

The Bhutan REVIEW Monthly

News, Views and Reviews

VOL 2 No. 6

June 1994

Rs. 5/-

JUST RESOLUTION IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW AND PRINCIPLES: US AMBASSADOR

Only two weeks after arriving in the country, the new United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Nepal, Dr. Susan Vogelgesang visited the Bhutanese refugee camp at Sanischare (Pathri) in Morang district, eastern Nepal on May 6. Providing a pointer to the priorities of the U.S. government, the Ambassador chose to visit the Bhutanese refugee camp on her first official visit outside of the Kathmandu Valley, a point that was underscored in her brief address. "We hope for a speedy and just resolution to this problem in line with international law and principles of displaced persons," she said, adding that "the United States, along with many members of the international community, is concerned that the flow of refugees from Bhutan is continuing."

The Ambassador praised the efforts of His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its partners for the remarkable efforts in providing for the care of the over 86,000 men, women and children. "I know that you have no desire to remain here," she said to the refugees and expressed the hope that concrete progress would be made in the forthcoming Joint Ministerial talks scheduled for June. Besides extending substantial financial assistance for the Bhutanese refugee welfare programme, the people and the Government of the United States of America have continued to provide the much needed moral support and inspiration for all the Bhutanese in exile.

NO TO FINNISH JOURNALISTS

Seven journalists from Finland who planned on visiting Bhutan this September were denied visas by the Royal Government of Bhutan. This was stated in a Press Release issued by the Finnish Guild of Travel Writers which was organizing the visit. Representing major mass media in Finland, the journalists planned to cover issues ranging from tourism to development cooperation in Bhutan.

Reijo Harkonen, a journalist who had visited Bhutan last September is quoted as having said that "Bhutan allows only carefully selected journalists who will not write too negatively about the autocratic regime of Bhutan, and are not interested in the poor human rights record of Bhutan."

WFP SLASHES ASSISTANCE TO BHUTAN

In a clear signal aimed at driving home the message of concern over the 100,000 Bhutanese who have been evicted from the country and who are living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced the reduction of its assistance to Bhutan over the next four year-cycle by two-thirds. While WFP had provided assistance valued at US\$ 9.4 million during 1990-94, the amount committed by WFP for the next four year period is only US\$ 3.5 million. The telling decision to reduce food aid was made after a mission from its headquarters in Rome visited Bhutan and inspected WFP programmes in 10 districts. In the aftermath of the public demonstrations and the subsequent closure of schools and hospitals in southern Bhutan in 1990, WFP assistance was

covertly diverted to feed security personnel stationed mostly in the school complexes. Eyewitnesses, including expatriates, recount how security forces removed food materials at night from WFP storage facilities. In the government media these items were reportedly looted by "anti-nationals".

Denied access to the south allegedly on account of "security" reasons, international agencies had difficulty monitoring their own organizational activities. Mr. Bodo Henz, leader of the WFP mission politely but pointedly remarked that lack of proper monitoring was one of the many problems faced by the agency over past few years. The reduction of WFP assistance would affect school enrollment, increase drop-out rates and affect the growth rate of the education system in

the kingdom, Education Secretary Thinley Gyamtsho admitted. The key person responsible for the blatantly discriminatory policies in the education sector also made it abundantly clear, however, that the people themselves would have to bear the brunt of the consequences of this aid reduction. Having implemented draconian regulations and a systematic programme of repression and vendetta, to the extent of requiring "Police Clearance" from southern Bhutanese children as young as six years for school admission, the regime obviously has no qualms in nonchalantly passing on the burden resulting from its ill-conceived and ruthless policies to the already impoverished ordinary people. Gyamtsho was quoted as having observed that "it will be more the parents than the Royal Government who will have to cover the expenses."

INDIAN AGENDA FOR DEMOCRACY

Addressing the Joint Session of the United States Congress in Washington D.C. on May 18, Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, deliberated at length on Democracy and stressed the urgency for the "consolidation and concretisation of democracy" upon which depended the very "survival of humankind". Because the views of the Indian leader are revealing, this section from his address has been excerpted below. The sentiments may not go down well in Thimphu where "the will of the ordinary citizen" certainly does not prevail, but they may serve to encourage the millions still struggling for democracy to "become a way of life." But, should these noble sentiments really be taken at face value, or are they part of plain rhetoric? Do these same professed lofty principles guide India's foreign policy, especially where immediate neighbours are concerned and where India can exert political and economic influence? Is this a source for optimism, a well of hope, or just a classic case of political hypocrisy? We leave it to the readers to decide.

... I would like to submit to this august assembly that the Agenda for Democracy is by no means over, all over the world. The principle of the system is perhaps universally accepted now, but even this acceptance is not unqualified. In the ultimate analysis, the survival and acceptance of any system would depend crucially on its capacity to deliver the goods. This may not be obvious in countries where democracy has become a way of life and the political process has got rooted in the principle for centuries, making it normal and unquestioned. But elsewhere, the temptations to cut corners for immediate benefits and the tendency to superficialise democracy while the real wielders of power only make it a mask -- these are phenomena that should make genuine votaries of the system sit up and think.

I may be forgiven for striking this new, if discordant, note in the orchestra of prevailing opinion. I submit, Sir, that the basic and most essential Agenda of the world hereafter, perhaps through the next century, is the consolidation and concretisation of democracy. On this single plank, directly or indirectly, will depend the prospects of peace, disarmament and development -- in one word, the survival of humankind. I am not referring to the process of democracy, but to the content which should, in essence, mean that the will of the ordinary citizen, as it is and not as it is manipulated for a given occasion, prevails. I do realise that this is a tall order; yet nothing less will do, if the dangers to democracy are to be met effectively. The 21st century must prove that development is best assured when democracy is assured.

THE BHUTAN REVIEW IN NEPALI

भूटान रिभ्यू

समीक्षात्मक मासिक समीक्षा

वर्ष १ अंक ६ जून १९९४ न. ५, ६

आस्थाका बन्दी - टेकनाथ रिजाल

श्रीमती राफेलको विषयमा सुन्ने गर्नुपर्ने कुराहरूको उल्लेख गर्दै रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

भूटान सरकारले पछिल्लो वर्षहरूमा बन्दी बनाएको छ। यी बन्दीहरूको बारेमा जानकारी प्राप्त गर्नका लागि रिजालले लेखेका छन्।



'बन्दी मर्द'को देहान्त

भूटानका राजधानी अगरी बजारमा भएको एक घटनाको बारेमा रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

भूटानका राजधानी अगरी बजारमा भएको एक घटनाको बारेमा रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

कारावासको जीवन अझ कति ?

भूटानका राजधानी अगरी बजारमा भएको एक घटनाको बारेमा रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

भूटानका राजधानी अगरी बजारमा भएको एक घटनाको बारेमा रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

श्रीमती राफेलको भूटानी शरणार्थी शिविर भ्रमण

दक्षिण एसियाली विषयका सुन्ने गर्नुपर्ने कुराहरूको उल्लेख गर्दै रिजालले लेखेका छन्।



दक्षिण एसियाली विषयका सुन्ने गर्नुपर्ने कुराहरूको उल्लेख गर्दै रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

दक्षिण एसियाली विषयका सुन्ने गर्नुपर्ने कुराहरूको उल्लेख गर्दै रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

दक्षिण एसियाली विषयका सुन्ने गर्नुपर्ने कुराहरूको उल्लेख गर्दै रिजालले लेखेका छन्।

The Bhutan REVIEW

BY-LINE FOR SALE

In a remarkable case of seemingly flagrant plagiarism, the 850-word October 9, 1993 editorial of Bhutan's only newspaper, the weekly Kuensel (Vol. VIII, No. 40), appeared in full on May 26, 1994 in a leading Indian daily, The Hindu (Vol. 117, No. 124), under the by-line of one S. Ramachandran. Dated Thimphu, May 25, the story was printed in the 'News' page with a catchy, if completely misleading, headline: "Breakthrough in Bhutan, Nepal talks".

Considering that no dialogue was in progress between the two Governments at the time the copied story was filed to provide opportunity for news, least of all a "breakthrough", the headline in itself displays a remarkable bit of ingenuity. Obviously, correspondent Ramachandran also has remarkable trust in his luck, expecting his blatant larceny to go unnoticed -- Kuensel's low circulation figures, only barely crossing the 5,000 mark, perhaps helping to bolster his confidence. But most remarkably, completely and conveniently disregarding two subsequent rounds of talks between the two countries, the editors of a reputed Indian newspaper actually hoped to get away with foisting six-months-old opinions as fresh 'news'.

Imitation may indeed be the best form of flattery but Kuensel's editor, if he is honest with himself, is hardly likely to harbour illusions of grandeur over the knowledge that his weighty prose should have attracted the attention of a fellow journalist. Excellent as Kuensel editorials may be, it is simply inconceivable that this essay was found to be so profound and indelible that another correspondent decided to foolishly risk his entire reputation and career by copying it verbatim and fobbing it off as his own.

In fact, for the very reasons that Ramachandran's and The Hindu's actions have, in this instance, gone to make this a remarkable example of irresponsible and unethical journalism, it is evident that the motivating factor was, not fame and glory, but pure greed. The dated article, it is certain, was reproduced neither because the correspondent suffered a sudden bout of the writer's block requiring him to steal, nor for the reason that the Kuensel editorial was such an astonishing literary piece that claiming to have authored it was likely to elevate Ramachandran's stature as a writer or reporter. Rather, the grounds for the decision by a person having already acquired the addictive taste for Bhutanese largesse was much more mundane, such as adding a bit more to the riches and wealth already accumulated over the past couple of years, and involved no more than the negotiation of a reasonable fee for the use of his "good" name. Strategists in Thimphu have admittedly come up with an excellent, if immoral, idea. In the past, journalists who "owed" the regime helped promote government opinions in their own fashion. The results were often embarrassing for the over-fawning sentiments a-la-Brian Shaw; at other times, special nuances were missed by even the best in Thimphu's stable of "friendly" foreign reporters. At last someone in the capital seemed to have found the answer -- the surreptitious placement of unedited, uncensored and unabridged opinions of the government under the by-line of "neutral" correspondents in major papers! Having used Ramachandran on a number of occasions in the past to help propagate their point of view, apparently it was not very difficult to make him file, as his very own product, the government story as it appeared in Kuensel. In succeeding at this task, at a fairly high cost no doubt, Thimphu managed, in a most deceitful manner, to provide sanctity to its falsehood and propaganda. The people who have perfected the art of deception possibly outdid even themselves, this once.

There is no denying the fact that the Royal Government of Bhutan has consistently scored well in so far as the manipulation of the media is concerned. While dissident organizations have repeatedly expressed consternation over the unabashed "purchase" of media-persons by Thimphu, the scheming manner of the Bhutanese regime and the "spells" that it has successfully cast over select members of their own trade has appeared less often in the media. Nevertheless, over the past few years consensus has been building up among Bhutan-watchers that reports emanating from within the country are less than honest due to the attractive incentives provided by the administration to visiting journalists to wean them away from filing negative stories.

In the past, as dissidents we may have been guilty of too quickly attaching unflattering labels to all journalists accepting invitations to visit the kingdom. Sometimes unfairly, we may have condemned a journalist as being corrupt, morally and ethically if not financially, simply for writing in favour of the regime. We may have erred in our presumption in some cases, while proof has been lacking in others. But with this incident, the nexus between the beleaguered regime and avaricious individuals parading as journalists has been irrefutably exposed. It is conclusive evidence of the regime's manipulation of the external media, a truth that merits close attention from those trying to understand and help solve the current Bhutanese problem.

SOUTH AFRICA : A NEW DAWN

The whole world rejoiced when, with the demise of centuries of apartheid, for the first time all 22.7 million eligible voters of all races in South Africa were free to exercise their franchise between April 26 and 29 this year. Finally, after centuries of oppression, democracy with equal rights for all had arrived.

The historic transformation in South Africa is a triumph not of South Africans alone but a triumph of the human race as a whole. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, sweeping changes in Eastern Europe and now the end of 350 years of colonial rule and apartheid in South Africa -- the fortresses of tyranny and oppression continue to yield to the forces of freedom and democracy.

Though colonialism in the modern context had become a thing of the past, South Africa continued to be ruled with brutality under an apartheid policy. For this reason, a founder member of the United Nations, South Africa was suspended from the world body in November 1974. For years, the country remained under United Nations' economic sanctions, actions which were often debated for the adverse impact it had on the very same suppressed population the measures sought to help. Most of these sanctions were lifted in October 1993. The remaining oil and arms embargo were also lifted recently after the visit of the newly elected First Deputy President Thabo Mbeki to the United States and his address to the UN.

The new majority-rule South Africa has been received with open arms the world over. At the end of May, at the Cairo meeting of Foreign Ministers of non-aligned countries, South Africa became the 109th member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Many countries have already established diplomatic and/or trade relations and many others are queuing up.

Credit for the new democratic South Africa goes to the untiring efforts of the twin leaders of the country, the 1993 joint Nobel Peace Prize winners, Nelson Rohlhlahla Mandela President of the African National Congress (ANC) and former President F.W. De Klerk of the National Party (NP). While congratulating De Klerk, Mandela remarked, "many days, weeks and months, and for the four years that we have worked together, quarrelled, addressed sensitive problems; and at the end of our heated exchanges we were able to shake hands and to drink coffee."

Thousands of lives were lost in the transition from apartheid to democracy and majority rule. The history of the struggle of the South African people in their bid to shake off the

yoke of apartheid dates back centuries. However, the struggle took on an organized form with the launching of South African Native National Council in 1912. Eleven years later it was renamed the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC and other black apartheid groups were banned by the white regime in 1961. But the underground movement continued unabated. As a result, Nelson Mandela, born in 1918, General Secretary of the ANC was sentenced for life in 1964 for treason. He was freed after 27 years in prison, nine days after President De Klerk announced the end of apartheid on February 2, 1990.

It is with brave efforts of the then incumbent President De Klerk and the ANC leader Nelson Mandela that South Africa has achieved full democracy today within a period of four years. It required immense courage and statesmanship from both. At the end the two leaders were able to find an apt solution. An interim constitution was adopted at a multi-party talks on November 18, 1993. The talks were boycotted by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) of Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and white rightists, but that did not prevent the twin leaders from forging ahead. According to the constitution, regardless of the election results, there would be a coalition government in South Africa for the first five year term though any party polling more than two-thirds of the votes would be able to rewrite and ratify the constitution. The terms further provided that any party securing more than 5% votes would be incorporated in the formation of the new cabinet. These provisions were necessary in order to prevent an advent of apartheid of the reverse order, while at the same time preventing partition of the country. Both have been achieved. This is the greatest achievement of the two leaders and the people of South Africa.

This historic election was witnessed by about 3,000 observers from all over the world, most under the UN banner. With the problems foreseen as a result of the possible non-participation of the IFP resolved at the last minute, all South Africans exercised their democratic rights as the country went to multi-racial polls for the first time. The final tally was: ANC - 62.65%, NP - 20.39%, IFP - 10.54%, the balance going to others in a bicameral house of 490 seats (National Assembly-400 and Senate-90). Accordingly, the majority (18) of the cabinet posts went to the African National Congress, six to the National Party and three to the

Inkatha Freedom Party.

Reflecting the spirit of conciliation, Mandela expressed his relief that his Party had polled only 62.65% votes stating: "It is ironical for me to say that I am relieved that we did not get the two-thirds majority, because already tensions were building up that we were now going to write our own constitution."

Nelson Mandela was elected on May 5 and sworn in as the new President of new South Africa on May 10. Thabo Mbeki and outgoing President F.W. De Klerk were also sworn in as the First and the Second Deputy Presidents respectively on the same day. At his inaugural address, attended by a number of heads of states and governments from all over the world, Mandela said: "Never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer indignity of being the skunk of the world."

Now that the elections are over, the legislators have been elected, and the government has been formed, democracy has been ushered in. However, the value of freedom and liberty lies in sustaining it well which is, perhaps, more arduous than fighting for it. For the poor and the down-trodden it will be sufficient initially if democracy is translated into food and shelter with dignity in a peaceful environment which was denied by apartheid. The country as a whole has a great future if this can be translated into economic dynamism. All the world is watching post-election South Africa for economic partnership. For South Africa, there is a bright future ahead.

Ten days after being elected as the Second Deputy President, De Klerk visited London. He was given two standing ovations at the Royal Albert Hall by a mixed black and white audience. Deservedly, praise was lavished on De Klerk for his courageous role in ushering in democracy in South Africa. A black South African whose academic career had been ruined by the brutal apartheid regime aptly summed it up when he said, "I never thought I'd live to see South Africa achieve full democracy, and I want to congratulate you. You are a godsend to our land."

Indeed, it requires tremendous courage, determination and fortitude to relinquish power gracefully. Nelson Mandela has rightfully earned his place in history, but the world will never forget De Klerk. Dictators and absolute monarchs seeking a way out would do well to take a leaf out of the former South African President's book of statesmanship.

PORTRAIT OF A REFUGEE -- INDRAWATI RAI

"My Nepali forefathers moved to Bhutan a long time ago. Even my parents could not recall when this had happened. In my village there were only Nepali people. We used to have many friends among the Drukpas who lived in a village some thirty kilometres away. All that changed in 1988. Suddenly, the government forced us to act like the Drukpa people. When we protested, the army moved into our village. After that our lives became hell."



Indrawati Rai with her husband

Indrawati Rai used to live in a village in Sarbhang District, in the south of Bhutan. Her family cultivated rice, maize, and millet on the five acres of fertile land they owned. Every year they would harvest different kinds of fruit and nut and sell them at the market. Nowadays, Indrawati is a refugee and lives in Beldangi I Camp, Sector D4, Hut Number 287.

The huts in Sector D4 form a neat line, and the huts are almost identical with the bamboo frame covered with mud, a door and windows made out of bamboo, and a blue plastic sheet on top. "Most of the quarrels in the camp are caused by the fact that [we] live so close to each other," says Indrawati. "Women quarrel about the rubbish that ends up in the neighbour's yard, or they get angry with other people's children." Indrawati remembers the date the Bhutanese army came to her village better than her own birthday. On October 7, 1990, the army came to arrest all the men in the village. Her husband managed to escape, and Indrawati was left alone with her two children and father-in-law. "I guess

the soldiers were sent by the King of Bhutan. Two years earlier we were ordered to wear the Drukpa dress and to cut our hair. I wore the dress whenever I went outside, but refused to have my hair short."

"The people of my village wrote a petition to the King, saying that we want to follow our own traditions. Not much later the army came and moved into the local school. The soldiers used to go around the village at night, completely drunk. They entered our houses and asked where we kept our husbands and sons. They beat the people and even raped a few women in the village. It was like tyranny. We used to stay with many people in one house and stay awake all night. At that time I didn't know what had happened to my husband. I thought he might have been shot by the army. Only months later I found out he was alive and had escaped to Nepal." "On December 10, the army set our house afire. Nothing remained of our belongings. We decided to leave for Assam, India, and walked for two days. People in Assam gave us a donation, and we travelled to Nepal. My hus-

band was waiting for us at the border. Somehow he had heard that we were coming. He took us to Maidhar Camp which was a depressing place. Many people became sick because of the heat and the change of diet. One child from our village died because of diarrhoea. When we moved to this camp I felt very relieved." "I miss my village and the hard work we did in the fields. Still I think I can be of use here. I settle disputes and help women who are alone because their husband is in jail. The Bhutanese [Refugee] Women's Committee contributes to the work of LWS by organizing voluntary labour and keeping the pit latrines clean. For women it's not so hard to be a refugee, since we can join many activities in the camps. For men it is much harder. My husband used to be an operator in a cement factory in Bhutan. Now he sits inside a small hut all day. Apart from helping the children with their studies, there is nothing for him to do. I believe for men it is much more difficult to be a refugee."

Courtesy : PORTRAITS, 1993 Annual Report, The Lutheran World Service Nepal.

"IN QUOTES"

"It is the responsibility of nations to preserve the life and liberty of ALL their citizens under the law regardless of race, religion or ethnicity."

Indian Prime Minister P.V.Narasimha Rao in his address to the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress on May 18.

"We hope for a speedy and just resolution to this problem in line with international law and principles on the rights of displaced persons."

Dr. Susan Vogelgesang, United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Nepal, addressing Bhutanese refugees in Sanischare (Pathri) camp.

"Democracy works, but dictatorship does not."

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at a civic reception in Kathmandu, Nepal.

MEDIA SCAN

Human Rights and Ethnic Cleansing in Bhutan

The human rights record of Bhutan is appalling. The Royal Government tramples on the civil liberties and fundamental freedom of the citizen. Socio-political organization of Bhutan belongs to the middle ages. Politics is considered a propriety of the ruling family. Political parties and activities are strictly banned in the kingdom. Elections have never been held and adult franchise non-existent. In the closing decade of the 20th century, Bhutan is probably the only country, where the people are not allowed to choose their own dresses.... Publications of newspapers, journals and magazines other than government publications are strictly forbidden. There is not a single newspaper or magazine privately published in Bhutan. "Kuensel" -- a weekly, official bulletin published by the Department of Information and Broadcasting, is the only "newspaper" in the kingdom. The Government-owned Bhutan Broadcasting service remains in air for three hours a day and is the main organ of state propaganda. The people are strictly prohibited from watching television. There is a strict censorship of even foreign newspapers in the country. Formation of unions, organizations and associations is forbidden. There are no human rights organization, NGOs, or even the Red Cross in Bhutan. Few such organizations are functioning in exile.

In the absence of a written constitution, there are no safeguards to protect the individual against the infringement of fundamental rights and liberties. The people cannot seek justice in the courts against the atrocities of the government as the Bhutanese Judiciary serves only the interests of the ruling feudal elements. The right of the accused to be heard in defence, accepted by all civilized societies, is not available in the Bhutanese Courts....

In order to suppress the mass movement for democracy in the form of rallies and protests in September 1990, the regime resorted to unprecedented state terrorism, with arbitrary arrests, illegal detention, torture, murder, rape, intimidation, destruction of dwellings and forced evictions causing unprecedented exodus of Bhutanese people. The policy of ethnic cleansing practiced by the Royal regime and the Government crackdown on the pro-democracy forces have resulted in the displacement of 125,000 Bhutanese people as refugees in the neighbouring countries of India and Nepal.

Southern Bhutan, once bubbling with life and activity, bears a totally different look today. Villages after villages have become empty with inhabitants now taking refuge in Nepal and India. Life is not easy for those left behind, too. A racist Government bent upon punishing the entire community, frequently demands free manual labour for government and private constructions. Those refusing to supply labour are forced to leave the country. Schools have been closed, depriving education to thousands of children. Hospitals provide services only to the security and government personnel. Postal services remain suspended.

While the feudal regime of Bhutan is wrecking havoc in the lives of the Southern Bhutanese, and over a 100,000 people are languishing for years in the refugee camps, the world seems to have largely ignored this unimaginable human tragedy for so long.

SAARC LINK, Quarterly Newsletter of the South Asian People's Commission on Human Rights, January 1994.

The road for a refugee is as long as you make it.

This road can be very short if we all help. It may lead the refugee back to his homeland. It may mean the beginning of a new existence in a neighbouring country. Or it may take him thousands of miles away from his home. The United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees co-ordinates world-wide efforts to solve refugee problems, to give human rights back to refugees: work, education, freedom from persecution, legal protection. Since 1951, UNHCR has helped some 25 million refugees to begin a new life.



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

4 THE HINDU, Thursday, May 26, 1994

Breakthrough in Bhutan, Nepal talks

From S. Ramachandran

THIMPU, May 25.

The fact that the Nepal-Bhutan joint committee meeting in Kathmandu was able to finalise the first step of the process to solve the problem of 85,000 people in Eastern Nepal refugee camps is good reason for optimism. It is significant because, not only is the task a Herculean one, but the representatives of the two governments are grappling with heavy odds, according to official sources.

The talks took place in an atmosphere of deep scepticism. Long before the Bhutan delegation even arrived, the entire process was condemned as an exercise in futility. Several groups based in the Nepalese capital, which had assumed political leadership of the people in the camps, had made every attempt to convince others that Thimpu was not even serious about the problem.

Attempts were made to discredit the leader of the Bhutanese delegation, Home Minister Dago Tshering, as the hardline engineer of the problem supported by a section of the Nepalese press, which had taken up "Bhutan bashing" as a campaign. There was intense pressure on the Nepalese Government to view Bhutan's participation with suspicion. In fact, the credibility of the Nepalese officials themselves were questioned, with critics making every attempt to persuade them that they were on the losing end of an immaculate plot by the Bhutanese Government to compound the problem instead of solving it, the sources said.

The anti-Bhutan literature stemmed from the groups which were currently opposing the Bhutanese Government, supported by sympathisers who were mainly Nepal-based. And it would be a valid question, today, to ask if such a propa-

ganda camp now hamper to the proble

It was with joint committee, Mr. Sheeter, Dago Tshering, days of intense communication of people's achievement both countries, rala told the progress.

But, even a satisfaction coming to the problem, becoming inc of the problem, knowledge term solution and by those unrealistic and it would be a that, despite sides there w

Both Govern been accused lem. But this personal level problem solve plexity of the to accept that ally agreea

It had not was still suffer flood disaster, largescale detied up the G emergency si

October 9, 1993



An important process begins

The fact that the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Committee meeting in Kathmandu was able to finalise the first step of the process to solve the problem which has resulted in about 85,000 people living in the Eastern Nepal refugee camps is good reason for optimism. Such an achievement is significant because, not only is the task a Herculean one, but because the representatives of the two governments are grappling with heavy odds both within and outside the problem itself.

The Kathmandu talks took place in an atmosphere of deep scepticism. Long before the Bhutanese delegation even arrived, the entire process was condemned as an exercise in futility. Several groups based in the Nepalese capital, which have assumed political leadership of the people in the camps, had made every attempt to convince the Nepalese population and the international community that Thimpu was not even serious about the problem. Attempts were made to discredit the leader of the Bhutanese delegation, Home Minister Lyonpo Dago Tshering, as the hard line engineer of the problem.

Supported by a section of the Nepalese press which has taken up "Bhutan bashing" as a campaign, there was intense pressure on the Nepalese government to view Bhutan's participation with suspicion. In fact, the credibility of the Nepalese officials themselves were questioned, with critics making every attempt to persuade them that they were on the losing end of an immaculate plot by the Bhutanese government to compound the problem instead of solving it.

The anti-Bhutan literature stems from the groups which are currently opposing the Bhutanese government, supported by sympathisers who are mainly Nepal-based. And it would be a valid question, today, to ask if such a propaganda campaign had been so successful that it now

The HINDU, a major Indian daily carried a startling item, "Breakthrough in Bhutan, Nepal talks", in its NEWS page on May 26, 1994, under the by-line of S. Ramachandran. For the editors it may indeed have been news, but the piece was actually over six months old. Except for the riveting new headline and the addition of references to alleged sources sprinkled in between, the story is a word for word copy of the editorial "An important process begins" in the October 9, 1993 issue of Kuensel, Bhutan's only national newspaper published weekly. Obviously, for a price, even a reputed daily will magically transform dated, stale and biased views into "news". [See Editorial: BY-LINE FOR SALE].

Ramchandran, of course, can hardly be blamed for succumbing to temptation. The largesse and lavish hospitality bestowed on

members of the media by the Royal Government of Bhutan is renowned. This knowledge, in fact, gave birth to a special scam -- unscrupulous editors and journalists hounded the regime with negative coverage until agents of the Royal Government come knocking at their doors with cash compensation, gifts and invitations for wining and dining with Thimphu's elite and Bhutanese royalty. Until last year, Royal Ministers and Ambassadors, no less, with money in their pockets were known to be poking around small, dingy printing presses in West Bengal and Nepal, trying to purchase reporters, editors and proprietors. Only the other day, an acquisition from such a foray in the past, a "prominent" Kathmandu journalist, the editor of a vernacular weekly, was reportedly one such royal guest in Bhutan!

LOOKING BACK AT THE VIENNA CONFERENCE

Nearly half a century after the Universal Declaration, the issue of Human Rights once again came on top of the agenda at many important international fora culminating in the convening of the second World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993. The preparatory process and the Conference rightly received due international media coverage. In turn, there was some impact on governments across the globe which had till then paid scant regard to basic human rights norms.

The number of individuals who congregated at the Vienna Conference was impressive; official representatives from 171 countries and over 2700 individuals representing nearly 1300 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were assembled. However, it clearly lacked the high level representation which had marked the Rio Earth Summit a year earlier. Also, as against two years of extensive preparation for the Conference on Environment, the preparatory process for the meet on Human Rights was minimal. At one stage, it was even feared that the Conference was heading towards getting bogged down to debating the very principles already enshrined in the Universal Declaration. Nevertheless, with a great deal of behind-the-scenes maneuvering by various groups, a consensus was finally hammered out in the form of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

The 3-part Declaration reiterated international commitment to the purpose and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and stressed on the universality and indivisibility of human rights. Besides an impressive list of other commitments, the document also called on states and organizations to cooperate in creating conditions favourable for full and effective enjoyment of human rights. A year has passed since the big event in the Austrian capital. It may be worthwhile to look at the progress, if any, made so far.

At the outset, the document rightly recommends increased coordination in support of human rights and fundamental freedoms within the United Nations itself. However, it is yet to be seen whether any international agency will risk the ire of autocratic/dictato-

rial regimes who have blatantly violated even the most basic of human rights. Besides urging for more resources for Human Rights activities and the need to strengthen the Centre for Human Rights, the Conference called for special measures to assist in the strengthening and building of institutions relating to human rights, strengthening of a pluralistic society and the protection of groups which have been rendered vulnerable.

There is no dearth of international bills for the promotion and safeguarding the rights of individuals. What is more important are programmes for action and implementation of these commitments. Since the universality and interdependence of all human rights have been stressed, one set of rights should not be curtailed with an excuse to promote others.

Development cooperation and assistance, however, continues to be highly selective. Political and/or economic interests continue to influence major decisions. Governments are allowed, or in some cases even supported, to strengthen undemocratic institutions which are detrimental to the well being of the people in the long term. In turn, recipient countries have used this continued cooperation as an approval by donor countries for their repressive policies. For instance, reporting to the National Assembly of Bhutan in July 1993 the Bhutanese Foreign Minister boasted thus, "human rights was considered an important issue by the rich and powerful countries of the world... international assistance to Bhutan continued to flow in undiminished because Bhutan had a good record of proper aid utilization. In fact, some new donors had also started extending aid to Bhutan."

One of the most controversial issues at the Conference was the setting up of the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights for the protection and promotion of human rights. Since no consensus was reached on this issue, it was referred to the fortieth session of the United Nations General Assembly. Though it is too early to say how effectively the post will serve its purpose, the General Assembly established this position early this year appointing former diplomat Jose Ayala-Lleso of Ecuador as the first United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

SOLUTION TO REFUGEE PROBLEM ONLY WITH INDIAN INTERVENTION : SHAHA

Translated from the Hindi daily JANSATTA, 30 April 1994, New Delhi.

New Delhi, 29 April -- Nepal's former Foreign Minister and President of the Human Rights Commission (sic) Rishikesh Shaha believes that the Indian Government will have to intervene to solve Nepal's problem of refugees with Bhutan. Without this, the problem cannot be resolved. He takes strong exception to Nepalese refugees being called criminals.

According to him, the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal are talking with each other to resolve the problem. However, the issues are such that it is evident that the Government of India will have to intervene in the end. What these issues are, he did not elaborate.

"When the time comes, it will become clear," he said. But, perhaps, the Bhutanese Government does not think along these lines. Asked to comment on Mr. Shaha's observations, Bhutan's Delhi based Counsellor Sonam T. Ragbe (sic) said that the problem was between Bhutan and Nepal. There is no need for third country intervention. Just as the Kashmir problem should be resolved through dialogue between India and Pakistan, the problem of displaced Nepalese should be similarly resolved through dialogue between the two countries. India had taken the Kashmir problem to the United Nations and the matter got entangled. By bringing in the United Nations into the problem of displaced Nepalese, the Government of Nepal has also complicated matters. "The Nepalese Government should keep an eye on history, too," Ragbe said.

As far as India is concerned, the Government has already refused to intervene in the matter. According to sources in the External Affairs Ministry, Nepal had requested India to intervene. But this was refused. They then went to the United Nations. The United Nations proposed a three member committee to study the problem. There were names of a representatives each from India, Nepal and Bhutan. From India, the United Nations nominated former Chief Justice P.N. Bhagawati. The Government, however, rejected this proposal. According to sources,

India's policy is not to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. In the case of neighbouring countries, too, India adheres to this same policy. [Bangladesh, former East Pakistan, Nepal, formerly independent kingdom Sikkim, Sri Lanka and the Maldives will collectively vouch for this professed noble Indian policy! -- Ed] Approximately 6,000 (sic) Nepalese are living in camps managed by the United Nations Human Rights Commission (sic) in Jhapa in Biratnagar district (sic). The Bhutanese Government says that among these there are very few southern Bhutanese (those who had come from Nepal and settled down and obtained Bhutanese citizenship) who had left Bhutan. To exaggerate the extent of the problem in the international arena, anti-national forces which have political support in Nepal have kept people from Nepal itself in the camps. Talks between the two countries to resolve the problem are going on. In the meeting this very month between 4-8 April, the Ministerial Joint Committee established for this purpose agreed that people living in the camps will be identified, and if differences arise officials will together find ways to reach agreement. According to Rishikesh Shaha it will be difficult to come to such an agreement. The strongest objection of the President of the Human Rights Commission was that these people had been labelled as criminals and evicted.

According to him, they are not criminals but (ethnic) Nepalese. If you consider them criminals, then the Indian Government will have to contemplate about all the people who make up its Gorkha regiments. Sikkim's Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari states time and again that about one crore (10 million) Nepalese live in India. If those demanding their rights in Bhutan are called criminals, will those Nepalese living in India also be put in the same category? According to him, refugees coming from there say that they are citizens of that country, and the King of Bhutan is not ready to give them equal citizenship and political rights. But, according to Regbo (sic), large numbers of Nepalese living illegally in Bhutan have become a threat to the country's culture and economy, and it has become necessary to expel them. But selfish elements among them made use of Nepalese with Bhutanese citizenship to fulfill their ambitions. As a result, the problem escalated.

[Rishikesh Shaha is the President of Human Rights Organization of Nepal (HURON).

Sonam T. Ragbe is with the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in New Delhi. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides for over 86,000 Bhutanese refugees in 8 camps (at 5 locations) in Jhapa and Morang districts in southeastern Nepal.]

REFUGEE CAMP INFORMATION

| Location | District | Refugees | Students |
|-------------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
| Timai | Jhapa | 8,252 | 3,365 |
| Goldhap | Jhapa | 7,814 | 2,990 |
| Beldangi I | Jhapa | 14,684 | 5,054 |
| Beldangi II | Jhapa | 18,828 | 6,690 |
| Beldangi II Ext. | Jhapa | 9,532 | 3,575 |
| Sanishare(Pathri) | Morang | 16,725 | 5,250 |
| Khudunabari(N) | Jhapa | 6,993 | 3,206 |
| Khudunabari(S) | Jhapa | 3,379 | |
| Total | | 86,207 | 30,130 |

Cumulative births: 3,839
Cumulative deaths: 2,537

The above figures are as of May 31, 1994.