

Bhutanese Refugees

The Tragic Tale of the Displacement



**(Report by a fact-finding team on the
conditions of Bhutanese refugees jointly
sponsored by *INSAF* and *GRINSO-NEPAL*)**

Bhutan Solidarity

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The *Bhutan Solidarity* was founded in a convention held in New Delhi on 27th September 1997 over the issue of Bhutanese refugees, with Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer as its patron and Shri Anand Swaroop Verma as the Convenor. Shri Verma shouldered this responsibility till August 2006, when he handed it over to the young peasant leader and the Member of Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly – Dr. Sunilam. The aim of the organization is to highlight the ongoing democratic struggles of the Bhutanese people against the despotism of the monarchy and their brutal repression by the Government forces; to create a public opinion in favor of democratic forces facing the ire of the king; to provide a platform for raising the voice against the human rights violations in Bhutan; and to work towards the resolution of the issue of Bhutanese refugees.

The September 1991 foundation convention of the *Bhutan Solidarity* was convened by *Teesari Duniya Adhyayan Kendra* and was attended by the delegates from Bhutan and many noted jurists, intellectuals, human rights activists and the representatives of the social organizations from India. Prior to the convention, in order to acquaint the people with and to draw their attention to the conditions in the Bhutan, *Teesari Duniya Adhyayan Kendra* published and circulated a booklet – '**Violations of Human Rights in Bhutan**'. Another booklet – '**Agony of Bhutan**' – was published after the convention. This booklet containing the historic speech of Justice Krishna Iyer and the views of Justice Ajit Singh Bains, noted Nepalese Human Rights activist – late Shri Prakash Kafle and others, was well received in the activist circles. In 1992, on the initiative of the *Bhutan Solidarity*, a team of the jurists from the SAARC countries was sent to Bhutan and in 1995 it organized a study trip by a team of journalists to Bhutanese refugee camps in Jhapa. The report of the team published with the title, '**Tyranny In Bhutan**' published in Hindi and English was very well received and debated in India and abroad. *Bhutan Solidarity* waged a protracted struggle for the release of Bhutanese Human Rights leader, Tek Nath Rizal. In 1997 when another Bhutanese leader, Rong Thong Kunle Dorji was arrested in India, it filed a Habeas Corpus petition against his arrest and launched a movement for his release. In collaboration with GRINSO-Nepal, it organized a **South Asian Conference on Bhutan**, which was attended by the delegates from the SAARC countries.

Bhutan Solidarity seeks to create a public opinion among the Indian Government and the Indian people in order to pressurize the Indian Government for a speedy resolution. As India and Bhutan have special ties under the *Treaty*, without interfering into the internal affairs, it

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Preface

The issue of the Bhutanese refugees is over 16 years old. During these years, the governments of Nepal and Bhutan have held 15 rounds of talks to no avail for over one hundred thousand Bhutanese living into a forced exile on the Himalayan foothills. These people have been banished from their homeland by the autocratic royal government for their "offence" of demanding minimum democratic and human rights. Their plight could be known to the world at large only after the publication of a report by the fact-finding team of *Bhutan Solidarity*. The team consisting of noted journalists and activists visited the refugee camps, held extensive interviews with the refugees and their leaders: the representatives of the organizations supporting their cause; and the concerned representatives of the Government. The report was well received in India and abroad and the people came to know about the agony of over one hundred thousand human beings from the little Himalayan kingdom, Bhutan.

The democratic rights movement took off in Bhutan at a time when the Nepalese peoples' movement for democracy was on the verge of victory and the abolition of the existing retrogressive Panchayati system and the establishment of multi-party system had become certainties. During these 16 years, the movement in Nepal has traveled a long distance and now the end of the monarchy and the establishments of a republic have become certainties. 90% of the refugees are Bhutanese citizens with Nepalese origin (Lhotsompas) and most of them live in the refugee camps situated in two districts of Nepal – Jhapa and Morang. The influence of the events of Nepal on these people is but natural.

A meeting of the Working Committee of *Bhutan Solidarity* held in June 2006 in New Delhi decided that with the help of friends in India and Nepal, a team should be sent to the refugee camps for studying the fresh developments. Accordingly, two organizations – INSAF from India and GRINSO (Group for International Solidarity) from Nepal – were contacted and a team constituted.

The team constituted under the leadership of Dr. Sunilam, the new Convenor of the *Bhutan Solidarity*, consisted of the outgoing Convenor, Anand Swaroop Verma, Vinod Agnihotri, Virendra Sengor (journalists), Utkarsh Sinha (social Activist) and Pramod Kaphley (GRINSO). The team met the noted Human Rights leader of Nepal, Tek Nath Rizal in Kathmandu before visiting the refugee camps in the last week of August. Shri Rizal was interned for 11 years and tortured by the King. Apart from meeting Rizal, the team members also talked to the leaders of various social organizations there.

After the study trip to the refugee camps, the team held Press Conferences at Jhapa, Kathmandu and Delhi and acquainted people with the problems of the refugees.

This report contains the major findings of the study and is aimed at seeking popular attention to this humane problem needing urgent attention.

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The Refugees can endure it No More

The brutal and inhuman treatment of its citizens by the monarch of Bhutan is unprecedented. More than one hundred thousand Bhutanese citizens are languishing in the refugee camps for over sixteen years, crying for help from, and trying to penetrate the deaf ears of the governments of India and Nepal and the international agencies, to no avail as yet. The repression of democratic forces by a despotic monarchy is not as surprising as the India's governmental indifference towards it, notwithstanding its claim of being the biggest democracy of the world. The imperialist forces of the West and US are working on the plans to transport these refugees, like commodities to their respective countries. It is high time that India should break its "neutrality" under the excuse of its being a bilateral issue between Nepal and Bhutan and act positively to resolve this issue and pave the way of home-returning of these helpless humans. Following are the excerpts of the study report by the team that visited the refugee camps

The atmosphere of the refugee camps in Nepal inhabited by displaced Bhutanese citizens has gone through qualitative changes. In 1995, when a group of journalists visited these camps, the anger of more than one and a half lakhs of the refugees was directed against the King of Bhutan and his lackey officials, whose repression had forced them to live in the refugee camps in Jhapa district in east Nepal, hundreds of miles away from their home and land. Ten years ago they were quite hopeful about the end of their miseries in few months or years. The displaced had enormous faith in the intentions of the Indian and Nepalese governments. They had hoped that these governments would exercise their influence in pressurizing the Bhutanese royal administration to allow their return to their homes. It should be noted that most of the refugees are Hindus of the Nepalese origin. But their religious and cultural identity separate from the ruling clan, which is one of the major reasons for their misery, did not come to their rescue. In the last ten years there have been 16 rounds of fruitless negotiations between Nepal and Bhutan and India has not only maintained "neutrality" but also is not ready to allow them passage through its territory. A portion of West Bengal separates the borders of Bhutan and Nepal. Once, when they tried to cross the border and go back home in huge groups, Indian Police and the Security Forces stopped them at the bridge of Mechi River that divides India and Nepal, lathicharged and chased them away into Nepal. In the past 10 years of wretched, nomadic existence, their way of thinking has changed. The then five years old ones have grown into young men and women of 15 years. Their experiences of unfortunate existence have expedited their maturity. Their fists are tightening. They want no more charity but their right to go back home. They look serious about their determination. Their endurance is giving away. They – particularly the youth – are fed up with miserable refugee existence dependent on donations and charities. Instead of languishing in the

refugee camps they would prefer a dignified death – martyrdom – fighting for their right to homeland. But the biggest hurdle is India. Earlier they looked up at India with lots of hope but now for them, Indian Government is equally big villain as the Bhutan king, if not bigger. In retrospection, they find that their peaceful appeals and struggles have not been able to change their miserable and humiliating, dependent existence. They have received only batons of Bhutanese and Indian Security Forces, whenever they peacefully attempted to cross the borders. During the same ten years, Maoists of Nepal, who chose the path of armed struggle to end the despotism of Nepalese king, are not far from seizing the royal palace. The difference in the consequences of the armed and peaceful struggles is making them restless. They are debating the change in the strategy of the struggle – from peaceful to armed. This feeling and thinking pervades all the camps in Jhapa district being run under the auspices of the United Nations. Nearly 40% of the refugees consist of those young men and women who have been born and/or brought up in these camps during the last 15 years. And hence they do not have any traditional reverence towards royalty, which was a common thing, in the Himalayan countries of Nepal and Bhutan till a decade ago.

There are seven big refugee camps in Morang and Jhapa district of Nepal adjacent to India's West Bengal since 1991-92. These camps are inhabited by over 125 thousands of people. Apart from this, there are around 30-40 thousand Bhutanese refugees, who are living at different parts in the Indo-Nepal border areas. About 40% of them are in the age group 16-26, who are getting restless and impatient with the on-going conditions. Elders have neither strength nor logic to dissuade them. They also have lost the faith in God's providence and fate's mercy. This youth is bewildered with the apathetic attitude of India, "the

biggest democracy" of the world. Human rights leader Teknath Rizal spent 10 long years in the Bhutanese jails and is now living the exiled life. According to him, "We always looked at India as our protector. In 1962, at the time of war with China, when Nehru urged the representatives of south Bhutanese citizen of Nepalese origin to stand only one liter of Kerosene in a month that they use to have some light in their huts only for very limited hours. Darkness of their huts has crept into their lives. The school going children have to finish their home works before sun set. The inferior quality of rice given to them is not fit even for feeding the animals. Quota of rice per head for 14 days is little over 5 Kg one fourth of which is trash consisting of stone particles. For cooking, a family of 6 members gets 25 Kg of coal, 30 Kg for a family of 10 and 35 Kg for bigger families. The coal is of so inferior quality that it generates more smoke and less fire. Most of the refugees suffer from diseases caused by the excess smoke. It takes so long to burn that most of the children leave for school without having the breakfast. The explanation of the executives of aid agencies is that the budget of the aid has not increased in the same proportion as the increase in the population. Another reason they cite is that the camps were established temporarily with the expectation that the problem would be resolved in a couple of years but that did not happen and the camp life is prolonging indefinitely.

Manoj Raii, Secretary of the Khudnabari camp, is worried about the delay in resolution of the problem, which

is causing widely spreading thought of armed struggle among the youth of the camps, on the pattern of Nepalese Maoists, particularly after the unprecedented success in their anti-monarchy campaign. Though there are schools for the children of the camps but by the time they reach high school stage they start getting dismayed with their pathetic existence and start articulating their rebellious instincts. The young men and women are getting impatient and angry. An intensive participatory interaction with them revealed that though they don't want to be termed as terrorists by India, US or any other country, yet they don't see any other way out but to take up arms. It is well known that the US had declared CPN (Maoist) as a terrorist organization much before anyone else. They are quite enthused and thrilled with the victory of the CPN (Maoist) against the wishes, and despite all the imperialist tricks and the efforts of the US. Due to insufficient supply and truncated aid, the refugees have to go out for the wage work that brings them in conflict with local people at times. The refugees being in a helpless state agree to work for fewer wages that adversely affects the employment of local workers. K. Bhandari's subtle remark, "our only request to the Government of India is that it should just allow us passage through its territory" reflects the general sentiment of the refugees about Indian attitude to the issue. "Whenever we try to go back our homeland, Indian Forces chase us back into Nepal from West Bengal border". Yam Sharma, a young boy from the camp told us, "The young people are ready to take up arms, though they do not know



A refugee camp in Jhapa

Kuldip Nayar's opinion:

I can not comprehend why is Indian Government not exerting pressure on the Government of Bhutan to take back its banished citizens. Most of the exiled were born in Bhutan. They are Bhutanese citizens... the only offense they committed is that they supported the ongoing democratic movements. Bhutan government banished them from the country on the false "Illegal Economic immigration" principle but a fact finding visit by a team of journalists in 1995 confirmed the news of their repression.... Government of India does not even want to raise this matter with the king of Bhutan fearing his annoyance. Presently they are friends. As long as India government does not object to the cynicism of Bhutanese royalty, the king would have no complaints against India. But if India takes any such step which not in accordance with the royal liking, Bhutan may make a tilt towards China. This is India's biggest apprehension.

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against whom? But they are getting more-and-more convinced that without the thunders of guns their voices shall remain unheard". Many of the young people brought up and born in the camps and have never seen Bhutan but know about their homeland through the stories, reminiscences and fables told by the elders. By hearing about the stories of happy and dignified life back home, they have developed a strong desire to see their homeland and settle there. They also lament about their treatment as refugees and inferior humans despite their Nepalese origin. The wide spread feeling among these young men and women is that they are made to suffer for no offence. They were not part of protests against the king in 1990 as they were not yet born or were little children. Indifference to their miseries of world at large also disturbs and pains them.

Not only the youth is getting impatient with the stalemate but also even the endurance of the elders is cracking. They are quite nostalgic in memories of their homeland in Bhutan – their farms, their orchards, their forest and their rivers. Now they feel that they have only few years of the life and they don't want to die in an alien land. They too are getting extremely restless for returning to their homes and want to do that at any cost, even at the cost of their lives. Many of them support the youth thinking on the strategies of the armed struggle. According to an elderly member of the camp, Dal Bahadur Bhattarai, "India keeps eulogizing the peace-ful and democratic movements but it has turned the deaf ear to the peaceful voices of Bhutanese refugees for the past 16 years. Not only the Indian Government is maintaining a dubious indifference to our agonizing miseries caused by the whimsical despotism of Bhutan's monarchy but also is standing on the side of the perpetrator. So our anger is no more directed only against the king of Bhutan but also against the Government of India. Nevertheless, we have great faith in the concerns and the good will of India's freedom-loving public at large and hope that they would seriously take up the issue and pressurize the government

to act in the direction of resolving it. If India can take a tuff stand the issue of Bhutanese refugees' right to return to their homeland, would be resolved within a month. The time is running short and it is high time that the Government of India changes its attitude and acts positively, otherwise the cracking endurance of the refugees might prove to be pain in its neck. It is not a threat but warning. Therefore the issue needs urgent attention and solution".

We met Kapila in a refugee camp. At the age of ten she was forced to leave Bhutan with her parents in 1990. 16 years of human life in the wretched camps have eaten on her endurance. She is completely fed up and does not want to continue with her humiliating existence anymore. Instead of languishing in the camps she would prefer to die fighting for her rights. Her anger in her verbal reactions could be read on her face that had turned red and tears rolled down over it as if trying to calm the fire within. Kaushalya Bhandari, living in the camp for the last 14 years, also echoed Kapila's sentiments. Kaushalya is associated with the Bhutanese Refugees' Women's Forum. She is unable to comprehend the apprehensions of the Indian Government and wonders why India is unwilling to provide us just passage, she pleads, "We don't want any other help from India except the passage through its territory, we shall fight rest of our battle ourselves."

Beldangi camp is bigger than the Khudnabari camp. Here we interacted with thousands of the refugees of this camp from dawn to dusk and even after the sunset in the flickering lights of the kerosene lamps. Gathered in a ground, refugees unhesitantly and clearly expressed their feelings and views. They complained that many people and groups from India, Nepal and elsewhere in the world, show sympathies, give assurances and go back. But things remain as they were and are. The Secretary of the camp, Hari Bangale is convinced that there could be no end to their miseries without the helping hand of India. "We have no hopes from the progenitor of our woes – the Bhutanese monarchy. Our only hope is the goodwill of the Indian

people and the Government.” Keshu is an Intermediate student. He tells, “We know that we can not wage an armed war with India, but what is the other way out? But we also know that Indian government does not pay attention or heed to peoples’ demand as long as they raise it peacefully, but pay attention to the demands raised violently. So if some of us take up arms and raise our voices with the thunder of guns, may be the Government of India would listen to our voices of a humanitarian and just plea”.

In India, the issue of Bhutanese refugees is generally treated as a bilateral issue between Nepal and Bhutan that by implication justifies the “neutrality” of Indian State. The Bhutanese refugees reject this perception and consider it as a tripartite issue. In support of the tripartite argument, the General secretary of the Druk National Congress, Rin Zin Dorji said that Bhutan borders India and not Nepal. Moreover, the refugees first came to India and were subsequently sent to Nepal with active collaboration of Indian Security Forces. So, according to him, India can not wash its hands by declaring it a bilateral issue. It must perform its role of not only a third party, but also a dominant one. India must take a clear and just stand, without that there is no solution in sight. Indra Binasim sounds more restless, “we all are Bhutanese and if we are not sent back to our homelands, there may be revolutionary upsurge”. M.P. Kafle argues the need of India’s intervention not on humanitarian but also on political grounds. “If we take up arms, a Palestine like situation shall be created in South Asia”.

The President of Bhutan Peoples Party, Balram Paudel lays the blame for their problem getting worst from bad at the doors of the apathy of the powers that be – particularly India. According to him, “in the beginning

we were quite hopeful that king would bow down to international pressure, but that pressure did not build up. Any further delay would aggravate the intensity of volcanic discontent and distress lying underneath the apparent calm. The young men and women are no more prepared to heed our advice”. Paudel claims that resentment against the royal rule but discontent is gaining ground even within the country – not only among the South Bhutanese of Nepalese origin but also among the Sarchop and other communities of the north also. Discontent is brewing even among the Ngalong community to which belongs the king. Sarchops of the east Bhutan are angry over refusal to recognize the reincarnation of their religious head, the Lama, by the king. According to Rin Zin around 25 thousand members of Sarchop community have fled Bhutan and are living in Arunachal Pradesh in India.

Teknath Rizal is most widely accepted and respected leader of Bhutanese refugees. He was released from 10 years of tortuous imprisonment in Bhutanese jail consequent to the intervention by Amnesty International, UN Human Rights Commission and other international Agencies. For a long time Rizal occupied important positions in the Bhutan’s royal administration and even had been advisor to the king. He had been the elected member of the Bhutanese legislative assembly. He also had good relations with the governmental establishment in New Delhi. In 1989-90, when the royal government unleashed the waves of repression and banishment against the South Bhutanese people, Rizal opposed it that led to his arrest and imprisonment. In the jail, according to him, he was subjected to various kinds of torture including forcing to eat from a pot like animals after tying his hands and the feet. He is living in exile in Nepal since his release. He has also been to New Delhi for the treatment.

Issue of Refugees is a matter of Serious Concern – Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer

I don’t think that there is any need of going into details of Human Rights violations, particularly in the South Bhutan. I have learnt from reliable sources about the way people have been forcibly evicted from their houses and banished from the country and they were subjected to various kinds of injustices. Amnesty International has also criticized the human rights violations in Bhutan. There have been many rounds of talks between Nepal and Bhutan without any conclusion as yet. Human aspect of the issue remains the subject of concern and anxiety for the people inside and outside Bhutan. Today there is urgent need of creating conducive conditions for the restoration of basic human rights and resettlement of the displaced in Bhutan. Pushing people in the realm of distress amounts to the giving air to terrorist activities, which is not beneficial for everybody.

As an individual concerned with the human rights, a friend of the Bhutanese people, a well-wisher of your country, and as the President of the “International Center for Humanitarian Laws and research” I appeal to your majesty to seriously consider the issue of democracy in Bhutan, use the influences of people active on the issue inside and outside the country so that the existing bitterness could be ended so that a common man equipped with democratic rights can peacefully live in his country as a Bhutanese citizen.

(From the letter to Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuk written on 19 December 1995)

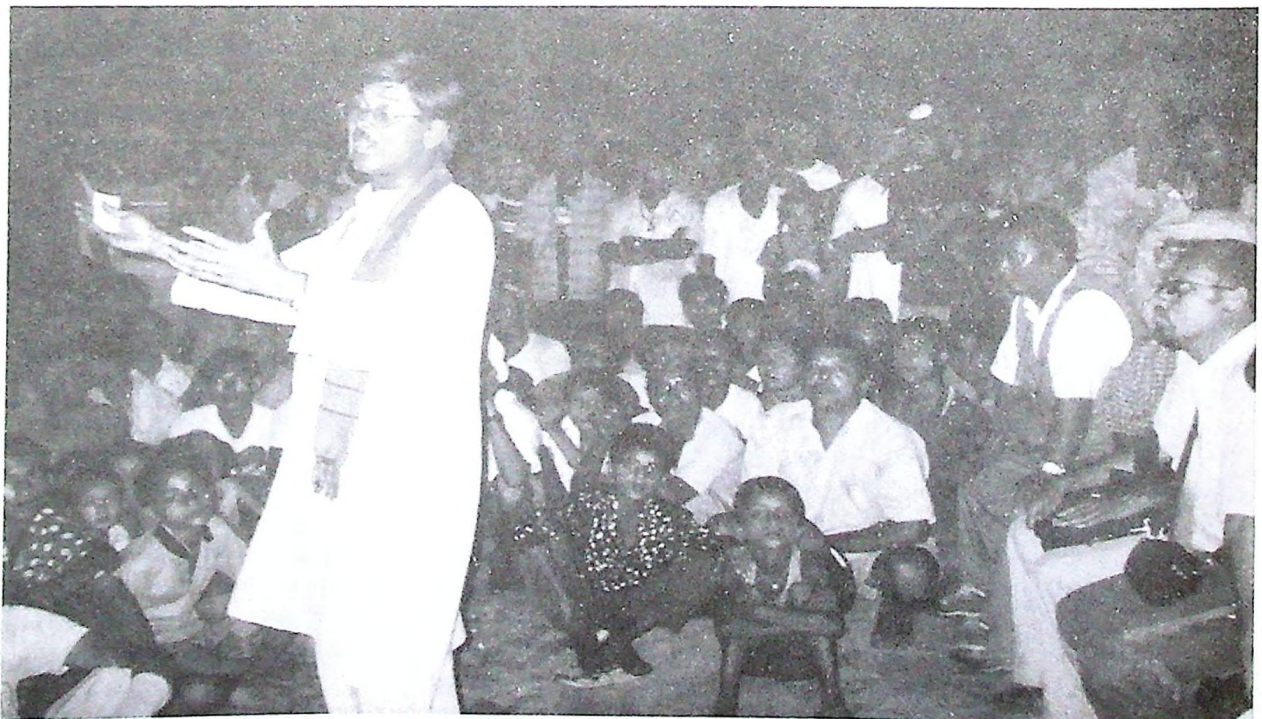
Rizal told us about the plans of various world powers at the instance of the US to divide the refugees in groups and settle them in US, Canada and other countries instead of sending them to their homes in Bhutan. Rizal considers this settlement plan as a conspiracy against the refugees and also against the Bhutanese people in general. According to him, "in Bhutan the people of Nepalese origin— 250-300 thousands — constitute 45% of the total Bhutanese population of approximately 600 thousands. Out of 250-300 thousands Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin, around 150 thousand are displaced and living in exile. If these people are settled abroad, then remaining Bhutanese of Nepalese origin shall also be ousted gradually and the whole cultural ambience of the South Bhutan shall be fundamentally transformed. And the next victims shall be Sharchop and other communities. So we reject the idea of being settled in other countries at its very outset itself". The plan is being outrightly and strongly opposed in various camps also. Indra Binsima of the Beldangi camp outrageously reacts to the proposed plan and says, "We are Bhutanese and were banished from Bhutan. And we must be sent back there only. If we are settled elsewhere, remaining Bhutanese shall also meet the same fate." As their struggle is eventually for the human rights, so Teknath Rizal and other representatives of refugees want that they be allowed to live and peacefully create public opinion in India on the issue of the Bhutanese refugees in same way as was done with the Nepalese pro-Democracy leaders.

Rizal told that whenever he went to Delhi, was always unnecessarily harassed by the Indian intelligence agencies and consequently he came back to Nepal. But Rizal feels that there is no other way out. All the roads to the solution of their problem lead to New Delhi. Jasoda Budathoki, President of the Women's Organization of Bhutan, which is conducting awareness campaign for rights, tells that women are the worst victims of the royal repression and even now they are the worst sufferers. She appeals to the Indian women and Women's Organization for supporting their cause by way of building pressure on the Government of India to recognize the gravity of the situation and act favorably.

In our 200 Km long journey along the Bhutan border from Jhapa through the areas of Siliguri and Darjeeling district to at many places we found Bhutanese refugees working as wage laborers. There is just one gate dividing the Jaygaon town of West Bengal and Phuntsoling town of Bhutan. This gate witnesses everyday the passage of hundreds of residents of South Bhutan and West Bengal to and from either side. Interaction with such people vindicated the opinion of the leaders at refugee camps regarding growing discontentment with and resistance against the despotic monarchy.

The floating of the proposal of a constitutional monarchy and a new constitution by the king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, shows the desperation and fear. Fear of the volcanic eruption of the popular discontentment. And the events in Nepal must have intensified his fears.

(Continued on Page16)



Dr Sunilam addressing refugees in Beldangi

Bhutanese Refugees and the American Plan

by Anand Swaroop Verma

On October 3, 2006, in a Convention in Geneva organized on issue of the Refugees, Deputy Foreign Secretary Ellen Sauerbrey declared that America would rehabilitate in its country a major chunk of Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal. She told the journalists in convention that in the next 3-4 years the Washington plans to settle around 50-60 thousands Bhutanese refugees in various parts of the US. She also told that Australia and the Canada too are showing their readiness to do the same. Bhutanese refugees have outrightly rejected the American "generosity" and have reiterated their demand of right to their homeland. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has welcomed the US offer that has caused considerable resentment among the Bhutanese refugees. The spokesperson for UNHCR, Jennifer Pagonis has also welcomed the willingness of Australia and Canada for taking some of the refugees.

Refugees are adamantly opposed to any such proposal. They believe that these countries could have easily pressurized the Bhutan Government to amicably resolve the problem instead of showing the hypocritical generosity to settle them in their lands in such a large number. They apprehend, and quite rightly, a conspiracy in such proposals not only to destroy their cultural identity but also to revive the slavery of feudal era. Once again the silence of the India is quite bewildering for these hapless people. It is true that few such refugees who have never seen Bhutan or they were too small at the time of their displacement that Bhutan is not part of their memory but by and large the wider community is opposed to it.

Teknath Rizal, the most popular leader amongst the refugees, is firmly opposed to the American proposal, which according to him is a new style of the American conspiracy against the oppressed of the world. He asserted in no uncertain terms that they would not accept this proposal of slavery at any cost.

These Bhutanese people living, as refugees in these camps needs a healing touch on their 16 year old wounds of misery and humiliation. Just outside the gates of the "biggest democracy of the world" more than 100 thousand people are suffering for committing the "offense" of demanding democracy. Even the political parties including the Left ones have maintained conspicuous silence on the issue.

To highlight the plight of the refugees, 'Bhutan Solidarity' organized a seminar in 1996 in New Delhi and launched many programs of action to demand the release of their leader Rong Thong Kinley Dorji locked in Tihar Jail of Delhi. George Fernandes then an opposition leader participated in these programs with all the pomp and show.

And when Parliament was in session to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Independence on 15th August 1997, he along with his friend Nitish Kumar, in a unique expression of solidarity with the Bhutanese refugees, sat on dharna outside the Tihar jail for the whole night. But his acts of the solidarity were merely rhetoric and the issue of the Bhutanese refugees stopped bothering him soon after becoming a minister and the convenor of the ruling alliance, NDA. Had he been serious about the issue, he could well have used his position in the NDA government to use diplomatic channels and pressurized the Bhutan Government for a fair and just solution. He could have reminded the Bhutanese royal government and his own that in 1990 when the Bhutanese citizens were being haunted and driven out of the country by the Bhutanese Royal Army for their "offence" of demanding democracy, they came to India, as Bhutan borders India and not the Nepal. From the West Bengal in India, Indian security forces forcibly transported them into Nepal. As over 90% of the refugees are of Nepalese origin known as Lhotsompa in Bhutan. Nepalese government allowed them in its territory on humanitarian grounds.

The UNHCR gave them refugee status and stepped in to organize refugee camps for them. Ever since they are living there – since the last 16 years.

The last 15 years have witnessed 15 rounds of talks on the issue between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan without any result. The Nepalese government and the refugee leaders were already apprehensive of the talks as Indian territory separates the borders of Nepal and Bhutan and the Bhutanese king enjoys full support of the Indian Government. That is why they emphasize the need of a tripartite summit. But India has been continually shunning off its responsibilities with the untenable argument that it is a bilateral issue and that it should be resolved through negotiations between Bhutan and Nepal.

In 1995, a team of journalists under the leadership of the Bhutan Solidarity visited these camps and published in English and Hindi a detailed report 'Bhutan: The tale of Repression', the first detailed report on the life and the conditions of Bhutanese refugees. The report was well-received world over and generated considerable debate on the issue. After 11 years another Bhutan Solidarity team under the leadership of the Peasants' leader and a Member of Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Dr. Sunilam, went to reassess the situation.

I had the opportunity of being part of both the visits. And in the interval of 11 years between 1995-2006, these camps have produced a new generation of young men and women with a new consciousness and new self-belief. This

Bhutan Version of Gujral Doctrin

Thousands of Bhutanese, banished from their homeland are living in miserable conditions in Assam, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh, in regions adjacent to Bhutan border. The government of India has not given the status of refugee so they don't get any help from international agencies like the UN. The argument put forth by the Indian Government is that according to the bilateral treaty of 1949, the citizens of either country can freely cross each other's borders and move in each other's territory freely and hence no need of giving them refugee status. Also according to the treaty they would not interfere in each other's internal affairs. But is the issue of Bhutanese refugees Bhutan's internal affair? In 1970s the Organization of African Unity has passed a resolution that if a substantial portion of the population is forced to take shelter in another country then it is no more the internal matter of the country concerned. On the basis of this reasonable resolution the UN passed its own resolutions and India is amongst the signatories to these resolutions.

Despite this the Government of India has been maintaining indifference against its own commitment. Is the government really neutral to the issue? No, it is not so. The Indian P.M., Shri Indra Kumar Gujral is keenly interested in Bhutanese affairs and is wholehearted supporter of the Bhutanese monarch. The whole country is passing through such chaotic situations that nobody has time to ponder over the policy prepared by Indra Kumar Gujral as India's Foreign Minister on Bhutan, and particularly on the on-going democratic movements there. Feeling free from any accountability he gave full support to the king for the repression of the democratic forces in his country and in return secured of Bhutan's support in India's favor on the issue of CTBT.

After becoming the Prime Minister, Gujral made the declaration of the appointment of Bhabani Sengupta as advisor on Bhutan Affairs but Sengupta has been his advisor for a long time. And also for a long time he is doing research on the 'Participatory democracy' in Bhutan and in this connection he often meets the king of Bhutan. He is doing research on "Participatory" democracy whereas it is very well known to the entire world and even the king Jigme Singye Wangchuk confesses that there is no democracy at all in Bhutan. There are no political Parties. Studies of Law and Political Science are proscribed from educational curricula. Till last year watching television was restricted. According to a UN study, there is not a single jurist in the country. In the so-called courts of law there is no judge who has studied law. So Bhabani Sengupta's research on participatory democracy is astonishing.

In August 1996, Indra Kumar Gujral went to Bhutan on a state visit. This was the first visit of an Indian Foreign Minister in 14 years. Just months before his visit, many groups of refugees from the Jhapa camp had made several attempts to cross over the border through Indian territory to return to their homes that had created considerable tension in the West Bengal. The Nepal and Bhutan had held seven rounds of negotiation to resolve the issue of Bhutanese refugees. But the issue of refugees did not bother the conscience of the Indian Foreign Minister. Gujral did not feel the need of even raising it with the Bhutanese Royal government!

In fact, the government of India has been shrewdly able to maintain its 'neutrality' toward this burning problem so that the Bhutanese king is not put into any inconvenient situation. India treats it as a bilateral issue between Nepal and Bhutan whereas Bhutan borders India and not the Nepal. The Bhutanese citizens, persecuted by the government came to India and from here they were beaten up, bundled into trucks and thrown into Nepalese territory. Thus India used coercion to transfer its problem to Nepal. As the repression started from southern Bhutan populated mainly by the Nepalese-speaking Bhutanese (Lhotsompa) so India found it convenient to shift the tension to Nepal and adopt the posture of "neutrality".

On October 12, 1996, a memorandum signed by many noted Indian citizens including Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer and Swami Agnivesh was submitted to Mr. Gujral, in which among other things, the demand of Indian participation in the negotiations on the refugee issue was emphasized. The members of the delegation were shocked and surprised by the Gujral's response that he would not do any such thing which might create problems for the Bhutanese monarch. Earlier he had refused even to talk about Bhutan under the pretext of the national interest. Is it not the responsibility of India to support the democratic movements in the neighboring country? His response was that his government would not support democracy on the cost of the national interests. When he was reminded about the possibility of explosive situations on the India-Bhutan borders, he told the delegation that the government would deal with it. The foreign Minister of the "biggest democracy" was talking in the tone of a monarch. The delegation was amazed and the talks ended in a tense atmosphere...

(From Anand Swaroop Verma's article published in *Jansatta*, 15 May 1997)

new generation finds the camp-life appalling and is not ready to live on the 'mercy' and 'donations'. This generation of youth is able to well-comprehend the situation in the context of the international politics and has witnessed the origin and growth of the armed struggle in Nepal under the leadership of the Maoists. In 1995, the main villain for these refugees was the Bhutan-king but now, in 2006 their perception has changed. The Indian government has become the main villain. The main reason of this change of perception is the attitude of the Indian State in the past 11 years towards their peaceful attempts to cross over to their homeland. Whenever they tried to cross the borders in the form of a peaceful procession, they were arrested at India-Nepal borders and put behind the bars.

The youth in the refugee camps is bewildered with the stand and actions of India. It readily "helped" the displaced Bhutanese chased by Bhutanese army to allow them cross over into its territory and then forcibly transporting them into Nepalese territory. But when they are ready to face any consequences for their right to homeland, India steps in as an obstructing block. The youth feels that owing to the vested interests of the Indian ruling classes, the Government of India is supporting the repressive tyranny of the Bhutanese king. It is beyond their comprehension that why should India, "the biggest democracy" is unashamedly supporting the only monarchy of the South Asia! The new thinking about appealing to the governments among the youth is a matter of great concern. With their own experiences and of other contemporary movements, they have arrived at an understanding that the governments do not hear the peaceful cries but the thunders of the gun. It is to be noted that over 40% of the refugees in the camps belong to the age group of 17-40 years.

The prominent Human Rights activist and the leader of Bhutanese refugees Tek Nath Rizal is currently living in exile in Nepal. Before 1990, he was advisor to and the member of the Royal Council. In 1990 he was arrested and put behind the bars for the "offence" of submitting a memorandum of certain demands of the people of south Bhutan. The matter was raised and discussed at various international forums that forced the Bhutanese government to release him after 11 years in 2001. When I met him in Nepal, I was shocked and surprised to know that whenever he tried to live in India, Indian Intelligence agents always harassed him. He apprehends more danger in the Indian Territory than in Bhutan. Around two years ago when he was in New Delhi, two "dangerous looking" home ministry personnel threatened him to leave the country within 24 hours otherwise they will implicate him in some forged case and put behind the bars. Bhutanese people were also surprised and shocked to see the king of Bhutan – a monarch – being made the chief guest at the last year's Indian Republic Day celebrations, a contradiction in terms. They feel that at a time when the royal repression has forced over 100 thousand people of Bhutan out of its total

population of around 700 thousand into the displaced life of the refugee camps, honoring the despotic king defies the meaning of biggest democracy.

Day-by-day the situation is becoming more-and-more explosive. If India keeps its stance of "neutrality", there is every likelihood of the emergence of another disturbed zone in this part of the South Asia. The youth in the camps are conscious about American design of intervention in South Asia in the name of fighting terrorism, and they do not wish to provide this opportunity.

Recently the government of Nepal sent a parliamentary delegation to the camps to assess the mood of the people to the informal American proposal. This delegation also discussed the issue of American proposal with many notable intellectuals and activists of Nepal. After this exercise the delegation decided that it would request the Government of India to take initiative in the matter. It is well known that the Bhutanese royalty can not easily ignore the advice of the Indian Government to consider the matter seriously and take the steps towards the amicable resolution of the issue. As yet, for the last 16 years Indian government has not taken any initiative in this direction. Instead of showing any concern with the pathetic condition of people living in the refugee camps it invited the King as chief guest of its Republic day celebrations at a time when the refugees were most agitated for their right to homeland.

The way the government of the Bhutan king used the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) against its citizens agitating for democratic rights, is intriguing and subject matter of a separate study. First it allowed the ULFA to camp in its territory and used it to chase away the South Bhutanese. Seeing the mounting international pressure for taking back the refugees, in order to please the New Delhi, it allowed the Indian military action against ULFA in its territory. Thus it used ULFA for expropriation of anti-monarchy forces and again to stop their attempts of returning to their homeland.

Few planted agents are conducting a signature campaign in the camps in favor of the American proposal, but the general mood is against it and the situation is quite tense and volatile. The home minister of Nepal, K.P.Oli some time ago had stated that the representatives of Nepalese and Bhutanese governments would hold talks in November 2006 to arrive at some concrete results.

In the meanwhile when people were discussing this statement with some elements of hope, America floated its proposal of "generosity" that has increased the restlessness of the refugees and forced them to expedite their search for new methods to secure their homeland rights. For the time being they seem to be in the mood of waiting for some more time in the hope of India's acceptance of Nepal Government's request to take initiative for the resolution of the problem. If their hopes are belied, future course of their struggle would unpredictable and can take any path, including that of armed struggle.

The Bhutan Refugee Repatriation: Hurry to Bury

Pramod Kaffle, GRINSO-Nepal

Bhutanese King Jigme started "demographic management" immediately after the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. His mind had been occupied with the retrogressive medieval dream of "one nation one people" for a long time and to materialize it he introduced 'Citizenship Act-1985'. It all began with the Sikkim's annexation in 1975 by India and King Jigme waited for a right time to begin a systematic mass exodus of Southern Bhutanese known as Lhotsampas. The Bhutanese regime of King Jigme didn't only want to banish the Nepalese speaking people (Lhotsampas) but wanted to continue the autocratic dynastic rule for long.

Nepalese peoples' movement in Nepal with the democratic waves of late 80s and early 90s' encouraged the Bhutanese people to resist the autocratic regime in Bhutan. Sensing the popular mood the King Jigme began massive repression in Bhutan. Banishment of people of Nepalese origin was single agenda of his foreign policy. Taking advantage of bitterness in the relations between Nepal and India during 1989-90, he fooled every one from Rajiv Gandhi to Nepalese King Birendra.

Indian government unable to comprehend the new international order after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eastern European block got trapped into King Jigme's designs. On the other hand King Birendra helped to abduct human rights activist Mr. T.N.Rizal in Nepal in 1989. King Jigme smoothly mobilized the support of its neighbors – India and Nepal — and suppressing the democratic movement of 1990 forcefully evicted one-sixth population of the Bhutan and chased them into Indian territory across the border. India not only did not oppose these expulsions but also cooperated with the King by forcibly transporting these stateless people into Nepalese territory and distanced itself from the issue on the pretext that it was a bilateral issue between Nepal and Bhutan.

In the mean time Nepal entered the arena of a "multiparty" system. The democratically elected new government provided these banished citizens of Bhutan, the refugee status in its country and pleaded with the international community for humanitarian aid. As the cold war was over the "left over" resources of the UNHCR – an organization established to look after refugees, was used to help the Bhutanese Refugees living in eastern Nepal since 1990. The USA being the largest contributor to the UNHCR funds, it treated it as a future investment to expand its influence in South Asia.

That is why the USA is in such a hurry to bury the prolonged crisis of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

Is the issue a bilateral or trilateral?

Since the beginning of the exodus all the Bhutanese citizens who had to flee their homeland oppressed and hunted by the King Jigme's systematic atrocities, crossed the boarder into India, the largest democracy in the world. In fact it should have been the bilateral issue between India and Bhutan from the very beginning. All the Bhutanese who were coerced into signing the "Voluntary Migration Certificates" and chased away into Indian territory by Bhutan's despotic regime were caught, bundled into police trucks and dumped into Nepal by Indian Security Forces. This was one of the largest ethnic expulsions in the modern history.

There are over one hundred ten thousands Bhutanese in the UNHCR camps in Nepal and the process of evictions is continuing. The Indian Government is well aware with the happenings in Bhutan and the miserable existence of the Bhutanese refugees into camps. But India is looking at the problem by the king Jigme's eye and maintaining "neutrality" on the pretence of its being a Nepal-Bhutan bilateral issue. Over one and half decade impasse of refugees is spent in waiting to return home with honor and dignity.

Refugees' this dream could have been exploited by any one. The time has come to take the issue to its logical conclusion. Now it is high time that India must involve itself and initiate the process of trilateral talks. If the situation of conflict and instability continues in the Himalayan kingdom at its north frontiers, India shall not remain unaffected. Its prosperity depends on the peace and stability in the neighboring countries. However India's foreign policy since independence has been inconvenient to its neighbors as it has always wanted to keep them under its thumb. Ideally it should have been imperative on India to take care of the interests of not only its own citizens but that of the citizens of the neighboring countries also. The Bhutanese people launched a forceful democratic movement in 1990 and expected that India would support their struggle for democratic and human rights. But on the contrary India owing to its vested interests, instead of supporting the movement aligned itself with the Bhutanese monarchy and the Bhutanese people paid a heavy price. So the people of Bhutan living in and away from expected justice and democratic treatment from its neighbor the "largest democracy" of the world, India.

International concern on Bhutan Refugees

The rallies organized on 17 August 1990 demanding the democratic rights in southern Bhutan were the first ever human rights rallies in the history of Bhutan. Dago Tshering, the present Ambassador of Bhutan in India, was at that time Bhutan's deputy Home Minister. He had issued a circular of "forfeiture of the citizenship of all the relatives" of those who participated in the rallies. Eviction orders were issued against them. This event shocked and stirred all the democratic and human rights groups active in Nepal, other countries of South Asia and at international level and put the European Union, donor countries and the USA in a fix. However all these concerns were partially diffused with the Indian stand of "neutrality". Nepalese government through all these years had been trying a respectful solution of the refugee's repatriation. But the process was shattered by a stubborn monarchy of Nepal after 2001 and the anti-people stances of the India and the USA.

The US Proposal was summarily rejected by the Bhutanese refugees. The king of Bhutan welcomed the proposal and expressed its gratitude to the USA. Henceforth the US officials have been regularly visiting Bhutan, notwithstanding the absence of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. The agreement on categorization and verification came as a boon to the Bhutanese despotic regime as it got some more time for designing newer plots and plans against its ousted citizens. It agreed to constitute the Joint Verification Team (JVT) on March 26, 2001 but did not give any time frame. The year 2001 was a turning point

in the Nepalese history. Nepal entered into an era of the autocratic rule of the king Gyanendra.

The verification process lacked transparency and any provision of deadline yet the verification in one camp — Khudanabari — compelled Bhutan to recognize 3/4th of people living there as the bonafied Bhutanese citizens. The unexpected outcome once again embarrassed the Bhutan and the embarrassed Bhutanese officials of Nepal-Bhutan Joint Verification Team (JVT) walked out of the meeting being held at Damak in Jhapa District of Nepal and left for Bhutan on December 22, 2003 without informing the Government of Nepal. This shows Bhutan's attitude of absolving itself from any responsibility towards its people and of looking for an excuse to run away from its own created crisis.

Nepalese Peoples' upsurge of 2006:

The April Revolution

The unprecedented Nepalese people's upsurge in April 2006 and the shift of power to the people put the Bhutanese regime in difficult situation. It had unilaterally boycotted in December 2003 the verification process and hence it had to find some other way to carry forward its ill intentions and anti-people designs. On the other hand the human rights and civil society movements in Nepal and India accelerated their advocacy for the repatriation of refugees with dignity and honor. The western nations led by the USA formed a "core group" without any consultation with the refugees.

American Strategy on Bhutanese Refugees

The Official news Paper of Bhutan government, *Quensel* published a news item on 2 September 2006 detailing the visit to Bhutan of a delegation of American Parliamentarians under the leadership of Republican Senator Jim Kolbe. A perusal of this news item makes it very clear that the USA has been working on the strategy of settling the refugees for quite some time. Jim Kolbe said, "I know that Bhutan does not like the term refugee and claims that the people living in the camps were illegal intruders in Bhutan and hence can not be called refugees. Despite the claim, it is a fact that these people are still living in the camps and possibly few of them might have been Bhutanese citizens". Therefore Bhutan government should accept few of them "even a very small number as its citizens." Then he added that the US would settle 50-70 thousand of remaining refugees in its territory and Australia and Canada would also take some of them.

According to a news report published on 14 May 2005 in *Kathmandu Post*, most of the western countries are interested in settling the refugees in their countries. UNHCR's representative, Abraham asserts that the international community wants the solution of the problem but for this it is important that the Nepal Government gives "exit permit" to settle them in a third country. The U.N.H.C.R. spends about \$ 5 million on the refugees' world over and America is the biggest contributor (25%) to its funds. The other major contributors to it are Britain, Japan, Germany and the EU

The leaders of the refugees once again started impressing upon Nepalese government to sympathetically consider their problems and expedite the process. Finally, though in a slow process the Nepal Government has taken correct initiative and stands that the issue of the Bhutanese refugee is the matter between, and has to be resolved by "the Bhutanese Government and the Bhutanese people". In this changed situation Bhutan is facing tremendous pressure from every corner and searching a strong back up to continue its draconian rule.

The recent US proposal to settle 60,000 Bhutanese refugees in its territory and other members of "Core Group" willing to resettle some more of the 106,000 estimated Bhutanese living in UNHCR run camps has come as a great relief to King Jigme. It gives Bhutan a clean chit to make more refugees in future.

This kind of recent unilateral declaration in Geneva by Ms. Ellen Sauerbrey, the US Assistant Secretary, has created a situation conducive for the continuation of the unending cycle of atrocities by the King Jigme's autocratic rule. The recent visit to the refugee camps (August 20-25, 2006) of a joint team of Nepalese and Indian human rights and civil society activists has rightly emphasised the miseries of the refugees and has urged the Indian government to involve itself to amicably resolve this crisis as early as possible. This would bring about a just and durable solution to this burning problem.

Conclusion: Hurry to bury

Before the 16th round of talks in November 2006, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Nepal, K.P. Sharma Oli in his recent meeting with Bhutanese counterpart Lyonpo Jigme Yoeser Thinley had said, "if Bhutan tries to create hindrances ... Nepal can still think of an alternative means to resolve the crisis"..

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Terming the King's declarations as eyewash, D. P. Kafle of Bhutan Peoples Party says that his seriousness towards democratic reforms could be gauged through his attitude towards the refugee problem. That is why, he says that Indian Government needs to do some rethinking on its Bhutan policy.

As far as king Wangchuk is concerned, he has even refused to recognize the refugees as Bhutanese citizens. Four years ago, an Inquiry Committee was constituted to look into the matter. The committee consists of the representatives of the Nepalese and Bhutanese governments but there is no representative of the refugees. The terms of the inquiry are based on the assumption that divides the refugees into 4 categories.

- (1) Bhutanese citizens displaced due to political reasons;
- (2) Those Bhutanese, who left the country voluntarily;
- (3) Those who fled the country due to being wanted in some criminal offence; and
- (4) Those who are not Bhutanese citizens.

The pace of the inquiry is so slow that as yet it has identified only 74 families in the first category; 2182 in the second; 814 in the third; and 85 in the fourth categories. Refugees want that there should be their representatives also in the Committee. Kafle says that even according to this committee, at least three categories are the Bhutanese citizens, so why so much delay in their return?

Now, it is clear that it may be the last chance for India to step in with honest involvement and resolve the crisis if Nepal and Bhutan fail to do it. India should extend its solidarity to the refugees and try to find durable solution of their repatriation even with informal consultations and discussions with the Bhutanese government and peoples' representatives.

The latest offer from the USA government is to strengthen on going repression of the king of Bhutan. The present administration in Washington doesn't want to spare a single moment to have a good relation with the present Bhutanese regime. They have seen the fate of the autocratic regime of King Gyanendra in Nepal where the Nepalese people rejected the despotic monarchy and are fast moving towards establishment of a republic

The aim of the present proposal from Washington is to dismantle refugee camps in Nepal at the earliest and oblige the king of Bhutan in long term interest of the US imperialism. It is aimed at having a foothold in this "Himalayan nation" to "keep a watch on India and encircle China". Had it not been so, the USA would have taken a firm stand on the questions of democracy and human rights in Bhutan and the will of the Bhutanese people and persuaded the government in Thimpu to resolve the crisis in accordance with the international norms and conventions. The US proposal tends to ignore the natural and legal right of the refugees to return to their country.

A renowned human right activist of Bhutan has criticized the US proposal as being "in favor of the Bhutanese king but against the Bhutanese people" and found UNHCR praise of it "even more objectionable". It is time to hurry in finding a durable solution with the involvement of and consultation with the Bhutanese refugees but not bury their rights to return to motherland and enjoy human rights in Bhutan.

Rizal: Disappointed with India

Once upon a time Teknath Rizal used to be the Advisor to the Bhutan King. He was the Coordinator of the Investigation Bureau. His initiatives to unearth the pervasive corruption led him into trouble. After spending 11 years in the Bhutanese jail, he is living an exiled life for many years. The fact-finding team had a long interview with him in Kathmandu. Excerpts of the interview:

"I had been into a hell. Nowhere in the world the conditions of jails would be as worse as in Bhutan. For the six months my hands had been tied from behind, holding the bucket by teeth I had to defecate there only. I was the advisor to the king and my offence was that I advised him to stop ill treatment to his people.

"I would like to state that the assistance given by India to Bhutan is not a blessing but a curse for the Bhutanese people. I was the advisor to the King and also the Coordinator of the Bhutanese Investigation Bureau and on conducting investigation in the entire country, it was found that many bridges on many rivers had been constructed but only on papers. Similarly construction of many long roads through tunnels has been recorded but on investigation it was found that there are none. When I carried forward the investigation, I started getting threats. Agents of the Donor agencies have a nexus with the king. In such a situation there was great danger to my life and I am lucky to be still alive. The army is deeply entrenched into corruption.

"It is not proper for India to say that the refugees are not Bhutanese but Nepalese because the census in Bhutan is conducted by India. Till 1982 the Civil Administrator endowed with the right to grant citizenship was an Indian. The people involved in agriculture and cattle rearing are also Indians. Therefore India knows very well about various castes living in different villages.

"The number of people in Bhutanese jails is not exactly known. Also there is no record of people killed. On records Bhutan has just one jail but there are other jails in the forests, where people are imprisoned and they have to work in the guava and apple orchards of the royal clan. Their hands are kept tied. The court tells them that they shall be released within 2-3 years but they languish there for 11-12 years. Foreign journalists are not allowed in these places.

"Jawaharlal Nehru in a speech near Siliguri had said that these are Gorkhas living here and China would attack from the Himalayan heights, A man from the crowd had



Tek Nath Rizal

Courtesy Kantipur

told him that we would fight against China. We had told the Indian Ambassador that Bhutanese king intends to give to China the land adjacent to Sikkim border in exchange the land on this side. I had said it with documentary proof but no one listened to me. Now see what has happened? I had gone to the camp of Indira Gandhi and had contacted her Liaison Officer but today the Indian Government instead of helping us is compounding our problems. I can not live in Delhi for pursuing the cause of the Bhutanese people. You know what happened with me when I went to Delhi. My first two visits were for my treatment and nothing happened. But when I went there for the third time, a friend from Sikkim offered me his vacant house in Delhi to stay there instead of my living in Bagdogra. I started living there. After 4-5 days few people from Indian Intelligence started visiting and "interrogating" me. My companion there started getting funny calls such as about me. But my hopes were belied. Today it is difficult to get a 'pass' for going to Bhutan. Bhutanese family members face the risk of imprisonment, if he hosts a non-Bhutanese in his house. I asked them how over 100 thousand people could be outsiders? Indian Police must know about them if they have come from India. But Bhutanese government was interested in ousting the people of southern Bhutan

under the excuse of Gorkhaland. In fact the Bhutanese government misguided the Indian Government and gave misleading informations. The Government of India did not know that the king wanted to banish the southern Bhutanese people. It was told that some miscreants from Gorkhaland had crossed over into Bhutan. Bhutanese King claims that they are not Bhutanese. They have come from Assam and Bengal. The people in India need to be told that we are Bhutanese.

"Few misconceptions have been planted into Indian mindset that Nepalese dominance in Sikkim has increased and Subhash Ghising is active in West Bengal with the Gorkhaland plank and therefore it is apprehended that they would dominate southern Bhutan also. I don't apprehend that much danger in Bhutan as in Siliguri. Most of the

people in Bhutanese jail have been handed over by the Police in Siliguri and most of them are innocent. We do not have any safety in India

"Now we have nothing to lose. Most of our relatives have been killed. The relatives of king and his ministers have appropriated all our properties. Now we can not even speak."

where from he got the mobile phone and that he would be arrested in the case of theft. Subsequently I went to a friend of mine, Chandrashekharan. He assured me and told that he would speak to the Home Ministry for help. I told him that I should be allowed to stay in Delhi and work, as I never wanted to stay in Nepal. I was under the impression that I have good relations with many people and that the people over there know me. The ambassador knew me and no one has bad opinions

Teknath Rizal: A Fighter for the of Bhutanese Peoples' cause

Teknath Rizal was elected to the Bhutan's national assembly from Lamidara constituency of Chirang district in south Bhutan. As a member of the National Assembly he made great contributions for his constituency and his country. He established many Primary schools and health centers in his area, made arrangements for drinking water, created irrigation facilities and got roads linking Lamidara to major National Highways. Along with being a Member of the National Assembly, he was also the labor scrutiny officer in the royal government. He was reelected to the Assembly in 1981 and again in 1984. Seeing his work and ability the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk sent him to Australia in 1982 for higher studies.

In 1985 he was appointed as a member of Royal advisory Council and was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the affairs of the western-southern Bhutan.

In 1987 the king made him the Director of the Royal Audit Commission. This Commission found many Jongda (District Collector) guilty of bungling the development fund. Not only this he compelled the king to remove many Jongdas from their posts and even to put some behind the bars. Many of the Jongdas who were dismissed or arrested were related to some ministers in the royal court and therefore he became quite unpopular among the King's courtiers. Some of them became his staunch enemies.

During the 1988 census few officials started the process of depriving the people of south Bhutan from their citizenship. People approached Rizal. On 9th April 1988 he submitted a memorandum saying that many of his officials were misusing their powers in the name of census. He also pleaded with the king to amend the 1985 Citizenship Act.

The Government branded the memorandum as anti-national and the act of submitting the memorandum was termed as the sedition. Consequently he was charged with sedition and put behind the bars. After keeping him in jail for three days, he was coerced to sign a paper that said that he had no right to participate in any public function and that he can not talk to more than three people at a time. He was unceremoniously removed from his post, released from the jail and was ordered to leave the capital town with immediate effect.

On 16 January 1989 the king through a royal decree declared the policy of 'one-nation, one-people meant to curb the cultural diversity. The culture, language and the dressing style of the ruling clan – the Nolang caste —were made compulsory for all the Bhutanese. After this royal decree started the severe repression of the human rights in the South Bhutan. Rizal left the country and established *Peoples' Forum for Human Rights, Bhutan* at Kakarbitta in Nepal on 7th July 1989. He was arrested on 16 November 1989 and released on 17 December 1999. He wrote his autobiography *The Exile*, which is very popular in Nepal and Bhutan.

Malinowski kills several birds with one stone

American design over the issue of Bhutanese refugees is not a new phenomenon. A letter written by American Ambassador in Nepal, Michel Malinowski around three years ago makes it very clear that the US has never been interested in the repatriation of the refugees. A report regarding this appeared on 16 July 2003 in The Telegraph, Kathmandu. Here are the excerpts from the report:

Killing two birds with one stone is no news. However, what is news is when one stone kills several birds at a time.

The United States Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski falls under the second category for obvious reasons.

A letter signed by Ambassador Malinowski last week created ripples both in Katmandu and Thimpu when it appeared in a broad sheet daily hinting both the countries, Nepal and Bhutan, that the United States was not that happy with the conclusions arrived at by the Joint Verification Team (JVT), as it had so many "inconsistencies". The relatively small letter has serious repercussions as it has touched all the possible aspects of the refugees from their safe return to Bhutan and their possible assimilation in the Bhutanese society albeit in a changed context. Following "inconsistencies in the JVT report on the Khudnabari refugee camp are pointed out in the letter.

- The Ambassador tries to prove the "inconsistencies" by citing one example that while the parents have been categorized as non-Bhutanese and therefore not eligible to return to Bhutan, whereas their children have been categorized as Bhutanese and eligible to return and reapply for citizenship.

- The letter expresses its apprehensions as to how the Bhutanese could appeal now to the same authority that denied them their right to return to Bhutan earlier? Pertinent question indeed! This means that the Ambassador is skeptical about the body reversing its own previous unjust verdict, which means that the Bhutanese will be allowed to appeal but the result will be a foregone conclusion.

- Malinowski feels that the conclusions of the report lack "transparency" urges the countries concerned to "reexamine" and possible "review" them entirely "in the larger interest" of the refugees.

- He suspects that the Bhutanese returning to Bhutan legally might not be treated in a fair manner and hence talks of the "absence of guarantees" to the refugees. This means that he would like to get a "proper and genuine guarantee" from the Bhutanese side that the refugees would not be ill-treated and "terrorized" by the state security apparatus which forced them flee to Nepal some twelve years ago. The fact is that the Bhutanese side has yet to guarantee the safe and sound return of its own forcibly evacuated citizens.

- The US has indirectly hinted to the Royal government of Bhutan to allow the refugees to return to their own places from where they were forced to leave the country. The letter also expresses concern for the problem of employment upon their return to Bhutan.

- The Ambassador expressed apprehensions about the safe return of the refugees and their problem of employment in their original place of residence and says, "with so many uncertainties facing the refugees' future in Bhutan, I fear that many will be hesitant to return". This means that a considerable chunk of the Bhutanese refugees even if allowed to return to Bhutan will not do so unless they conclude that the "uncertainties" as mentioned by the United States are removed.

- In the letter Malinowski has expressed his unhappiness over the total neglect of the UNHCR by the Nepalese side. The gist is that the United States is not happy with the outcome of the latest report that had so many "inconsistencies".

At the fag end of the Clinton Administration, Assistant Secretary of State, Carl Inderfurth, in conversation with a select group of Nepalese media, had warned Bhutan that if they did not take back their own nationals residing in Nepalese camps, the US will be forced to convince international consortium assisting Bhutan to suspend their pledges until it heeded to the US suggestions.

Since then the US has been reluctant in pressurizing Bhutan to take back its refugees. However, it's fresh overture shows that the US is not only watching the event here but is also keeping an eye over the procedures and the methods of verification and the repatriation of the refugees.

The Ambassador's letter was issued at a time when Indian foreign secretary was in the Nepalese capital in connection with the SAARC standing committee meeting.

भूटानी शरणार्थियों का दर्द

हर सुबह उगते सूरज के साथ जवान होती उमंगें
उम्मीदों की रोशनी में उठने वाली तरंगें
दूर तक मां के आंचल की तरह फैली धरती
जिसे जितना भी देखो तबीयत नहीं भरती
असीम संभावनाओं के द्वार खोले खुला आसमान
पहाड़ों की चोटियां, घने जंगल, संतरे के बागान
झरनों की कल कल, नदियों की हलचल,
कितना खूबसूरत है अपना भूटान
इसे हमने चाहा दिल में बसाया, प्यार किया
हमारे पुरखों की जमीन, हमारा वतन,
हमने यहां जनम लिया
यहां की हर सुबह खुशियों से भरी होती थी,
हर शाम मां के आंचल की तरह हमें छुपा लेती थी
अपनी मेहनत और फितरत से
जिसके हर कोने को हमने संभारा
आखिर क्यों उसी सरजमीं से हमें कर दिया गया बेसहारा
हमने तो अपने राजा को भगवान की तरह माना
पर उसी भगवान ने हमें बना दिया बेगाना
हमने तो नहीं थी वगावत की फसल रोपी
तब क्यों हमारे ऊपर जबरन भूटिया संस्कृति गयी थोपी
क्या डर था हमसे जो हमें गया लुटा
क्यों सरकार और फौज का कहर हम पर टूटा
हमारे घर हमारी आंखों के सामने उजड़ें
हजारों लोग दर-ब-दर हांकर अपनों से बिछुड़ें
खेत बीरान हुए बागान सुनसान हुए
गांव शमशान हुए लोग बेजान हुए
वूहों के सिर लाठी जवानों को मिली जेल
बच्चों को खा गया खाँफ
महिलाओं की इज्जत से खेला गया खेल
अपने ही देश में हम हुए पराए
हजारों की तादाद में जबरन गये भगाये
दर-ब-दर भटकते जिंदगी मौत के बीच लटकते
मांगते धरती से सहारा
शरणार्थी शिविरों में कैद होकर रह गया संसार हमारा
खैरात पर बीत रहे हैं दिन महीने और साल
हर दिल में है बस एक ही सवाल
जानवरों से भी बदतर इस जिंदगी से छूट कर हम
आखिर कब रखेंगे अपनी धरती पर कदम
कब उगेगा वह सूरज जिसकी लाली में
हम देखेंगे अपने खेत गांव और बागान
हरी भरी धरती, वर्षा की चोटियां,



उफनाती नदियां और नीला आसमान
अब तो हमारे बच्चे भी हो रहे हैं जवान
जो हैं तो भूटानी पर देखा नहीं उन्होंने अपना भूटान
आखिर कब तक यह कह कर हम उन्हें बहलायेंगे
सब्र रखो हम जल्दी ही अपने देश जायेंगे
उनके सवालों का अब नहीं है हमारे पास कोई जवाब
टूटते धैर्य और उस उबलते खून का हम कैसे दें हिसाब
जो बात करने लगा है मरने और मारने की
शांति की अनदेखी से आजिज होकर हथियार उठाने की
अहिंसा और शांति के अलंबरदारों रोको इस उबलते खून को
बात और ज्यादा बिगड़े इसके पहले थाम लो इस जुनून को
हमें लौटा दो हमारा अतीत हमारा वतन
सितारों की महफिल और बहारों का चमन
जहां हम चैन से जी सकें और शांति से मर सकें
दुनिया को संभारने के लिए अपने हिस्से में जो है उसे कर सकें
इसलिए गांधी के देश
तुम भले ही मनाओ अफ्रीकी सत्याग्रह के सौ साल
पर आखिर कब तक टालोगे हमारी घर वापसी का सवाल
हमारी वतन वापसी के रास्ते में तुम्हीं तो खड़े हो
जब जब हमने जाने की कोशिश की तुम्हीं तो अड़े हो
तुमको तुम्हारे अहिंसा के पुजारी का वास्ता
मत दिखाओ हमें बंदूक उठाने का रास्ता
हमारी आवाज सुनो खोलो अपनी डगर
हम अमन के गीत गाते खुशी से चहकते जा सकें अपने घर

विनोद अग्निहोत्री

Fifteen years of Turmoil



July 1990: The *Bhutan People's Party (BPP)* submitted a memorandum to the King, Wangchuck in which it demanded the establishment of a democratic system.

September 1990: Peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations in 14 towns of Bhutan's southern districts. Bhutanese embassy official in New Delhi denied reports that some 327 people were shot dead by government troops during two weeks of protest demonstrations and rallies. The spokesman also alleged that the protesters belonging to the *Bhutan People's Party (BPP)*, armed with petrol bombs and guns confronted police and soldiers in nine areas along the Kingdom's border with India. According to him, the *BPP* is allegedly using the tea estates in West Bengal province in neighboring India as their hideouts (*Los Angeles Times*, 12/23/95).

Feb 1991: The king began expelling large number of such people from South Bhutan, whom he suspected to have participated in the pro-democracy demonstrations. An influx of Nepalese migrants poses the greatest threat to the survival of Bhutan since the seventh century, said the 35-year old King Wangchuck. He expressed apprehensions that in the coming years the original inhabitants — Drupkas — shall be reduced to a minority as happened in Sikkim with Nepalese domination there.

September 1991: In a convention on the issue of the Bhutanese refugees *Bhutan Solidarity* was formed with Justice Krishna Iyer as its Patron and Anand Swarup Verma as the Convenor.

October 1991: Three exiled

Lhotshampa (Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin) members of Bhutan's National Assembly began a 24-hour hunger strike in Katmandu to protest the convening of their legislative body in Thimpu. The trio, who staged their protest in front of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meeting, said the session made a "mockery of democracy" since it does not represent the Bhutanese people. Only 14 members of the 150-seat National Assembly are Bhutanese of Nepalese origin despite the fact that ethnic Nepalese comprise nearly 53% of Bhutan's population. Five members out of the fourteen have fled to Nepal and one is in jail.

Feb 1992: Since the enforcement of Bhutan's citizenship law in 1985, about 10,000 "foreigners", mostly of Nepalese origin, have been expelled. Many more have left because of the government's Bhutanization policy. The BPP, formed in 1989, was banned in 1990 and operates primarily from Nepal and India.

May 1992: A team of jurists under the leadership of Justice Krishna Iyer set for a visit to Bhutan but despite their already booked tickets of Druk Airlines, they were stopped by the Bhutanese officials in Katmandu from taking the flight.

March 1993: Exodus of many senior civil servants from Bhutan alleging "ethnic cleansing" — a deliberate policy to depopulate the country of non-Drukpa people. According to them the government was harassing the people of Nepalese origin and/or was putting them in jails.

Jun 1993: Nepal and Bhutan have finally agreed to hold talks later this month to resolve the issue of Bhutanese refugees living in crowded camps in eastern Nepal. The refugees now number about 86,000. The flow peaked late last year and hundreds are still arriving every day, relief officials say. Some analysts indicate that Bhutan's new-found keenness to hold talks could have been timed to prevent Kathmandu from raising the issue at

the European Community meeting in Brussels and the UN human rights conference in Vienna this month.

Jul 1993: The governments of Bhutan and Nepal formed a joint ministerial committee to look into the issue of the Bhutanese refugees. The committee agreed to classify them in four categories:

1. Bonafide Bhutanese evicted forcefully;
2. Bhutanese who have emigrated voluntarily;
3. Non-Bhutanese; and
4. People who have committed criminal offenses.

They also agreed to form a verification committee with five members from each country that would identify and group the refugees into the different categories.

Feb 1994: According to a newspaper report, the Sarchops, the second largest community in Bhutan, organized anti-government demonstrations in eastern and southern Bhutan which were crushed by the security forces. Police opened fire at the demonstrators, killing eight of them. "The Sarchops are angry with the King for the false promises made by him during the last three years, when he managed to raise over 10,000 militiamen from among them to crush the southern Bhutanese movement", the newspaper said. Sarchops are said to represent some 30% of Bhutan's population.

Jan 1995: Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao advised Nepal and Bhutan to resolve the issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal bilaterally and in the spirit of good neighborliness. The two governments had asked India to help mediate their dispute

Mar 1995: During the latest round of talks between Nepal and Bhutan earlier this month, Bhutan agreed to take full responsibility for the refugees under the category "bona fide Bhutanese evicted forcefully". But it would accept only a few refugees into this category. Nepal insisted that long-

term residents of Bhutan should also be given a chance to return. Bhutan disagreed and accused the refugees of mounting a campaign of terror in its southern provinces to create a Nepalese homeland in Bhutan.



Apr 1995: No progress was reported following the sixth round of talks between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan over the issue of Bhutanese refugees who are residing in eight camps in Nepal. Bhutanese officials indicate that Nepal has now toughened its position by seeking the repatriation of all the refugees.

Jan 1996: During the first week of this month, Indian security forces arrested numerous Bhutanese citizens when they attempted to cross the Nepal-India border. India asserts that it will not allow its territory to be used for any anti-Bhutan movement. The Lhotshampas, from the refugee camps in Nepal, were undertaking a protest march to Bhutan in order to press for their repatriation and for democratization in the tiny kingdom. Over 90 Bhutanese were arrested while others were chased back into Nepal. Despite Indian opposition, the refugees are planning another march to Thimpu.

Jan 12, 1996: Over 96 Bhutanese refugees in the jails in West Bengal have begun hunger strike to demand their unconditional release..

Jan 14, 1996: A dawn-to-dusk mass strike called by the Association of All-India Gurkha League (ABGL) paralyzed three sub-divisions in Darjeeling district. The strike was called to express support for Bhutanese refugees who are trying to return home. The protesters were also demanding unconditional release of all the Bhutanese from various Indian jails. The Bhutanese movement has already gained the support of two regional parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist

party of India, in West Bengal, according to PTI Report.

Jan 23, 1996: Nepal called for talks with Bhutan at the foreign ministers level in order to solve the predicament of up to 100,000 Lhotshampas who are entering their sixth year in Nepal's refugee camps. Six rounds of talks at the home ministerial level have not resolved the issue of refugee verification. While India has so far urged the two countries to solve the issue bilaterally, its recent arrest of over 150 Lhotshampas is viewed as sending a signal to Nepal. Under a 1949 treaty, India controls Bhutan's defense and external policies.

Jan 24, 1996: Indian authorities stopped Over 300 Bhutanese refugees as they attempted to cross into Bhutan through India from their camps in Nepal. The march was organized by the AMCC.

Jan 28, 1996: Nepal officially requested Indian intervention on the issue of the fate of up to 100,000 Lhotshampas who are in Nepalese refugee camps. India still maintains that issue should be resolved bilaterally.

Feb 1996: A three week sit-in at Nepal's eastern border with India ended on February 15 as Indian security forces arrested nearly 300 Bhutanese protestors when they entered Indian territory. The sit-in was to protest the continued detention of over 150 Bhutanese refugees and to demand free passage to Bhutan.

Feb 26, 1996: Another 343 Bhutanese refugees arrested by the Indian Security Forces as they crossed into Indian territory en-route to Bhutan. Over 400 other ethnic Nepalese Bhutanese are already in detention. Nepal criticized the Indian action asserting that India did not stop the Bhutanese when they fled their country and crossed India before ending up in UN refugee camps in Nepal.

March 1, 1996: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees will fund eight refugee camps in Nepal for the Bhutanese refugees for another year. The UNHCR says that funding cannot be provided indefinitely. In response to Bhutan's claim that majority of the people in the camps are non-Bhutanese, the UNHCR claimed that

all the people living in the camps have documentary proofs of being Bhutanese citizen. Meanwhile, significant limitations remain on the right to a fair trial, assembly, and association in Bhutan. Political parties are not allowed and Bhutanese Nepalese parties such as the Bhutan People's Party are regarded as "terrorist and anti-national".

March 6, 1996: India and Bhutan have begun talks on developing an extradition treaty to combat cross-border rebel activities. Both countries assert that rebels seek sanctuary across their common border.

March 13, 1996: Another 183 Bhutanese refugees arrested while attempting to cross Indian territory on their way to Thimpu. Hundreds of Bhutanese refugees are already languishing in Indian jails.

March 19, 1996: The European Parliament passed a resolution calling upon the Bhutan government to take concrete steps to ensure the repatriation of Bhutanese in Nepal's refugee camps. It also urged Bhutan to respect minority rights in its territory.

April 4, 1996: Talks between the Nepalese and Bhutanese governments over the refugee verification process began in Katmandu. Prior to the beginning of the negotiations, King Wangchuck asserted that over 99% of those in Nepal's refugee camps are not Bhutanese citizens. However, a Bhutanese human rights spokesman states that just the opposite is true.

April 7, 1996: An unidentified number of Bhutanese refugees were arrested at Nepal's eastern border as they were attempting to continue their protest march to Bhutan. More than 1000 Lhotshampas have been arrested since January; some of these were recently released when an Indian court ruled that their arrests were illegal.

April 8, 1996: The first round of talks at the foreign ministerial level on the status of Bhutanese refugees languishing in Nepalese camps has without any result. Nepalese officials think that the issue of adequate verification of refugee status remains the main stumbling block. Observers believe that little headway can be made until India steps in as a mediator, a role

it has so far refused to play. Meanwhile, Bhutanese refugees in Indian jails went on a hunger strike to protest their detention and one refugee group announced that it would wage an "armed struggle" against the Bhutanese government.

it will ask the Indian government for free passage and will seek international support to pressurize

Jun 1, 1996: The AMCC re-launched its protest march to Thimpu on June 1 with over 200 refugees. The protestors decided to cross Indian territory through non-traditional routes to avoid arrest by the security forces.

Jul 1996: The United Front for Democracy in Bhutan (UFD) — a coalition of political parties representing Bhutanese refugees, human rights groups and Bhutanese intellectuals formed in Nepal to intensify the struggle for democracy and the free repatriation of the refugees. The front includes the Bhutan Democratic Party (BDP), the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) and the Druk National Congress (DNC). DNC leader Rongthong Kunley Dorji would lead it. The UDF plans to lobby Bhutan's donor countries for support.

Aug 18, 1996: Between 50 to 150 Bhutanese protestors were deported back to India after they crossed from West Bengal into Bhutan on August 15. They were arrested soon after entering Bhutanese territory. The AMCC, which organized the protest marches, called upon Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda to allow refugees residing in India free passage to Bhutan.

Sept 1996: A delegation of hundreds of refugees left UN camps in Nepal to stage a sit-in in India's capital city, New Delhi. It would attempt to draw attention to the plight of the almost 100,000 Lhotshampa refugees.

Dec 5, 1996: A convention was jointly organized in the India's capital, New Delhi by **Bhutan Solidarity**, India and **GRINSO**, Nepal to discuss issue of the detention of Bhutan's prominent political prisoner, Tekanath Rizal and his comrades and to demand their release.

Dec 30, 1996: Royal army of Bhutan forcibly evicted many more citizens

from South Bhutan and chased them away into India. Over 600 Bhutanese refugees were loaded into buses from West Bengal and dumped at the India-Nepal border. Refugees periodically attempt to cross India en route to Bhutan.

Jan 3, 1997: A sit-in by thousands of Bhutanese refugees at the India-Nepal border ended. The AMCC called off the action, claiming that the Indian government had admitted its mistake in deporting the Lhotshampas. Thirteen Indian buses were also released.

Jan 8, 1997: India asked Bangladesh and Bhutan to help flush out militants who operate in its seven northeastern states and New Delhi claimed that they often seek sanctuary in neighboring countries.

Feb 1997: The US State Department's Report on Human Rights practices in Bhutan in 1996 indicates that state security forces committed some human rights abuses against the Lhotshampas. Two people were arrested for "anti-national" activities in southern Bhutan. Bhutanese of Nepalese origin who attempted to re-enter the country were forcibly stopped.



Mar 18, 1997: Some 15,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal's camps went on hunger strike to press the United Nations to help ensure their return. The Appeal Movement Coordinating Council (AMCC) organizes the action.

Apr 14, 1997: The Bhutanese refugees ended their almost month-long hunger strike.

Apr 18, 1997: The UFD leader, Rongthong Kunley Dorji arrested in New Delhi for not having proper travel documents. He belongs to Sarchop ethnic community.

Apr 22, 1997: *Bhutan Solidarity* condemned the arrest of Bhutan's UFD leader, Rongthong Kunley Dorji. The Deputy Coordinator of *Bhutan Solidarity*, Arun Kumar Singh filed a

petition in Delhi High Court challenging illegal arrest and detention of Dorji in Tihar jail of Delhi.

Apr 19, 1997: In Kathmandu, the United Front for Democracy demanded the release of its leader, Rongthong Dorji, who was arrested in New Delhi on the 18th April. The UFD was afraid he would be handed over to the Bhutanese government whose oppression had forced him to flee from Bhutan in 1991.

Apr 20, 1997: Some 20,000 Bhutanese held two rallies in Nepal to oppose the arrest of Rongthong Kinley Dorji, the leader of the United Front for Democracy in Bhutan (UFD) by the Indian government.

Apr 25, 1997: Bhutan's pro-democracy leader Teknath Rizal completed the 9th day of an indefinite fast in his prison cell at Changgang in Bhutan's capital Thimpu. He was demanding an audience with King Wangchuck to discuss the country's political crisis. Rizal was a member of the National Assembly until 1988 when he invited trouble for himself from the king by opposing the forced eviction of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese. He lived in exile in Nepal until November 1989 when he was kidnapped and returned to Bhutan, where he was convicted to life imprisonment in 1993 after three years in solitary confinement.

May 14, 1997: An Indian court told the government to consider releasing Bhutan's opposition leader Dorji.

May 20, 1997: In Singapore, Bhutan's Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dawa Tsering expressed apprehensions that Bhutan is under threat of being overrun by "Nepalese".

Jun 5, 1997: Some 35 Lhotshampas were arrested in Kathmandu prior to a planned protest which was to coincide with a visit by Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral.

Jul 14, 1997: Reports of the plans of the Bhutanese King to launch another ethnic cleansing campaign against the country's Nepalese population. The state-owned newspaper, Kuensel, recently reported a national assembly decision, which makes it compulsory for relatives of Bhutanese nationals of Nepalese origin to retire from government jobs.

July 29, 1997: *GRINSO*, Nepal and *Bhutan Solidarity*, India jointly organized a three-day **South Asian Peoples Conference on Bhutan** in New Delhi. The conference registered among the others, the participation of many parliamentarians and eminent personalities from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and other Asian countries.

Aug 1, 1997: Official sources in Nepal indicated a breakthrough in the recent talks with Bhutan. Bhutan reportedly agreed to some major concessions to help facilitate the return of the refugees except those, who "voluntarily" left the country. Previously, Bhutan only agreed to accept those who were forcibly evicted.

Aug 14, 1997: On the initiative of the *Bhutan Solidarity* many Members of Parliament and representatives of the mass organization staged a overnight Dharna at the gate of Tihar jail in New Delhi to demand release of Bhutan's UFD leader Dorji and other Bhutanese political prisoners in Indian jails. George Fernandez, Nitish Kumar, Brahmanand Mandal, Anand Mohan Singh, Mahendra Baitha, Suresh Prabhu, Ratna Bahadur Rai, Tamang Dawa Lama, Digvijay Singh and many other prominent persons participated in the Dharna.

Dec 18, 1997: Bhutanese refugee groups and Nepal government officials urged India to persuade Bhutan to accept the Lhotshampa refugees. India responded negatively by saying that it is a bilateral issue between Nepal and Bhutan.

Jan 15, 1998: The Bhutanese government began distributing land in southern Bhutan that belonged to the Lhotshampa refugees. According to a report published by Nepal-based Federation of Human Rights Organizations of Bhutan, the land is being used to resettle some 370 families from northern Bhutan. Several hundred Bhutanese refugees demonstrated in Kathmandu to protest against the King's action.

Jan 18, 1998: A new report by Amnesty International states that political activists in Bhutan are regularly tortured and the dissenters are persecuted. More than 150 political prisoners are in custody. Most of those targeted are members of the Sarchop

ethnic group who reside in eastern areas. The Sarchops have been organizing grassroots campaigns for democratic reforms and human rights.

May 8, 1998: The United Front for Democracy in Bhutan (UFD), having lost the hopes of democratic reforms by the king, declared it's readiness to launch a revolution to overthrow Bhutan's monarchy, according to AFP.

Jun 1998: For the first time in the last 26 years, Bhutan's King Wangchuck dissolved the cabinet and appointed six new ministers. Henceforth, the cabinet will be elected and be responsible to the national assembly. The national assembly will also have wider powers including the ability to call for a no-confidence vote against the king. Such a motion if passed by two-thirds of the majority, the king would have to abdicate. Analysts indicate that the reforms might be a move to ease ethnic tensions within the country and to improve Bhutan's international image. UFD termed it as a trick of the king to divert international attention from country's pressing issues including the issue of refugees living in the camps in Nepal.

Aug 14, 1998: Nepalese officials accused Bhutan of stalling the resumption of talks regarding the Lhotshampa refugees. Formed in 1993, the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Ministerial Level Committee last met in early 1996.

1999: Limited access to television and internet services allowed. Many political prisoners released.

Jan 23, 1999: Analysts and Bhutanese refugees deny the recent newspaper reports that the Lhotshampa refugees are being trained by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) insurgents in Bhutan. ULFA is reported to have bases in Bhutan. A South Asian human rights group asserted that the Indian insurgent groups, specifically the Bodos and ULFA, were responsible for committing some of the atrocities against the Lhotshampas in southern Bhutan.

Jun 2, 1999: In Nepal, some 40,000 Lhotshampas demonstrated in the refugee camps while another 10,000 staged a hunger strike to protest the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the coronation of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The king's coronation

ceremony was the first broadcast on Bhutan's newly established television network. Previously, there were no local TV networks and the use of satellites to obtain foreign broadcasts was not allowed.

Jun 3, 1999: The Bhutan People's Party submitted a 10-point memorandum to the King calling for the establishment of a multi-party democracy within a constitutional monarchy, respect for human rights, and the return of the Lhotshampa refugees. Political parties are banned in Bhutan.

Dec 17, 1999: The King reportedly released some 200 prisoners, including Tek Nath Rizal on the National Day.

2000: The first Cyber Café in Bhutan established.

August 2001: Nepal and Bhutan held talks on the issue of repatriation of the refugees.



September 2001: R.K. Budathoki, President of the Bhutan Peoples Party murdered in Jhapa district of east Nepal.

January 2002: Assam government asserted about the presence of the camps of two groups of the ULFA militants whereas the Bhutan government had ordered the removal of the camps by the end of 2001.

December 2003: Fierce fighting reported between the Bhutanese soldiers and the ULFA militants in south Bhutan.

March 2005: Declaration by the Bhutanese king of the proposed constitution promising parliamentary democracy in Bhutan. The King also promised to subject the proposed constitution to a referendum for approval.

December 2005: King Wangchuk declared that he would abdicate the throne for the Crown Prince after the 2008 general elections.

Conclusions of the fact-finding Team

● During the last 15 years of stay in the refugee camps, the conditions of the Bhutanese refugees have gone from bad to worst.

● Plight of about 150 thousands refugees in the camps is glaring proof of the three concerned countries – Bhutan, India and Nepal – have not been able to make it an issue of common concern. The UN has confined its role to the task of only providing aid, whereas during the last ten years the issue of Bhutanese Refugees has been repeatedly knocking the doors of the UN Human Rights Commission.

● 17 rounds of talks between Nepal and Bhutan on the initiative of Nepal have remained inconsequential due to stubbornness of the Bhutanese King.

● India is not only the largest country in the South Asia but borders Bhutan and the route of refugees' returning home is through the Indian Territory. In such a situation India's neutrality has aggravated the problem. Bhutanese refugees' anger has now diverted against Indian Government from the Bhutanese King.

● The endurance of Bhutanese refugees has reached to its climax. The refugees adopting peaceful means for their right to homeland for the last 15 years are getting restive and are talking of picking up arms. This is truer in the case of about 40,000 refugees who have grown up in the camps. The success of Maoists in Nepal is also an inspiration for choosing the path of armed struggle. If they do so there would be another center of "disturbed" area in the already "disturbed" Northeast region of India. And the responsibility for this would lie with the erratic policies of India's Foreign Ministry. Not only this, it could create a Palestine-like situation in the South Asia, which shall be detrimental to the peace in India, Nepal and Bhutan.

● Stoppage of the verification of refugees has caused alarm among them. They categorically reject the American plan of dividing them into groups and settling them in phases in the US and Canada, as they find it objectionable on many grounds. They apprehend in such proposals a conspiracy by the nexus of the Bhutanese King with the US and other western countries not only to destroy their cultural identity but also to revive the slavery of feudal era.

● One pertinent question of the refugees to the propounders and the propagators of such 'generous' proposals is: "why are we being deprived of our homeland?"

● They are not so surprised at the American support to the despotic monarch of Bhutan who has been oppressing and harassing a sizable section of its population for the "offence" of demanding democracy, as they know the reality of its claim to "democratize" the world. But they are surprised at the India's firm support to the King contrary to their hopes, as they had expected that the "largest democracy of the world" would support their struggle for democratic rights. They are very angry against not only the king but also against the world powers like America and Bhutan's "democratic" neighbor India also.

They almost unanimously feel that the only solution to the issue is their repatriation to Bhutan where they can live with dignity and with their citizenship rights.

Some Questions

- ❑ Who shall be responsible if the growing discontent among the refugees precipitates into violent manifestation?
- ❑ What shall be the future of thousands of children growing in the camps in the conditions of malnutrition, ill health and are victims of gross neglect?
- ❑ What is the present state of the confiscated properties of the Bhutanese refugees?
- ❑ Is the issue of Bhutanese refugees a bilateral between Bhutan and Nepal or trilateral with India as the third party?
- ❑ Is the plan of dividing the Bhutanese refugees into small groups and settling them in different countries of the American camp not a conspiracy to disturb the socio-cultural fabric and the economic structure of Bhutar?
- ❑ Why is there no representation of the refugees in the Joint Verification Team formed for their verification?
- ❑ Why has JVT become defunct?
- ❑ Why the format of the new constitution presented by the king has no mention of the Bhutanese refugees?
- ❑ When Bhutanese refugees came to India after being chased away from Bhutan by the King's forces, the Indian government forcibly sent them to Nepal, why is it not allowing them through its territory to go back to their homes?
- ❑ Despite the intensifying gravity of the refugees' plight during the last 15 years, why has India not as yet raised this issue with the Bhutanese king?
- ❑ Why the political parties of India which claim to be the custodians of democracy and human rights have not shown any concern for the democratic and human rights of the Bhutanese refugees?
- ❑ George Fernandes, while in opposition sat on a over-night dharna outside Tihar jail in Delhi, why did he not even raise the issue when he came to power and became the Convenor of the then ruling alliance NDA?

Charter of Demand Submitted to the King of Bhutan in August 1990

Introduction

The Peoples Forum for Human Rights (PFHR) and the Student's Union of Bhutan (SUB) awaited the government's positive response to their demands for human rights until May 1990 but to no avail. On the other hand, violations of human rights through arbitrary enactment of new laws continued. As the result of government's non-response attitude, the Bhutanese people such as the Sarchops, Adivasis, Nepalese, Doyas, Brokpas, Tibetans, Kheng even Ngalongs were compelled to organise themselves and form the Bhutan People's Party (BPP).

Thus, a political organisation referred to as Bhutan People's Party (BPP), is being established on June 2, 1990.

Aims and Objectives

The broad aims and objectives of the Party are as follows:

- (1) to evolve a parliamentary form of government with provision of a multiparty political set up;
- (2) to fight against violations of human rights by the Government of Bhutan;
- (3) to establish 'rule of law' under a written constitution guaranteeing socio-economic-cultural-political rights to all the Bhutanese citizens;
- (4) to establish an independent judiciary and introduce modern and professional legal practices in the Kingdom; and
- (5) to amend all the anti-people and anti-human rights laws and bylaws.

Demands

1. Unconditional Release of Political Prisoners

We demand the unconditional release of all prisoners arrested from within and outside Bhutan.

2. Change of Absolute Monarchy to Constitutional Monarchy

We demand constitutional monarchy in place of the present system of absolute monarchy. The parliamentary system of government with multiparty provision must be introduced with a view to electing a government responsible to the legislature.

3. Reform in the Judiciary

Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that "all are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law".

We demand a completely new and independent judiciary with professional judges who impart justice without distinction of race, religion, wealth, social status or political influence. The system of representation by attorney and lawyers must be introduced. The present system of one-man judgement must be abolished.

4. Amendment to the Citizenship Act

The baseless cutoff year should be amended and implicit biases inherent in the present system be removed. However, infiltration of illegal immigrants must be restricted and people must be left free to marry persons of their choice.

5. Right to Culture, Dress, Language and Script

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 grants an individual the freedom to one's own culture, dress, religion, language and script. The government of Bhutan must grant the right to culture, dress, language and script to all the Bhutanese citizens.

6. Freedom of Religion

We demand freedom to profess and practice religion of one's choice. The state shall have no religion and it shall not allow religious or cultural instructions in governmental institutions nor shall the state fund be used for any religious body. Bhutan should be secular state, meaning "equal respect for all religions" and the separation of the state from religion.

7. Freedom of Press, Speech and Expression

We demand the right to express one's convictions and opinions freely through speech, writing, painting, picture, or any other modes of expressions. We demand freedom of the press.

8. Freedom of Formation of Unions, Associations and Political Parties

We demand the right to form associations, unions and political parties.

9. Freedom of Trade and Occupation

We demand the right to practice any profession or carry out any occupation, trade or business which are not illegal, immoral or dangerous to the health and welfare of the people.

10. Right to Equitable Distribution of Wealth and Funds

We demand equitable distribution of wealth and development funds in all areas of Bhutan without distinction on grounds of race, religion, language and culture.

11. Right to Equality of Opportunities in Matters of Public Employment

We demand equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state.

12. Right to Education

We demand the right to education in any field and upto any level as per one's ability and choice. There must be no discrimination in respect of opportunities for training, scholarship and admission on grounds of race, religion, language and culture.

13. Right against Exploitation

We demand the abolition of the present system of forced labour such as National Work Force, Goongda Woola, Septolemi etc. through which women, children and old people are also exploited.

R. K. Budathoki
President
Bhutan Peoples Party (BPP)

Appendix — 2

Circular of Dago Tshering, Deputy Home Minister dated August 7, 1990.



ཡིག་ལང་

ནང་སྤྱི་ལཱ་ཁག་།

བཀྲིས་ཚེས་རྗེས་།

གཞུང་གི་སྤྱི་ལཱ་ཁག་།
17 August 1990

NOTIFICATION

It has come to the government's notice that a large number of Southern Bhutanese people have left the country to join forces with the ngolops. You are hereby instructed to immediately inform all the gups, DYT members and the general public in your dzongkhag that any Bhutanese national leaving the country to assist and help the anti-nationals shall no longer be considered as a Bhutanese citizen. It must also be made very clear that such people's family members living under the same household will also be held fully responsible and forfeit their citizenship.

I would like to assure you that the government is fully aware of the recent developments and the situation in southern Bhutan. The Home Ministry will extend all possible assistance to the concerned dzongkhags to look after the security and well-being of both the government servants and the general public.

Dago Tshering
Deputy Home Minister

Dzongdag, Samchi
Dzongdag, Chukha (for Phuntsholing Dungkhag)
Dzongdag, Sarubhang
Dzongdag, Chirang
Dzongdag, Dagana
Dzongdag, Samdrupjongkhar

Appendix — 3

Mrs. Madhumaya Bhattacharai
Lepcha Gaon
Bara

Date: 8.1.92

As per the orders of the Dasho Dunga issued to all the five block Mandals of Sibsoo dungkhag on 23-12-91 at Sibsoo dungkhag office, all such families where a member of the household has left the country are ordered to leave the kingdom immediately. Since your name is enlisted in the list of such people, you should leave the kingdom alongwith your entire family who are under thram no.18 and house no.38 within 15-1-92.

Leela Prashad Sharma
Gup
Bara Gewog

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Dasho</i> | - A term used to address higher government officers |
| <i>Dungpa</i> | - Sub-divisional officer |
| <i>Mandal</i> | - Village headman |
| <i>Dungkhag</i> | - Sub-division |
| <i>Thram No.</i> | - Number assigned to land holdings |
| <i>Gup</i> | - Village headman |
| <i>Geuwog</i> | - A block consisting of several villages. |

[illegible]

Appendix — 4

English text of Letter in Nepali ordering demolition.

Royal Government of Bhutan
Dzongkhag Administration
Sarbhang Bhutan

REf: Sardzong/109/91-92/1367 Dt. January 4, 1992

To. Gup, Singay Gewag.

You are hereby notified that, although as per your report submitted to Dzongkhag office, stating that you had completed the demolition of houses of those who had absconded from the country, on my personal visit and in my assessment you have not complied to the order. I found that most of the houses were not demolished and those demolished houses were not cleared properly.

Therefore, within three days you are ordered to gather 70-80 people of your village to demolish the houses and intimate me about the same. The houses should be demolished in my presence. Treat this notice as very urgent.

Sd/-
(Kencho Dorji)
Officiating Dzongda



Royal Government of Bhutan
DZONGKHAG ADMINISTRATION
SARCHANG, BHUTAN

Ref. No. Q. 103

Date 14/1/92

ॐ
॥ श्री गुरुः ॥

[illegible]

लालमर्ल लपहीलें आल्वा, भील्लो, पलींळो
 विज विज विजया लालीया पर्व ३० दशां ३० असा
 पालीपल १८ अल्वाकुकी विजि कीली लाली या
 कार्यालया जालाई पुचना दिनु मिला अल्वा ल
 अल्वा प्री लालया (लालया) च पर्व उपविजल दूई।
 या "पलींळी" एक अलीं अल्वा अल्वा १० ३० अल्वा लाल

(ਕੰਜ਼ੀ ਰਬੀ)
ਅੰਗੀ ਮਲਿਕੁ ਤੋਬਦ।

Conclusions of the report of the fact-finding Team of Journalists that visited the Refugee Camps in Nepal in 1995

The team of journalists after interacting with a large section of people – Bhutanese refugees residing in the border areas between India and Nepal; refugee leaders in the camps; leaders and the workers of Bhutan's various political parties; human rights activists, villagers of Indo-Bhutan border, political prisoners released from the Bhutanese jails; and Bhutanese citizens living in Nepal – had arrived at following conclusions:

1. The oppressive and discriminatory rule of the Bhutanese King has made the lives of Bhutanese people in general, and southern Bhutanese in particular, miserable. Their human rights are being blatantly violated. The movement of people demanding democracy was brutally crushed. The citizenship of the participants in the pro-democracy rallies and their relatives was withdrawn and they were chased away from the country.
2. In order to project the movement of the people for democratic and human rights as the issue of citizenship and thus to present it as an ethnic issue, the king has been resorting to blatant lies and false propaganda.
3. People were coerced into signing a letter saying that they are voluntarily leaving the country on their own, whereas each and every refugee wants to return back to his/her home at any cost.
4. In the name of the Bhutanization the government imposed the culture, language and way of life of the ruling tribe on the people of Southern Bhutan – mostly of Nepalese origin – aggravated the situation.
5. The Bhutan government did not only abolish the citizenship of the agitators for democracy and their families and chased them away but also demolished their houses, set them ablaze and appropriated their property, orchards and farms.
6. There are enough documentary evidences to prove that the people banished from Bhutan have been living there for generations and are the bonafide citizens of that country.
7. In creating the refugees' problem in Nepal along with Bhutan, India is also equally responsible. India borders Bhutan and Bhutanese citizens entered India after being chased away from there and tried to take refuge in Assam and West Bengal. Assam Government refused them aid and protection. In many cases they were chased back to Bhutan across the border. They reached Nepal after seeing no ray of hope in India. Many were bundled into Police trucks and dumped across the border in Nepal. India is a signatory to the 1948 Charter of Human Rights and to provide shelter and protection to these political refugees was the moral responsibility of India.

Team's Appeal to the Indian People and the Indian Government:

1. The people expelled from Bhutan and currently living in India should be provided with immediate relief and protection. They should also be immediately granted refugee status so that they can avail the assistance from the UNHCR and other international agencies.
2. India has Peace and Friendship Treaty with Bhutan, hence it should ask Bhutanese government for early and just solution of the problem. As compared to over 90 crores population of India, the number of over 150 thousands refugees appears negligible, but it is a sizable proportion of Bhutan's population.
3. The issue of the refugees should not be treated as bilateral between Bhutan and Nepal but India should actively intervene and make it a trilateral issue. Given its standing in the South Asia, India could play a meaningful role in the resolution of the issue.
4. The oppressive, inhuman and brutal measures adopted to crush the peaceful movement for democracy in a neighboring country must be condemned in no-uncertain terms but the India's silence and "neutrality" is surprising.
5. India should keep in mind that the issue of refugees apart for needing humanitarian consideration is also linked to regions adjacent to India's sensitive area. If not resolved, in coming days it may create problems for the peace and harmony in India.

Group for International Solidarity – Nepal (GRINSO – Nepal)

GRINSO-Nepal was founded on April 9, 1990 by a group of committed and enthusiastic people of high social profile dedicated to the peaceful neighborhood, equitable social system and dignified life for all people around the globe and within the country. The **Group for International Solidarity** (GRINSO –Nepal) established with the objectives of peace, social justice and promotion, protection and preservation of human rights it has become a leading human rights organization of the country. It has been working as the secretariat of the **South Asian people's Solidarity (SAPS)** – a coalition of the human rights organizations of Nepal and other South Asian countries. GRINSO-Nepal conceptualizes the human rights as indivisible, inter-dependent and universal, which can be well protected in a democratic setup only. It recognizes tremendous strength of group-action, therefore it aims to work at national, regional and global level with the organizations committed to similar causes. It is committed to be an active partner in the formal/informal global networking for the human rights. GRINSO-Nepal has been honored with the Special Consultative status with ECOSOC of the United Nations on 31 July 1998.

With its headquarters in Kathmandu, **GRINSO – Nepal** has its regional centers at Biratnagar, Hetauda, Dhangadi in the eastern, central and far- western corners of Nepal respectively. It has its special training center at Pratappur. The center is called the "Liberation Academy (LA)" and situated in far-western region in Pratappur, Kailali to cover Central and Far Western regions. It works as a resource centre for human rights and empowerment of the indigenous people, Dalits and backwards since its establishment in 1995. Since late 1999 till this year UNICEF and ILO supported its program for the rehabilitation of the bonded labor. During the armed conflict the centre was target of both – the Nepalese army and the Maoists and on April 2002 their Center was set on fire. Most of the training materials, library and other goods were burnt and the building partially damaged. The total loss estimated by a human rights fact finding mission was about Rs.13 million (Nepal Rs.)

From the very beginning **GRINSO – Nepal** has been concerned with the issue of Bhutanese refugees and has jointly with the **Bhutan Solidarity** (India) organized many programs on the issue.

