

The Bhutan REVIEW

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NEPAL - BHUTAN TALKS JOINT COMMITTEE TO MEET 4 - 7 OCT 1993

The first meeting of the Nepal-Bhutan high level Joint Committee to discuss the issue of Bhutanese refugees on Nepalese soil is expected to be held in Kathmandu during the first week of October. The Bhutanese delegation led by Home Minister Dago Tshering is scheduled to arrive in the Nepalese capital on October 4. Home Secretary Jigmi Thinley and High Court Judge D.N. Katwal are the other two members of the Bhutanese delegation.

The Nepalese delegation to the talks will be led by Home Minister Sher Bahadur Deupa and includes the Joint Secretaries of the Foreign and Home Ministries, Kedar Bhakta Shrestha and Shree Kant Regmi respectively.

According to the terms spelt out in the Joint Communique signed in Thimphu this July, the Committee will identify people in the refugee camps in Nepal and arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement to provide the basis for the resolution of the problem.

US ASSISTANT SECRETARY ON BHUTANESE PROBLEM

Speaking at the Asia Foundation Conference on 'Change in South Asia' in Washington D.C. recently, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Robin L. Raphael said that ending conflict, promoting democracy, and improving human rights are central to US interests in the subcontinent. "South Asian people are working hard to preserve and improve their democratic institutions in the face of serious difficulties. Strengthening democracy is a challenge in the ethnically and religiously diverse South Asian region," she said and went on to add that "the United States encourages and supports democratic institutions." Raphael appreciated the rapid economic changes in South Asia and said that "through these more open approaches, the region will become more closely integrated with the global market. The general move towards economic liberalization can unleash a dynamic surge in trade. It can also boost the ability of the countries of South Asia to deal with social, economic and even political problems that had appeared intractable in the past."

On the question of Bhutanese refugees, Raphael said that the United States government has talked to both the governments of Bhutan and Nepal. The two governments have been urged to discuss the problem and find a solution. Specifically asked to comment on India's role in the light of the 1949 treaty between Bhutan and India, which in principle allows India to guide Bhutan on foreign policy, Raphael said "I think that formal mediation and informal exchange of views are two different things. I would be surprised if India and Bhutan never discussed the issue."

YET ANOTHER MINISTER FROM HAA

Secretary in the Ministry of Communications Nado Rinchen was elevated to the rank of Deputy Minister in the same Ministry on September 20, 1993. The new Minister has had a long and checkered career both in and out of government service. A resident of Haa district he was working as a Range Officer in the Forest Department when he was forced to flee Bhutan and seek asylum in Nepal in 1965 because of his association with Lhendup Dorji, the then Acting Prime Minister and maternal uncle of the present monarch. Lhendup Dorji, his sister Tashi Dorji, Brigadier Tangbi, Colonel Penjor Wangdi and Commissioner Rinchen Dorji were the notable conspirators in an alleged plot hatched against the late monarch in the aftermath of the crisis precipitated by the assassination of Lhendup Dorji's brother, visionary Jigmi Palden Dorji, Bhutan's only Prime Minister on April 5, 1964.

During the nearly decade-long period of exile in Nepal, Nado Rinchen mainly served the other more promi-

nent co-conspirators and fellow emigres. He helped establish and operate the Casino Nepal of the Soaltee Oberoi Hotel in Kathmandu and dabbled in business himself although he was never quite able to achieve the financial success of fellow asylum seekers Rinchen Lama ('nee' Dorji), former Commissioner of southern Bhutan, who counts among his many other assets the Gaida Wildlife Camp and Lama Excursions in Kathmandu or Colonel Penjor Ongdi ('nee' Wangdi) owner of Hathiban Resorts and International Trekkers. Nado Rinchen did, however, use his time wisely in exile to pursue his studies and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu. Granted amnesty by the current monarch and offered a job in the Education Department at the very top, he left behind a poor business career and returned to Bhutan in 1973.

Despite being the first Bhutanese to carry the tag of *ngolop* and have his name besmirched in the National Assembly, Nado Rinchen has

worked hard and deserves this just reward, especially when the sheer incompetence of a number of other incumbents on the crowded top ledge is considered. With the creation of yet another Minister, the total number of exalted Excellencies in His Majesty's service has now risen to twelve (Lyonpo Sangay Penjor has already reportedly resigned), a number far exceeding the number of actual top level functionaries in the bureaucracy, viz. Secretaries to the government. Moreover, of the dozen Ministers, only two (16.67%) have

been culled from 85% of the population of the Central, Eastern and Southern regions while ten (83.33%) come from the West which has only 15% of the country's population, and no less than six are from the small district of Haa which has a total population of under 8,000.

Thus a district with less than 1.5 percent of the total population now supplies 50 percent of the nation's Ministers, a per-capita representation which should provide any right-thinking Bhutanese ample food for thought!

BEYOND THE CIVIL SERVICE - BHUTAN'S EXCELLENCIES

MINISTERS

C. Dorji, Planning
Dr. T. Tobgyel, Social Services/Dhaka
D. Tshering, Finance
Gen. L. Dorji, Royal Bhutan Army
D. Tshering, Home
D. Tsering, Foreign
O. Pradhan, Trade

Haa (West)
Haa (West)
Haa (West)
Haa (West)
Paro (West)
Thimphu? (West)
S/Jongkhar (South)

DEPUTY MINISTERS

S. Tobgye, Judiciary
L. Dorji, Agriculture
K. Letho, Delhi
P. Dorji, Geneva
N. Rinchen, Communications

Pema Gatsel (East)
Wangdi Phodrang (West)
Thimphu (West)
Haa (West)
Haa (West)

CHINA LOSES 2000 GAMES BID

If in the distant past the Olympics were hosted solely as a matter of prestige and used as an occasion to display national glory and national pride, ever since Los Angeles the Games has also meant big business and hefty profits. China spent the past few years shoring up its bid to bring the 2000 Games to its capital Beijing. But despite one of the most intense campaigns in Olympic history, on September 23 Beijing narrowly lost out to Australia's Sydney for the chance to hold this millennium's last Olympic Games. Despite questions over China's record of human rights and reported suppression of political dissent, Beijing had dominated the competition right until the final hours and upto the last round of voting. The 2000 Games was to provide China with a rallying point in its efforts to build national pride and unity for its ambitious economic development programme. And in the attempt to win the bid, the government even released some high profile political detainees and human rights activists from prison. But in the end the Games slipped out of China's hand, a decision which, in the words of Richard Dieker of Human Rights Watch, "puts Chinese leadership on notice that they will pay a price for the continued abuse of their own citizens."

irrespective of race, religion, sex or creed, the new Representative is expected to ably carry forward the noble objectives of the agency. Under new leadership it is hoped that UNICEF/Bhutan will once again take up truly national programmes and country-wide activities that benefit men, women and children in all parts of the kingdom.

ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS CALL FOR REPATRIATION OF BHUTANESE REFUGEES

The Meeting of Human Rights and Children's Rights Advocates of Asia held from 6-10 September 1993 in Lahore, Pakistan has expressed grave concern on the plight of over 35,000 refugee children who are the victims of human rights violation in Bhutan.

His Majesty the King of Bhutan has been urged by the Meeting to repatriate the over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees back to Bhutan with honour and dignity. The participants demanded that land and properties confiscated by the government be restored to the rightful owners, Human Rights be respected in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, a written constitution be established and the army and militia be withdrawn from southern Bhutan.

The Meeting also called upon the government of Bhutan to urgently initiate actions to implement various provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to sign and ratify all the important instruments on human rights such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The meeting was attended by representatives from 16 countries in the region including Bhutan.

NEW UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE IN BHUTAN

Stewart McNab, a British national arrived in Thimphu on September 6, 1993 to take up his assignment as the new UNICEF Representative to Bhutan. With over 18 years of working experience with UNICEF in various capacities, McNab, a nutritionist by profession, replaces Eva Nisseus who left Bhutan in July after a lucrative five years in Thimphu.

In the relentless efforts of the regime to stifle the voices of people in southern Bhutan, villagers, especially children, are being victimized and punished through withdrawal of proper health and education facilities. International agencies, and resident representatives in particular, therefore, need to take bold, courageous and selfless decisions to ensure that there is equitable distribution of external assistance. Unfortunately, too many heads of overseas organizations in Bhutan, it is reported, have fallen prey to the wiles of the regime and are guilty of parting with their conscience and overlooking the regime's discriminatory policies, thanks to the snob-value of card sessions and intimate meals with their Majesties plus frequent distribution of gifts by the government.

Having worked with the Kurds in Iraq earlier, McNab is unlikely to be fazed by the difficult working environment in northern Bhutan or overawed by pressures from the dictatorial regime. As the torch bearer in the country of an international organization responsible for the welfare of children worldwide,

CLINTON FOR HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

"We will work to reduce the threat from regimes that are hostile to democracy and to support liberalisation of non-Democratic States that are willing to live in peace," said American President Bill Clinton while addressing the current session of the United Nations General Assembly. Expressing serious American concern over the resurgent aspirations of ethnic and religious groups within nations he asked the Assembly to create a High Commissioner for Human Rights to protect the world's people from torture and repression, and reiterated that human rights are universal in nature and not something bounded by culture. Unfortunately, because differences in perception on human rights still remain, although there is now general agreement on appointing a High Commissioner, developed and some developing countries still differ sharply on how the High Commissioner should operate. Countries, mostly in Asia, opposed to sweeping powers for the High Commissioner because of their own stifling or outright repressive policies which could be called into question, are lobbying to make the new appointee operate through inter-Governmental bodies rather than allowing the High Commissioner to independently make judgements and act accordingly.

The Bhutan REVIEW

THE THIRD MAN

The moment Thimphu announced the inclusion of High Court Judge D.N.Katwal in the team to Kathmandu, the Bhutanese regime unequivocally signalled its intentions - there is going to be no level-headed approach to resolve the problem that 'vexes' both Nepal and Bhutan. Finding three people to make up a delegation is not usually a task that requires considerable preparation on the part of governments. But in this particular instance, the importance of the delegation composition was certainly not lost on Thimphu considering the nature of the talks and the significance of its outcome. Therefore, in choosing Bhutanese members for the 'high' level Joint Committee to address the issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, there is no doubt that every option was exercised in the corridors of power in Tashichhodzong.

If Bhutan gleefully accepted the opportunity to nominate Home Minister Dago Tshering to lead the delegation as counterpart to Nepal's Home Minister nominee, Home Secretary Jigmi Thinley found himself automatically selected, among other reasons, to make up for the sundry deficiencies of his Honourable Minister, leaving the selection of *the third man* to receive maximum consideration.

It would be erroneous to presume that the third slot was reserved for a *hotshampa* from the very beginning. In the light of oft-expressed sentiments regarding untrustworthy southern Bhutanese and considering current government policy which will not permit civil servants of Nepalese ethnicity to be posted in 'sensitive' posts, it is highly unlikely that a southern Bhutanese, regardless of his vocation, was initially under consideration as a member of the delegation to Kathmandu. Until, as is wont in scheming Thimphu, someone ingeniously came up with the name of His Honour the High Court Judge.

Through the inclusion of a southern Bhutanese in the team, the Royal Government will have achieved its propaganda objective of underscoring the fact that there are southern Bhutanese in Bhutan who, far from being oppressed and discriminated against, are still holding 'important' positions in government. More significantly, the inclusion is expected to provide proof of honest intentions on the part of the regime with a Bhutanese of pure and unpolluted Nepalese ancestry being given an opportunity to be a part of the 'solution' process.

There is no denying the fact that many Bhutanese of Nepalese ethnicity are still in the country; yes, many of them are still in government service, some in 'important' positions; yes, many are still studying in government schools, some are even on scholarships abroad. But if many are still working in the government or attending government schools, many more have been summarily dismissed from their jobs and many children have no school to go to. Likewise, it is a fact that even as many southern Bhutanese are still in the country, a hundred thousand, a third of the total, live out their days in refugee camps or elsewhere in exile. There is also the harsh reality that because of government actions the number inside continuously dwindles while the outside population is on the rise.

Man's instinct for survival, however, makes him blind to the naked truth, and he clutches at straws he knows will not keep him afloat. Thus, despite discriminatory policies, racist discussions in public fora, and proposals that call for the removal of all southern Bhutanese by the very roots, in the desperate bid for survival there are ethnic Nepalese Bhutanese ready to do the regime's bidding. This is not meant to belittle our race or denounce particular individuals inside; to survive, as history amply proves, people of other races too have been forced to speak and act against their own. But even as he is forced to go through the motions of parroting government propaganda, the average southern Bhutanese civil servant, however, knows the score and is not likely to be fooling himself. Unfortunately, on the basis of past record, it is unlikely that the Honourable judge will arrive in Kathmandu with such convictions.

While the judge from Bara in Samchi district may be an honourable man, there is no denying the fact that he is to Bhutan what the Pole is to Europe or the Sardarji to India, the butt of all jokes. His many languid years in the Posts and Telegraphs Department, which in his days had one lone international mail outlet on the Indo-Bhutan border, provided the nation with comic relief. Put out to pasture some years ago in the Thimphu High Court, the highest court of appeal in the land, the sombre surroundings have not helped diminish in any way the steady supply of Katwal-jokes, if at all they have been replenished at a quicker pace from the hallowed halls.

In Katwal's selection, therefore, the world is witness to yet another brilliant display of cunning from the masters of deception. If Thimphu genuinely sought to incorporate southern Bhutanese sentiments and concerns in the dialogue, the High Court Judge would be the last person of their choice, Thimphu knows this only too well. Among the hundreds of other 'important' southern Bhutanese survivors who could have been picked to be *the third man*, in D.N.Katwal the Royal Government has found the only individual who, more out of feebleness of mind than strength of loyalty, will extol the virtues of the regime. He will probably mean it, too. This, also, Thimphu knows.

ROYAL PASTIME, NATIONAL SHAME

Her Royal Highness Ashi Deki Yangzom Wangchuck was arrested at the Taipei Airport on September 17 and accused of attempting to smuggle into the island 22 rhinoceros horns valued at US \$740,000. This is stated to be Taiwan's biggest haul of endangered wildlife parts. Ashi Deki who flew in from Hong Kong also had in her luggage parts from 9 musk deer, another endangered species which has been placed under special protection in Bhutan. According to latest reports, charged with smuggling and violation of conservation laws by the authorities in Taiwan, Ashi Deki who claimed the 15 kilograms haul was part of the royal family fortune, has been released on bail pending formal trial but must remain on the island.

This latest scandal involving Bhutanese royalty in the lucrative business of smuggling is, sadly, not news to those in Bhutan who have had access to such reports in the past. Confidence bolstered by diplomatic immunity, ingratiating customs and security personnel in India and Bhutan, special deals between Thimphu and New Delhi in case of exigencies etc. have all contributed to our royalty becoming willing partners in this distasteful business.

Nine years ago, Kuenlay Wangdi, a commoner diplomat-husband of the same Ashi Deki, was arrested on arrival in New York with US\$55 million worth of heroin smuggled in from India. Understandably, Wangdi was thrown to the wolves by both the royal family and the Royal Government: conveniently Wangdi was presumably divorced from the Princess just weeks before his arrest and, equally conveniently, his services as Counselor in the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in New Delhi had allegedly been dispensed with only days prior to his ill-fated flight to America. Wangdi, who reportedly utilized his time in US prisons to study law, returned to live in India after his release and deportation from the United States in 1990. Currently, he is once again incarcerated in prison, this time in Thimphu where he indiscreetly returned last year in an attempt to claim his assets and landed property. Considering that the ex-convict is also the ex-husband of Her Majesty the Queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo, most Bhutanese considered this decision to return to Bhutan on the part of Wangdi foolhardy. An only son from his marriage with the eldest of the four queens died under tragic circumstances in Darjeeling, India, prior to the official royal marriage in 1988.

The Royal Government was faced with its first major embarrassment earlier in 1982 when Indian Customs officials at Calcutta Airport seized 150 kilograms of gold belonging to a royal entourage returning from Hong Kong. Smuggling of gold into India was then the major enterprise of the underworld owing to the sharp price differential in the international and Indian markets for the yellow metal. In this instance, since royalty was caught with a hand in the pie, fall-guys and easy solu-

tions could not be deployed.

The matter is reported to have been resolved only after direct tete-a-tete between Thimphu and Delhi. (The gold was confiscated by Indian authorities and not returned despite desperate pleas from Thimphu). Unfortunately for Bhutanese royalty and Bhutanese national pride, before the solution could be engineered at the top, much had already happened. The particular issue of the Indian weekly newsmagazine, Sunday, which provided a detailed and graphic cover story account of the seizure, royal indignation, protests and threats by Bhutanese royalty, royal escape, car-chase along Indian highways and subsequent arrests etc. was understandably banned in Bhutan.

While the above incidents reflect those times when royalty was caught red-handed, there are times when others have been coerced or paid to take the blame and carry forever the stigma. Kugo Dukpa, an official of the Bhutanese Revenue and Customs Department based in Calcutta, is now spending a comfortable term in a Bhutanese prison after 'he' was found guilty of smuggling goods into India in May 1991. Dukpa was charged with the crime when packages addressed to him in Calcutta were found to contain a large consignment of contraband items; it was only coincidental that Bhutanese royalty happened at the same time to be in Hong Kong from where the goods were despatched to the Bhutanese Customs official. Even though the crime was committed in India, Dukpa was allowed to leave for Bhutan where he is 'serving' a sentence passed down by the Bhutanese court.

Notwithstanding the Bhutanese 'punishment', the Indian case against Kugo, and certain lengthy prison sentence, still stands. On the basis of past precedent, however, he may yet be lucky and never have to appear in the Indian courts; thanks to the power and influence of benefactors, only some years earlier another Bhutanese Customs official apprehended under similar circumstances and required to stand trial in an Indian court, while still very much alive and well was certified dead by a pliant Bhutanese High Court! To add to the woes of the government the Calcutta Court which found out the truth took up the matter with Bhutan through the Indian Embassy, causing no end of embarrassment to a government then going through a passing "let's not love India" phase. The temporary embarrassment and national shame that accompanied such incidents and disclosures, unfortunately, reflects only the tip of the iceberg. Special privileges and immunity has afforded Bhutanese royalty ample scope and opportunities to engage in unscrupulous conduct both in Bhutan and India.

Among the innumerable cases of royal misdemeanour, those relating to smuggling of cultural artefacts and endangered species must surely rank highest among offences in a nation which currently prides itself

as "a model for the world" in terms of policies relating to ecology and environment and which professes to base its complete identity and entire development philosophy on its tradition, culture and heritage. But even as the government attempts to fool itself and the world at large into believing that wise leadership and not an accident of fate and circumstances is responsible for the country's relatively pristine environment, it gives the game away by continuing to display its impotence in dealing with the privileged few. Bhutanese royalty which delivered much of the nation's heritage, flora and fauna in the past to paymasters in the West, continues to routinely misuse and abuse power and authority as evinced by the latest scandal. The activities of nobility in the heinous business of exporting endangered animal products and the nation's heritage are "secrets" that have never remained truly secret in tiny Bhutan; even the identity of royal personae involved are generally known. But besides righteous indignation at the highest level in times of embarrassment, action has never been initiated against the culprits. In fact, the entire government machinery is made to spring into action each time a wayward noble is caught with his or her pants down. Having been spared the punishment that would have been meted out to mere mortals, the royal culprit is ready for business until the next time he is caught and the Bhutanese bureaucracy must yet again move to the rescue.

Perhaps closing the stable door after the horse has bolted, in recent times there have been 'intense debates' and enactment of new regulations to prevent the theft and smuggling of artefacts from the country. But both the 'debates' in the recent National Assembly sessions and consequent nine resolutions relating to curbs on smuggling of artefacts have only served to indicate the regime's impotence or its unwillingness to seriously address the real issue.

Even after admitting that "some individuals outside Bhutan had better and more valuable collections of Bhutanese antiques and artefacts than the royal government itself" and that "[i]t is common knowledge in Bhutan that much of the kingdom's national heritage was sold, in the 1970s, by the Bhutanese elite" (*Kuensel, June 12, 1993*), there was no discussion directed to the role of the elite, especially real royalty who qualify as prime offenders. Instead, in the usual charade, what the Assembly naively focussed on were petty criminals and miscreants. A case of "seeing no truth" and "hearing no truth", perhaps.

As long as there is no commitment to change at the very top, with the number of people acquiring or claiming royal status fast multiplying in geometric fashion, such spells of national shame and infamy brought upon by royalty that has yet to learn to respect its privileges can only occur with increasing frequency in the days ahead.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 1993

The introduction in this 354 page report which includes the human rights records of 161 countries for the calendar year 1992 comes down hard on governments. While most "are quick to proclaim that human rights must be defended and in 1992 international action in response to some human rights crises was at a high level," the report observes that "politically motivated selectivity has continued to be the norm for governments when dealing with human rights issues, and international treaty obligations have been cynically ignored when convenient". The response by governments to human rights crises elsewhere has been marked by a conspicuous lack of political integrity and "self-interest has guided governments' response to human rights crises and has prevented or hindered action in many countries where it is desperately needed. The world has witnessed human rights violations of allies being greeted with silence while those of declared enemies were met with public condemnation, sometimes backed with action. Such hypocrisy has led to a lack of public confidence in the way governments deal with human rights at home and abroad, in their relations with other governments or through international institutions."

"The report is a grim testament to a lack of consistent commitment to fundamental human rights standards, laying bare the abject failure of governments to protect basic rights. It records the violent suppression of dissent - .. in dozens of countries people are still being put behind bars because they speak out against their governments, or because of their family ties. The report exposes scores of governments that let their police and soldiers get away with beating, inflicting electric shocks or raping prisoners just to humiliate them or force them to sign false confessions. There are descriptions of gruesome torture sometimes leading to death. There are stories of some of the thousands of people who have "disappeared" or were brutally murdered at the hands of security forces or government-linked "death squads" - all because governments wanted to stamp out their opposition for good." The introduction is critical of the double standards applied by the international community in the area of human rights and cites cases of countries with strong commitment in their laws to human rights still failing to protect the right of individuals. It also notes the "cumulative failure" of nations, despite their stated commitments, to genuinely make protection of human rights their priority. This "seeming indifference" of the international community when governments knowingly shirk their obligations becomes complicity, and when the international community remains a mute spectator "it provides a shield behind which governments believe they can order the secret police, the torturers and state assassins into action with impunity." In 1993, the year when the human rights records of governments is under close scrutiny in the context of the UN World Conference of

Human Rights and the UN International Year for the World's Indigenous People, Amnesty International challenges governments "to back words about human rights with concrete action." AI calls upon all governments to ensure that their laws and practices respect international human rights standards, and to ensure that domestic and international protection of human rights is given the same priority as other essential functions of government.

For the benefit of our readers we reproduce below the full unedited text of the country entry on Bhutan from the 1993 Amnesty International Report.

A prisoner of conscience, a former adviser to the King, remained in detention throughout the year. Around 150 political detainees, all Nepali-speaking people arrested in 1992 and previous years, remained without charge or trial at the end of the year. Thirty-two others, all suspected of violent "anti-national" activities, were convicted of treason and jailed after a trial which may have been unfair. At least one detainee died in custody owing to inadequate medical treatment. There were reports of torture, ill-treatment and generally harsh prison conditions. The government took a number of steps to improve human rights.

Unrest continued in southern parts of the country, where groups of Nepali-speaking people continued to oppose the government policy of national integration on the basis of *driglamnamzha* (northern Bhutanese traditions and culture), the application of the 1985 Citizenship Act and the carrying out of a census (see previous *Amnesty International Reports*). By the end of the year, more than 70,000 Nepali speaking people had fled to Nepal. Among them were many who had been classified as illegal immigrants during the census. Many refugees said that they had been forced to leave by local officials or that they had left out of fear of falling victim to human rights violations by government security forces. Certain opposition groups, including the Bhutan People's Party (BPP), were allegedly responsible for torturing, killing and kidnapping civilians, including government officials and people suspected of being government informers.

Towards the end of the year, the government took a number of steps to improve the human rights situation. A new National Security Act, replacing the Law of Treason, made the death penalty an optional rather than mandatory punishment for crimes against the state. The government also banned the use of shackles in prisons, gave relatives access to prisoners and invited the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Bhutan periodically.

Tek Nath Rizal, one of the six prisoners of conscience arrested in late 1989 for allegedly initiating unrest among the Nepali-speaking population (see *Amnesty International Report 1992*), continued to be detained without trial. On 29 December he was charged with nine offences, in-

cluding acts against national security, although the real reason for his detention appeared to be his non-violent opposition to government policies. His trial was due to begin in January 1993. The two others who remained held without charge or trial at the start of the year, Jogen Gajmere and Sushil Pokhrel, were among 313 political prisoners released in an amnesty announced by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in February. By the end of the year, the King had ordered the release of 530 detainees in amnesties.

Scores of people of Nepali origin were arrested during 1992 on suspicion of supporting or sympathizing with southern opposition groups engaged in violent activities. In May, 41 prisoners were brought to trial before the Thimphu High Court on charges of treason, including four *in absentia*. One of them was sentenced to life imprisonment, 31 were sentenced to prison terms ranging between nine months and just over 10 years, and five were acquitted after a trial which may have been unfair. The four tried *in absentia* had not been sentenced by the end of the year. Around 150 political detainees remained held without charge or trial at the end of 1992, half of whom had been detained for more than two years. The large majority of them were detained at Chemgang detention camp near Thimphu; the place of detention of others remained unknown. Deo Dutta Sharma, who had been detained at Wangdi Phodrang prison, was transferred to another place of detention on 31 December 1992. The government has since refused to reveal his precise whereabouts.

Torture, ill-treatment and generally poor conditions in prison camps were reported. Several former prisoners alleged that conditions at Chemgang detention camp were particularly harsh. They said that all prisoners were forced to do hard labour, even when ill, and that guards routinely beat prisoners. In early January one political prisoner, H.P. Sapkota, was seen being taken to Thimphu Hospital in shackles and in a very weak condition. After several months of conflicting reports as to his fate, the government finally confirmed in July that H.P. Sapkota had died from typhoid. An independent doctor who studied the medical records for Amnesty International concluded that inadequate diet or poor prison conditions may have contributed to his illness and that H.P. Sapkota appeared to have been given "inappropriate and ineffectual medical care". The government admitted that normal procedures for informing the next of kin of his death had not been followed.

An Amnesty International delegation visited Bhutan for the first time in January. The delegates met the King and government officials to discuss human rights. They also visited Samchi District in southern Bhutan but were not permitted to go to Chirang for "security reasons". The delegates were also refused permission to visit places of detention. They met former prisoners of conscience and other victims of human

rights violations, as well as people affected by opposition violence. In June the government refused Amnesty International permission to observe the trial of 41 political prisoners charged with treason.

During the year Amnesty International called for the release of prisoner of conscience Tek Nath Rizal and urged the authorities to try or release other political detainees. It also urged the government to introduce safeguards to prevent torture and ill-treatment in prison camps. Amnesty International welcomed the steps taken by the government to improve human rights.

In December Amnesty International published a report, *Bhutan - Human rights violations against the Nepali-speaking population in the south*, which documented the organization's concerns since 1990 and made several concrete recommendations for safeguarding human rights.

MEDIA SCAN

ARREST OF BHUTANESE PRINCESS AND AFTER

Recently, *The Times of India* published a small news item tucked away in its inside pages reporting the arrest in Taiwan of Bhutanese princess Dekiy Wangchuck (43) for "trying to smuggle 22 rhinoceros horns into the island in her luggage in a flight from Hong Kong." The item, attributed to PTI and datelined Washington, disclosed that the rhino horns were valued at \$740,000 and stated that "it was Taiwan's biggest haul of endangered wildlife parts." Aside from indicating a get-rich-quick urge in the Bhutanese princess, this development is of not inconsiderable significance to Nepal. Let me try to explain how.

First of all, it indicates that, despite all efforts of the international media to project the Bhutanese ruling oligarchy as clean and wholesome, that is far from the case.

That is of relevance to all who have dealings with Bhutan recalling the frequent starry-eyed references in Western and Indian media to the good work being done in Bhutan by the Bhutanese ruling family, headed by King Jigme. The Bhutanese king, perhaps the world's last absolute monarch, has been consistently projected as a man who lives a spartan life, cares deeply for his people, is high minded and totally committed to conservation and environmental concerns.

Indeed, it may be recalled that one of Thimphu's pet schemes to hoodwink the international community on its ethnic cleansing policy vis-a-vis Bhutanese of Nepali extraction was its proposal for creating of a mile-wide green belt along the entire length of the Indo-Bhutan border which housed a large majority of those very individuals.

Secondly, in view of the fact that Bhutan today is a dictatorship controlled by King Jigme, it is simply inconceivable that princess Dekiy could have gone about her business of collecting rhino horns without protection from - or notice in - the highest quarters. The question therefore arise: was she alone in the scam?

Thirdly, since the smuggled items were rhino horns - and that too twenty two of them - one may ask: where did this hefty haul come from? This question is relevant because rhinos are extant in the Manas Game Sanctuary in southeastern Bhutan, along the border with India's Assam state which is also renowned for its rhinos. Were the horns from Bhutanese rhinos or Assamese rhinos or from both sources?

Whatever their origin, it is quite clear that such an operation would not be possible without effective protection over a prolonged period of time. It thus raises the possibility that this "trade" has been going on undetected for quite some time.

How much rare wildlife was slaughtered for its "promotion" one can only speculate. And all this from a member of the Bhutanese royalty which makes a big deal about its excellent environmental credentials. Finally, it is interesting, but hardly surprising, that since the publication of the startling news item there has been no follow-up stories. Doubtless another instance of Delhi looking the other way where Bhutanese shenanigans are concerned.

One reason why the princess had even dared to venture into this nefarious trade was precisely because without political parties and other democratic institutions like a free press in that country it is possible for its rulers to get away with anything - be it smuggled rhino horns or brutal repression of non-Drukpas.

Will Bhutan's protectors and promoters take note. And would HMG [Nepalese Government] press the point that commitments made by the ruling Bhutanese elite with whom she has to deal with on the refugee repatriation question cannot be taken at face value.

People's Review, Kathmandu, September 27, 1993

"IN QUOTES"

"Protection of basic, civil and political rights is not a constitutional luxury but a democratic necessity linked to good order and stability, both national and international."

H.E.Ms. Mary Robinson, President of Ireland, addressing the Bar Association of India in New Delhi.

"It is also a fact that during the most critical hours in the national life of Bhutan in 1964, Bhutanese Nepalese stood solidly behind the various steps undertaken by the king."

A.C. Sinha in *Bhutan: Ethnic Identity and the National Dilemma*

"Let's put this thing in perspective: the Bhutanese [refugees] are angels compared to refugees in a country like Somalia."

Bill Hitch, UNHCR Field Officer quoted in Lutheran World Service 1992 Annual Report

LIVING UNDER ECO-DICTATORSHIP

Der Spiegel - 21/1993

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS IN INDIA

On the occasion of forty years of climbing Mount Everest the German magazine Der Spiegel writes on the ecological degradation in the Himalayan region. "And Bhutan", the magazine states, "which offers itself as an alternative model, is just a Buddhist eco-dictatorship."

The new Shangri-la has already been revealed. It has been found in a small pocket of the Himalaya's folds: the Kingdom of Bhutan named *Druk Yul*, Land of the Dragon.

"A model for the world", Dawa Tsering, Foreign Minister of his country for the last 21 years, praises his homeland. None of his colleagues have been in office longer than he and hardly any other has his celebrated powers. He receives his guests in the largest wooden building of Asia, the *Dzong* of Thimphu, a fortress that protects the government and religious leadership from both enemies and their own people. "All traditional institutions, philosophy and culture are still intact in Bhutan", declares Dawa Tsering. "We do not build our happiness on vacuum cleaners and washing machines as in the West." Long before "the materialistic world gained consciousness, we protected nature because we believe in the existence of spirits in animals and plants."

Routinely and with relish the Foreign Minister then mentions impressive figures: forests still cover 64 percent of Bhutan's territory which is slightly greater than Switzerland's but has only 600,000 inhabitants. Bhutan remains closed to mass tourism even though it has great *dzongs* - castles and roller coaster-like mountain roads. Individual tourists pay US \$280 per day; only 2,800 tourists came last year.

85 percent of the population still lives in rural areas. New buildings are to be constructed in the old style - without nails or cement. The gov-

ernment has banned the setting up of industrial areas. Sick people are treated comparatively well and free-of-cost.

"We receive a lot of support for our policies", says Dawa Tsering. International development agencies, frustrated by failures on almost every front, pamper the little Himalayan state situated between China and India like a child prodigy. The UN organizations, World Wildlife Fund and a dozen countries, namely India, Japan and Switzerland, are financing two-thirds of the national budget. But the price for the people in Bhutan is high: they are living under an eco-dictatorship.

Along the roads, check posts are installed every 50 km where the police check every vehicle. For long distance travel even locals need a special permit. Those who do not wear the national dress, a knee-long gown, have to pay a fine of 150 Ngultrums - for most people a week's salary. After three offences they might end up in jail.

Cigarettes and TV are banned; all satellite dishes were removed four years ago. Videos, however, including those containing pornography and violence, are not banned. This is just one of the contradictions among Bhutan's purists.

The state owns all forests and permission is needed to cut each tree. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck decides who can move to the urban areas and who can buy new farmland. Only the family of the four sisters, whom the King married officially in 1988, enjoys special princely

privileges. The queens' father controls by now factories, hotels and the only big saw mill in the country.

In the prosperous region of Bumthang, the *Dzongdag*, a governor appointed by the King, resembles "a thunderstorm of glaring lightning and terrible thunderclaps", says an expatriate development worker. The official shoots mongrels, jails wayward subjects or orders his guards to beat them up for petty reasons. "The stick", he says, "is the only language these people understand."

"Labour Camp" reads the sign in front of the shabby corrugated shacks where thousands of Indians live with their families, strictly separated from the local people. Like serfs, only with dynamite and almost no tools, they have built Bhutan's impressive road network. It was financed by India so that in case of crises their tanks could quickly advance to the Chinese border. Land slides and ditches make maintenance an expensive Sisyphean task that Bhutan is only reluctantly taking on.

Meanwhile, officials in Thimphu complain about the lack of manpower, a problem which they themselves have caused. Since 1986 they have driven away about 80,000 citizens of Nepali origin who they claim were illegal immigrants or "anti-nationals".

UN officials at the refugee camps in Nepal call it "ethnic cleansing". Probably only 20,000 people had crossed the green border into Bhutan in the past, although the Himalayan state is as attractive for the hungry people of the region as is Germany

for Rumanians.

"Opening up means materialism", says Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering, somewhat hypocritically. He himself has long torn apart the cocoon: his three daughters and two sons, like the children of hundreds of high officials (*Dashos*), study abroad.

They now belong to spoilt group of "Dasho-kids" who are getting bored in Thimphu and brawling for lucrative jobs, mainly in Tourism. "It has only just started", says the young host at the Dechhen Bar, "in a few years you will not recognize this city." The King has already approved 29 private travel agencies and new hotels are being built.

"It's like in the Middle Ages but with Mercedes Benz", says Peter Stahl who had ten years of experience in Africa before he became head of the Swiss Agency Helvetas in Bhutan.

The Swiss discovered Switzerland in the remote Himalayan state. They support ecological, forest and animal husbandry development work with millions of Swiss francs while the Bhutanese elite fly to Zurich to consult their physicians. Nowhere else had Stahl experienced "so nearly ideal working conditions". Thanks to the "belated contact" with the outside world, Bhutan has the chance for "sustainable development" - the dream of all ecologists. "One does not need to buy these people if one wants to give them something", raves the Swiss-aid man. The 37 year old King regularly visits the villages all over the country. He patiently accepts petitions. He is

An ordinance for setting up of a National Human Rights Commission to inquire into complaints of human rights violations by public servants was promulgated by the Indian President on September 29. While official sources emphasized that there was no significance in the timing of the promulgation, and were emphatic that the move had nothing to do with external pressure, it was generally believed that the ordinance follows pressure on India from Western powers and international human rights organizations to improve its human rights record.

In addition to the National Commission, to be chaired by a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, each State will also have a human rights commission of its own to look into complaints of human rights violations pertaining to its jurisdiction. The commissions will have the powers to specify punishment against police and other public servants found guilty of human rights violations, but will not have such sweeping powers in the case of the armed forces.

knowledgeable about ecological issues. Stahl is under the spell of the absoi'te monarch and his aides. In his stately office with a view of the *Dzong*, the development worker of the 68-generation ruminates on his radically changed world view: "For a developing country, a benevolent dictator is best."



Still needing decades to reach maturity, young trees in Samchi district come under the axe wielded by workmen hired by the government touting itself as "a model for the world" in "sustainable development".

Government lumberyard at the Samchi border post. Established circa 1991.



ECO - CRIMES IN ECO - LAND

Insecurity fuels the mad rush to extract every bit of wealth.



REFUGEE CAMP INFORMATION

Location	District	Refugees	Students
Timai	Jhapa	8,143	2,674
Goldhap	Jhapa	7,865	2,495
Beldangi I	Jhapa	14,624	3,916
Beldangi II	Jhapa	18,654	5,182
Beldangi II Ext.	Jhapa	9,508	3,075
Patthri	Morang	16,499	4,534
Khujunabari	Jhapa	9,400	3,010
Total		84,693	24,887
Cumulative births:		2,635	
Cumulative deaths:		2,174	

The above figures are as of September 30, 1993.