH TO THIMPHU ENDS - POLICE ARREST BHUTANESE AT BORDER - Panitanki (Indo-Nepal border), Jan 17:** The Bhutanese refugees' long march to Thimphu from their camps in eastern Nepal was cut short today following the arrest of the rallyists and their Indian sympathisers by the police here. About 150 exiled Bhutanese of the AMCC had begun on a long march from Damak in Nepal, about 40 km from here, on Sunday. Having pledged never to return to their camps in Nepal, the refugees courted arrest after violating prohibitory orders clamped by Indian authorities... **The Telegraph BHUTANESE MARCHERS STILL IN JAIL - Siliguri, Jan 18:** The 150 Bhutanese refugees and their Indian supporters were remanded to judicial custody after a court sitting late on Wednesday night. After having refused to sign personal release bonds of Rs 100 each, the detainees remain in jail while their counsel has taken up the case with the sub-divisional magistrate arguing on the legality of the arrest and section 188 of the IPC under which they were detained... **Asian Age BHUTANESE REFUGEES LAY SIEGE TO NEPAL BORDER - Panitanki (Indo-Nepal border), Jan 23:** Bhutanese refugees today began an indefinite blockade of the international border here after police stopped them from reviving their long march to Thimphu. The 300 refugees, including 47 women, formed the second batch of the "long march" sponsored by the AMCC, a front of various organisations. On Jan 17, a group of 150 refugees and 16 of their Indian supporters were stopped and arrested by the police... **The Telegraph BHUTANESE REFUGEES BLOCK INDO-NEPAL BORDER BRIDGE - Panitanki (Indo-Nepal border), Jan 23:** Three hundred "formal" Bhutanese peace marchers with over 1000 back-up supporters blocked all

movement on the Mechi bridge that marks the international border between India and Nepal from Tuesday afternoon.

Demanding a safe passage through India to Thimphu where they plan to submit their memorandum to the Bhutanese King, the refugees squatted at the international border barring the entry and exit of travellers who were forced to wade through the river under the bridge.

In a change of strategy, these 300 marchers have refrained from violating section 144 imposed along the border. Meanwhile T.B. Gurung and Tara Gautam, two of the refugees leading the 300 marchers said if the Indian government releases the 150 refugees and lets them reach Thimphu safely, the protesters would peacefully retreat. Otherwise, they will be forced to sit and block the border indefinitely... **The Asian Age**

"IN QUOTES"

"They called us foreigners. If we are indeed foreigners, then we seek political asylum."

Ganesh Subedi, General Secretary of the Youth Organization of Bhutan, quoted in The Asian Age (Jan 5, 1996), on his response to being informed initially by Indian Police that the 96 cyclists were arrested because they were foreigners (Bhutanese) illegally in India.

"India may not want to disturb its relation with Bhutan but we cannot close our eyes when human rights are being violated in front of us."

Ms Dil Kumari Bhandari, MP from Sikkim, quoted in The Telegraph (Jan 17, 1996).

MEDIA SCAN

DRUK DRIVING

The West Bengal government's decision to stop Bhutanese refugees from launching a rally in north Bengal nicely sidesteps a problem. These refugees of Nepalese extraction, who live in eight camps run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Nepal, present a human problem which cannot be wished away. There are 87,000 such refugees. They have been forced to flee from Bhutan because the royal government in Thimphu does not consider them to be citizens.

Nepalese settlers in Bhutan date back to the 17th century and it is unfortunate that despite this long lineage they have had to suffer oppression at the hands of the Bhutan government and to live in exile. The plight of the refugees is aggravated by the general neglect to which they are subjected. Nepal has abandoned their cause; India does not want to queer its relationship with Bhutan over some refugees who will not serve any strategic or diplomatic purpose. Human suffering has thus been reduced to a mere statistic.

The realpolitik which determines international relationships and the suffering of refugees should not hide the dilemma of the Left Front in West Bengal over this issue. Ideologically, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) upholds the cause of refugees and wants their early repatriation. It is also in favour of furthering the democratic movement in Bhutan. In fact, the 15th party congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) held in Chandigarh in April passed a resolution which asked Bhutan to ensure democratic rights to all ethnic groups. Yet, the government in West Bengal which is dominated by the CPI(M) is unwilling to allow the refugees to hold a rally to articulate their grievances and their demands.

The CPI(M) will no doubt shrug off this dilemma as another price for operating within a federal structure. The matter may not be that simple. The left has burnt its fingers once with Mr Subhas Ghising, the president of the Gorkha National Liberation Front, who wants a separate homeland for the Gorkhas. The presence of a large number of Nepalese in north Bengal can only lead to strengthening Mr Ghising's hand. This, the CPI(M) cannot allow. It has thus fallen in line with the policy of the Indian government not to alienate Bhutan. Self interests of the Marxists and reasons of diplomacy for New Delhi have left refugees from Bhutan in a no man's land.

Editorial, The Telegraph, Calcutta, January 5, 1996

RALLYING IN INDIA - GLIMPSES

INDIAN SECURITY FORCES FOIL MASS RALLY

Indian Security Forces rounded up and arrested 103 Bhutanese dissidents at Mangalbare, near the Indo-Bhutan border on January 7. Despite massive security in the area, dissidents from different parts of India and Nepal had gathered to participate in a mass rally organized by the Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement (BCDM). Prominent Indian political figures as well as Bhutanese dissidents were expected to address the rally. Indians, politicians and human rights activists, proceeding to attend/address the rally were, however, stopped by the police at different places and prevented from reaching Jaigaon.

The venue had to be changed at the last minute owing to the heavy security at Jaigaon. The programme began in nearby Mangalbare at 11 a.m. as scheduled. The protesters called upon the Royal Government of Bhutan to respect the rights of its citizens and to initiate reforms aimed at establishing democracy in the country. They also sought the cooperation and assistance of the Government and people of India. Minutes after the start of the rally, however, Indian security forces swooped upon the procession and arrested 55 persons. At the end of the day, a total of 103 persons were arrested including Bhutan Peoples Party (BPP) President R.K. Budathoki, HUROB Acting Chairman S.B. Subba and Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) General Secretary

Dr. D.N.S. Dhakal.

Security was tight in the area between Siliguri and Jaigaon. All vehicles, including public transport, plying on National Highway 31 were stopped and searched. Bhutanese of Nepalese origin were the targets of the combing operation, but in the process Nepalese of other nationalities also faced inconvenience and harassment. A number of non-Bhutanese were detained for extended periods and released only after they were able to produce some identification.

On the Bhutanese side of the border, curfew was imposed in Phuntsholing town from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. while on the Indian side in Jaigaon the curfew extended from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. The Royal Government had cancelled leave of all civil servants posted along the border areas since mid-December and organized round-the-clock patrolling by the security forces. On the Indian side, from January 1 the authorities began combing the homes of ethnic Nepalese for Bhutanese dissidents. People in Jaigaon, including hoteliers, were warned by Indian and Bhutanese security forces not to host any Bhutanese dissidents.

Those arrested on January 7 were taken to Alipurduar jail the same day. On January 12, a group of 103 persons were released after signing Personal Release bonds. The remaining nine persons were released unconditionally on January 14.



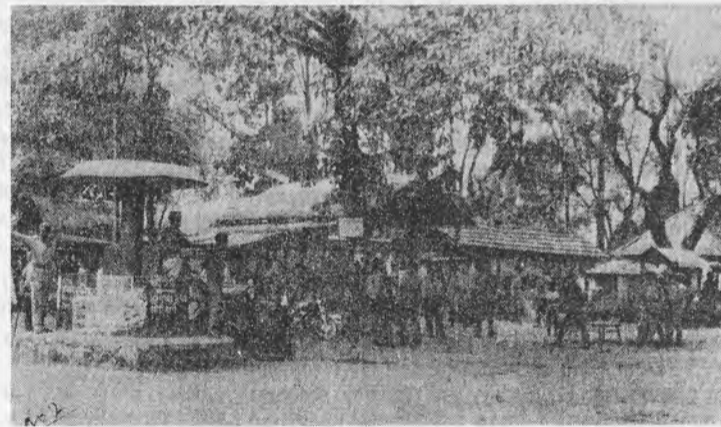
Gateway to the Kingdom, Phuntsholing from the Indian side, January 7. Photo: Uttarbanga Sambad (Bengali Daily)



The 96 cyclists being produced in court on January 4. Photo: Uttarbanga Sambad (Bengali Daily)



Past the security net - demonstration in Mangalbare on January 7. Photo: Dainik Basumati (Bengali Daily)



Waiting for the New Year and Bhutanese dissidents! Panitanki, December 31, 1995. Photo: Dainik Basumati (Bengali Daily)



Courting Arrest - Mangalbare, January 7. Photo: Aba (Nepali Daily)

