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# HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE



## BHUTAN

### THE DRAGON BITES ITS TAIL

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## MAIL

### Don't Blame the Bahuns

The writer of "Bahunvada: Myth or Reality" (May/June 1992) unconvincingly conjures frightening conclusions for the future of Nepal. Although it is unfortunately true that Bahuns have dominated Nepali society for a long time, and have not contributed much to its upliftment, the trend of Bahun domination is bound to end as more and more people from other castes are educated.

However, this is a social rather than a political problem and the people from other castes should not harbour hatred towards the Bahuns for their history. Every Nepali in his right mind would surely agree that education about the equality of human beings and the need to remove caste barriers will help to develop Nepal, whereas inciting caste and communal hatred among its various tribes is counterproductive. Nepalis can ill afford to have a confrontational attitude towards each other at this crucial stage.

*Parbatee Jaisi  
Aizawl, Mizoram*

### Anti-Democratic Movements

With reference to your issue on ethnicity, let me share with you some thoughts that I presented before a political science conference in Kathmandu in June.

In India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, ethnic separatist movements represent the failure of the post-colonial state to consolidate itself as a 'nation-state'. The ethnic conflicts, meanwhile, are sources of powerful anti-democratic social movements in the contemporary world. Unlike anti-colonialist nationalism, ethnic nationalism today is a reaction to the failure of all varieties of both capitalism and socialism. However, ethnic nationalism is no substitute for either failed capitalism or failed socialism. It is merely a desperate response to the failures of those two politico-economic models.

The present phase of heightened integration of South Asian economies with international capital and the world market is likely to intensify the most reactionary

tendencies of nationalism in the region. The hatred towards capitalism's failures will generate still more narrowly nationalistic responses to international capital. In Sri Lanka, for example, Sinhala nationalism has already entered a phase of national parochialism and xenophobia of fundamental dimensions.

As far as South Asia is concerned, the Left-led class struggle never projected its political goal towards territorial disintegration of the modern state. On the contrary, it accepted as a political reality the modern state and its territorial boundaries. The starting boundaries of ethnic nationalism, in contrast, is the rejection of the very constitution of the post-colonial state. While the socialist project stood for the progress of society, ethno-nationalist projects turn their back to all achievements of democracy and civil society. One political dilemma in South Asia today is that the class struggle is subsumed by ethno-nationalist struggles without progressive economic or political content.

Whether one likes it or not, ethnic conflicts have altered the agenda of political change in our societies. For example, the question of democracy in South Asia has, until recently, been posed in terms of opposing the authoritarian state and the authoritarian tendencies of regimes. But now, in all the multi-ethnic societies of South Asia, the task of democratic reforms has assumed a new dimension; it presupposes how to reform the state in a new model where political power is shared among different ethnic communities. In short, ethnic peace and democracy are closely intertwined in today's South Asia.

The experience of Sri Lanka as well as India points to one major lacuna in all contemporary ethno-nationalist ideologies: they are not democratic political projects. This observation is made not to salvage the discourse and practices of dominance of the State. Rather it confronts the historical failure of post-colonial nationalism to locate its political programmes and practices within the general problematique of democracy.

Broadly speaking, there have emerged

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Cover: Assamese trucks unload Bhutanese refugees at Goldhap Camp, 29 July 1992. Photograph by Laxmi Prasad Luitel, Birtamod.

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अस्त्युत्तरस्यां विशि देवतात्मा  
हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः  
पूर्वापरी तोयनिधी बगाह्य  
स्थितः पृथिव्या इव मानवण्डः

*The Abode of Gods, King of  
Mountains, Himalaya  
You bound the oceans from  
east to west*

*A northern yardstick  
To measure the Earth*

- Kalidasa (Kumara Sambhava)

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two forms of ethno-nationalism, majoritarian and minority. The minority ethnic movements have been combating the existing political order, particularly during the past decade, by means of arms. One primary political dilemma with this "critique by arms" is that it is an exercise which has not given rise to, let alone consciously projected, a vision of greater and better democracy *vis a vis* the existing state. The same dilemma appears with regard to majoritarian nationalist movements that are opposed to minority ethnic struggles. As illustrated in Indian and Sri Lankan experience, the majoritarian nationalism has stood for making the state more repressive and authoritarian in its confrontation with minority movements.

With regard to minority ethnic movements which have been practicing the armed struggle for independence/autonomy during most of the decade, in areas where they have emerged as quasi-states having large civilian populations under their control, they have displayed no moral, ideological or political reservations about destroying even the bare essentials of bourgeois democracy. The recent political history of Sri Lanka's Northeast under the control of contending Tamil militant groups is amply illustrative of the ethno-nationalist politics of returning to pre-bourgeois democratic practices of political power. Thus, one cannot resist the general conclusion that nationalist movements in South Asia today are social movements without democratic content.

Jayadeva Uyangoda, Lecturer  
University of Colombo  
Colombo

## Truth Denied

In his article "How to Tend This Garden?" (May/June 1992), Prayag Raj Sharma maintains that "modern states are based on the newer values of democracy, minority rights, equality and justice. These novel and external notion of governance entered Nepal during the 1951 anti-Rana revolution". He maintains silence on the role played by the 50,000 ex-Gurkha soldiers from among the *janajati* hill

## Note to Subscribers

North American subscribers please note the new subscription address. In Europe, those who have been serviced by Ludwig DeBuck note that he is no longer with HIMAL. Please write directly to our Lalitpur address until further notice. We wish to inform foreign subscribers that we have taken specific steps to enhance prompt and secure delivery of HIMAL. Do write to us if the magazine continues to arrive late and/or damaged.

ethnic groups who fought the decisive battle against the despotic Rana regime. But who enjoyed the benefits of democracy? Obviously, the Nepali Congress, to be more precise, the Bahuns, Thakuris and Chhetris, the upper-strata Hindus.

Because the Hindu ruling elite realised that the martial ethnic groups could well shake the earth beneath them with their unity of purpose, a shrewd and deliberate scheme was devised to fill the key positions in government, army, police, corporations and foreign service with high-caste Hindus. This policy of Hinduistic monopolisation became more apparent during the Panchayat rule and is being faithfully nurtured by the present-day so-called democratic government, which is of the bahuns and for the bahuns. Both the imposition of the "Hindu Kingdom" clause in the new Constitution and the latest proposals to impose Sanskrit education up to secondary level show the insensitivity of Bahuns towards the Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic majority. Is this not naked Bahunvada, or Brahminism.

The relentless leadership of the Hindu Gorkha and Ranas over the past 200 years was unable to diminish the self-awareness of the indigenous majority. On the contrary, the Hindu hegemony in the national life has aroused aversion for the Bahuns (and the Hindus generally) everywhere in the country.

The idea of the a Nepali state, Nepaliness and national integration have merely served to suppress the ethnic elements. Because Nepal is a multi-cultural nation, it cannot be developed under the tutelage of the Hindus. Sharma fails to gauge the magnitude of the feelings of the ethnic groups when he writes, "Some highly ambitious spokesmen are striving to bring minority groups together on racial rather than ethnic grounds...the attempt is to rally a political force based on the racial distinction of being Mongoloid." Such irresponsible remarks indicate prejudiced Bahun scholarship whose hallmark is a lack of understanding of the *janajatis* and the realities of Nepali soil.

What is it that makes the Bahun community so unpopular in the mountains, hills, plains and elsewhere? Is it because many foreign anthropologists are portraying them as a "class of exploiters"? Or is it their lofty, alien demeanour?

Kamal Prakash Malla in his article has greatly elevated the image of Bahunvada and its most acknowledged device, fatalism. In vain, he painfully draws out a parallel between Newars and Bahuns, highlighting the latter's marvellous achievements. Malla has clearly come under the influence of charismatic achievement-oriented Bahuns, so much so that he occupies himself with demolishing the fatalistic theory throughout his article, though unsuccessfully.

No matter which government comes to

power, as long as it continues to be headed by Bahun-Chhetri elements there is no hope for betterment of the indigenous ethnic groups living in the mountains, hills and plains, much less the prospect of development of the country. It is now up to the sons of Manu either to reconcile with the changing realities, or to face dire consequences for their actions.

Ratan Kumar Rai  
Freelance artist  
Baluwatar, Kathmandu

### Misnomered Development

Inductive reasoning, for which Professor Bennett praises Bistaji's *Fatalism and Development*, however clever, is only as true as its initial propositions. Scientifically, the book bases itself on several flawed methodological assumptions, which thereby make the thesis suspect. Historically, it fails to differentiate between co-opted Brahmanism as an ideology of oppression (which served so well the successful capitalist expansion in India), versus the creative cultural activity springing from a blending of introduced and indigenous cultures, which gave fruit to great civilisations in South Asian history. Comparatively, Bista explains processes as though they are unique to Nepal, while the same sort of fatalism and Brahmanism (in a generic sense of creating a religion of production and development and an arrogant, elitist, unproductive, bureaucratic caste) crops up within both deindustrialised "developing" countries and industrialised ones: be it "apparatchik", "yuppie" business school graduate, "karmacharis" or "expert".

Before isolating Nepal as a unique case, the question must address the general process of industrialisation and development. Why has development led to bottomless national debt (including in the USA) and ruined the lives and environments of peoples in developing countries of every continent, Soviet or democratic? Why do citizens confront stereotypically unresponsive bureaucracies, which nevertheless respond so well to the incursions of multinational corporations, wherever there is 'development'? (And, in comparison, just try getting responsive, courteous service from a bureaucratic office in the USA or other 'developed' country if you are Black, Chicano, Native American or foreign guest worker or from a UN, World Bank, or embassy office here in Nepal if you are female or wear the dusty, torn clothes of a villager.)

With these questions in mind, those foreign 'experts' who admire Bista's Fatalism and Development would be well advised to read Graham Hancock's book, *The Lords of Poverty: The Freewheeling Lifestyles, Power, Prestige and Corruption of the Multi-billion*

*Dollar Aid Business* (London), before "they remove the lice from the Nepalese bureaucrat's shoulder without removing the elephant from their own." If these experts are fed up with Nepal's bureaucracy, they had better ask who created it (in their own image) through sustained foreign aid, decade after decade, despite deficit budgeting, essentially no accountability and crass flattery and *chakari* that even the most naive person (to say nothing of over-specialised 'experts') should have been able to see through (if they did not have ulterior motives, that is). What can be more fatalistic than sustaining the flow of foreign aid to ruling classes of landlords, money lenders, merchants, religious and secular intelligentsia, and their bureaucracy and NGOs, which exhibit no substantial interest in helping 18 million rural producers crawl from beneath their own feet (in the form of rural debt, unfair markets, rents, unjust laws, unequal distribution, a disgraceful school system, and so on)? What can be more fatalistic than introducing project after project and throwing one euphemism after another - 'integrated development', 'decentralisation', 'basic needs', 'user group', 'health for all', 'democracy', 'human rights' - at villagers with no effective accountability demanded by the donors, no substantial communication with, participation of, or accountability to the beneficiaries, and a demonstrated lack of

### Kathmandu 2010

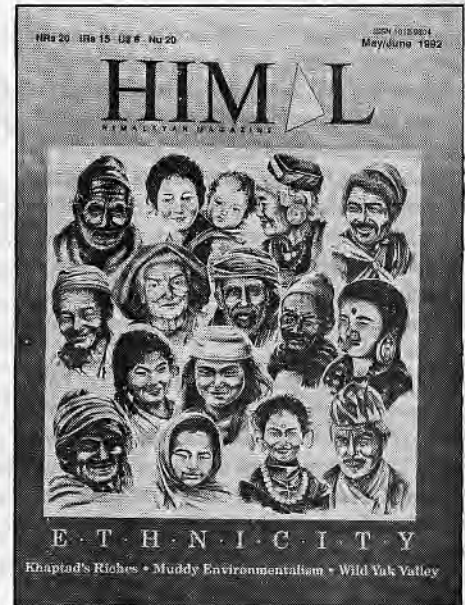
Difficult land stretch torn to  
Unmathematical pieces — walls, gates,  
Houses, vegetables, trees, flowers, chicken,  
Cows, dogs, gutter, drive —  
Unshapely fold-outs lay like a delicate  
Thing of beauty in Kathmandu 2010

From the window falls human sound  
As prickly as thistle on the street  
"Christ! who piled up bricks along  
My wall? Bloody idiot!"  
To the window reaches drain-stench  
And in the lavish room the revolting  
odor of human bodies and pets

Further up into narrow-town system  
Men of age pace up and down  
Unwanted lanes, roads and squares  
Like those on catch-as-catch-can living

Arteries bustle east-west, north-south  
— oxen, cars, trash, dogs, rickshaws,  
Blue-collars, vendors, cows, mo-bikes,  
Bicycles, cats, tough-bargaining and hot sun!

Pradeep S. Rana  
Kathmandu



effectiveness in terms of the stated aims? What can be more fatalistic than cruelly squashing efforts of oppressed groups trying to organise themselves to confront this very situation that Bista decries?

How have aid and 'development' been effective? Aid has created ruling classes which, dressing themselves in the garb of self-satisfied religiosity and nationalism, have committed themselves to donor values and interests. It has transformed rural communities into producers of underpaid, politically powerless sharecroppers and coolie laborers for plantations, carpet factories, hotels and brothels, and so forth. These same hard-working labourers do not have the luxury of the cynical nationalist and ethnic pretensions of their usurpers, since many are forced to work their lives in foreign countries. Aid has also succeeded in opening up non-human resources such as water and forests to exploitation by multinational interests, placed foreign debt and inflation on the heads of the people, shifted distribution of foodstuffs from villages to urban markets controlled by powerful interests, and created modern military forces and political structures to make sure that it stays this way.

Since the foreign aid 'experts' are the beneficiaries of much of the largesse of aid in the form of salaries which, even by their own national standards, are grossly bloated, it is no surprise that they keep on writing reams of substandard reports encouraging the process to continue, even if they change the name now and then. *Lords of Poverty* should lead Tom Laird to suggest firing half the bureaucrats and technocrats of the development agencies and organisations who dwarf the Nepal bureaucracy in waste, corruption and greed.

Short of withdrawing foreign aid (a good idea, since the rulers, soldiers and bureaucrats

would once again be made accountable to the urgent cries of their own people), the Nepal bureaucracy can be made answerable to the people through encouraging the creation and nurture of strong, participatory grass roots organisations by the poor villagers and urban workers themselves (not through this NGO farce). They must create elected, recallable committees and councils that work closely with the bureaucrats and local governments, to whom they are accountable and have open access to their books.

This is being done by the Workers Party in Brazil though an initiative that comes from these grass roots organisations on which the party is based, not from donors or government 'leaders'. And it will be done by the people of Nepal as their patience finally gives out. If experts and agencies cannot make a constructive contribution, I only ask that they at least withhold funds from attempts to co-opt and squash the effort, as they have failed to do so often in the past. The dividends — human, material, environmental, spiritual — to all humanity will far outweigh short-run costs to present short-sighted dominating interests.

Stephen Mikesell  
PO Box 380, Kathmandu

### Personal Faith and Public Doctrine

Both Dor Bahadur Bista in *Fatalism and Development* and his critics seem to share a common failure to distinguish between belief in fatalism and the function in society of fatalistic doctrine. If I may make a generalisation based on my particular experiences, it would be that Nepalis seem to be profoundly cynical about religious teaching. If you ask, "Did this happen because of 'karma'?", the most positive answer you can get is something like, "I dunno, I guess so". The exception to this is provided by men who earn their living by teaching religion and performing rituals.

An individual's religious belief is a complex mix of unexamined assumptions, conscious reflection and personal experience of the holy. It cannot be evaluated on the basis of public statements, and certainly cannot be inferred from economic or political actions. A religious doctrine, on the other hand, is public property and can be used to achieve political and economic ends in the public sphere.

Do individuals' religious values influence the development of their nation? What does Hinduism teach about the importance of working to change history? Must one abandon Hindu beliefs to become "modern"? These are important questions that remain to be addressed seriously before the debate about fatalism and development can progress any further.

Bista's book will be helpful to the extent that it demystifies the present socio-economic

structure in Nepal. It will be unhelpful to the extent that it increases the confusion between personal faith and public doctrine.

Nancy Molin  
Galyang Bazaar,  
Syangja District, Nepal

### Prickly Customer

Loathe though I am to impute sharp business practices to a respected magazine, I have to report that not a whiff of a memory of a hint of



*Himal* has crossed my threshold since I forked over the price of my annual subscription late last annum.

Even as I write these words, I see the editor wave a languid disdainful hand and dismiss my snivelling with rejection on the order of "...After all, who is this whimpering complainant but a skinny, feeble,

baldheaded, quondam imperialist whose threats are as hollow as his physique..."

You may be right, of course. However, be warned. I have POWERFUL friends. (And we will make no mention — for now — of the winsome Durga and the soft-eyed Kali.)



I trust the non-arrival of *Himal* is the result of a bureaucratic cockup and not of some disaster that has befallen *Himal*.

Jeremy Legatt  
Dallas, Texas  
USA

### Archetype, not Stereotype

When I first heard of the publication of *Fatalism and Development* by Dor Bahadur Bista, I conjured up an image of the author — grey, smiling, polite and pragmatic man, travelling widely by himself or as an aide to Western anthropologists of some repute to derive inspiration and data for his works. When I finally got a chance to read the book, I

found the author and the book not very dissimilar: it is also grey, pragmatic and clever. The book is as unambiguous as the man himself. A meticulously bald statement by a meticulous scholar-merchant.

I was spurred to go through the book critically, not merely by its tendentious title but also because of the chorus of praise it stimulated in Kathmandu's diplomatic circles and among its politicised, ethnically over-conscious citizens. And, while reading the book, I also followed the heated debate it generated in *Himal* and other journals. So far, every foreign reviewer has romanticised *Fatalism and Development*, while reaction from native critics has been putting the book in its right place.

At times, Western scholars undertake to examine the historical and sociological structure of Nepal with some predilection that clouds rather than clarifies. And some Nepali scholars seem to be attracted by them. The reasons could be anything — British rule in the subcontinent, sophistication of language and methodology of Western researchers, or the psychological faith that scholars from industrialised societies can never go wrong. The substance of nine out of ten studies is that high-caste Hindus are the oppressors and the remaining hapless citizens are the oppressed.

Bista does not seem uninfluenced by the Western tradition of Nepal-touring sociologists and anthropologists. He moves around the circumference of Nepali society and its structures — education, government, development, politics and some debatable patches of history and religion — suggesting an unwillingness to go to the centre where he in all probability, might have got lost.

To summarise Bista's central thesis in the book: the culture of fatalism is unique to Nepal, but was not a part of Nepal's world view before the arrival of high-caste Hindus (especially Brahmins) from India; Nepal's development is arrested because of its absolute belief in fate or Karma; education here is an end in itself and not an instrument for development; fatalism obstructs the process of democratisation; to have a son in the family is necessary among high-caste Hindus and the father symbolises the ultimate in achievement; Nepali society is ascriptive and Nepalis do not plan for the future; family planning has been less effective among high-caste Hindus than among low caste and non-caste ethnic people in rural Nepal; most people live in the present and are principally consummatory in their orientation than instrumental.

How on earth can a man talk reasonably of Brahminism without going back to its roots — the sublime vision and practice of the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and other systems of Hindu philosophy, the whole subterranean world from where the exaltation

or deviation of the great ideal flowed?

Fatalism and development is too serious a subject for mere hypothetical speculation. And speculation should not be presented as anthropology. In his effort to make periphery the surrogate for the centre, Bista has missed much of the validity of his points. Bista's methodology for the most part empowers him to state platitudes about fatalism, but the attitudes and habits he ascribes to Nepal can be found in all the peoples of the world with a mythology or cultural history of their own.

Bista says the high-caste Nepali child is bound for a life of fatalism through a ceremony on the sixth day of birth. But this ritual is also common in India and a similar ceremony was practiced in China before Mao Zedong himself assumed the role of Fate. The preference for male children is actually widespread throughout the world, including Western societies.

Bista's two observations, "In Nepal education is an end in itself" and "Nepalis live in the present", are the falsest (if I may coin a word) of all. Education was an end in itself in the highly developed ancient civilisations of India, China, Egypt and Greece. And living in the present is the hardest of things — only a Buddha, a Lao-Tsu, a Socrates or a Jesus could live in the present. Further, the concepts of *chakari* and *afno manche* vary from place to place, but are present in all human societies. The only difference is the degree of sophistication of the *chakari* culture.

As for "planning for the future", normal humans like Bista and I incessantly swing between the past and the future. The present bores us terribly, past memories and future hopes make our existence bearable. Living in the present is a state of no-mind, a pure consciousness transcending time and space.

Among the most memorable reviews of *Fatalism* I have read is the one by Thomas Laird (Mar/Apr 1992). Laird says it "is the single most important book ever written by a Nepali. I can say this with a straight face since so far as we know the *Shakya* sage never wrote a book". This is unutterable, unwriteable absurdity. If Laird were in a Communist or radical Islamic regime, such blasphemy might even be punishable with a *fatwa*.

Another review in *Himal* (Jan/Feb 1992) by Anup Pahari says: "In the guise of developing analytical generalisations, Bista provides a highly simplistic, biased and untenable framework for the study of the relationship between society, culture and economic development in the Nepali context".

The next issue of *Himal* (May/June 1992) drew a scathing rebuttal from Edward M. Bennett: "Pahari even suggests that the book is dangerous. Bista's book, which is concerned with the problem of persistence and change provides hope and challenge to transform

Nepali society for more positive development".

In *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* (CNAS Vol 17 No 1) Dilli R. Dahal says: "The book is the product of a false framework of interpretation and only serves to increase the frustration and misunderstanding of the majority. The book fails to build a basis for scientific generalisation".

On Nepal's anthropologically virgin soil Bista, with his congenital sense of worldly success, has achieved the stature of one with an infinite capacity to impress a block of people engaged directly or indirectly in the running of the nation. He did it for the past 40 years, and now he is acting out his old role in a new theatre with some change in make-up and direction. The audience is still more or less the same — power-holders and foreign inquisitives. His genius is in ascribing customs, habits and beliefs — common also to other societies — to Nepal as if they were Nepal's singular heritage.

Bista's discovery that Brahmins have made Nepalis fatalists, irresponsible to development, caste-respecting and backward, is misuse of scholarship. Bista has confused the stereotype for the archetype.

Durga Prasad Bhandari  
Tribhuvan University  
Kathmandu



### Mistaken Coverage

We were impressed by the writings of Harka Gurung and Parshuram Tamang and the information on Nepal's ethnic groups, politics and history that they contained (May/June 1992). You have succeeded in letting the world know of the traditions that have played a role in Nepal since ancient times.

An example of the common insensitivity towards the different hill communities is illustrated by the accompanying postcard, produced by the Cottage Industries Handicrafts Emporium Ltd., Kathmandu. The girl is identified as a "Magar Girl from Western Nepal", whereas she is clearly a Tamang. Her dress shows the woman to be from Shertang Village, Dhading District, west of Kathmandu. The *lungi* with black border is known in Tamang as *Shyama*. The waist belt is known as *fuki*. The shawl which, uniquely, is crossed over the front and covers the back is a *gya*. The traditional handloom that weaves the cloth is the *thara* or *chhyala*.

Ajit Man Tamang,  
Trisuli  
Sova Lama (Ghising)  
Kathmandu

### The Trouble with ICIMOD

May I congratulate Shri Bijaya Lal Shrestha (I do not know him) on his honest, realistic, transparent, and balanced article, "Promises To Keep At ICIMOD" (March/April 1992). As you invite comments and information from readers, may I offer some of mine. This letter is not meant to be critical of individuals, some of whom have been my colleagues and all of whom I respect.

First, what Shrestha called the "India factor" was only a more pronounced and unfortunate manifestation of the inter-governmental factors in the region, which were apparent as early as 1975 at the Kathmandu UNESCO conference and certainly at the time of the Centre's inauguration in 1983 and later. The "India Factor" is a matter which I, as an Indian citizen, regret. But it is also a fact that a few senior ICIMOD people at the time did not realise that you cannot solve a problem if you become a part of the problem. The time called for the qualities of Shiva, holding the poison in his throat, which I then conveyed to two of them. It was then, as later, a time for organisational statesmanship.

Some years later, knowing of ICIMOD's regional problems, I made two suggestions to Rosser, in a personal capacity as a friend of the institution, which some of us had given a few years of our lives to help promote. The first was to get the Himalayan ecodevelopment problems recognised by SAARC, of which all the Himalayan governments were members. Moreover, floods, food, and power were major concerns of these governments. Rosser sent me a telegram inviting me to come to Kathmandu. Commitments prevented me from doing so and I do not know if he or the Board followed up my suggestion to lift the problem and ICIMOD to a higher level of international recognition and understanding.

The second suggestion was to lift

ICIMOD from being a publishing outfit to a recognised influence on the eco-development policy-making by these Himalayan governments; especially in development from village and sub-catchment upwards, with the help of village communities managing their local biomass and water resources; and with these governments sharing the results of regional research and experience. I am unaware of any follow-up or results, but Shrestha's article bears the impression that ICIMOD is still in its publishing *avatar*, with human resources development as an important activity. Was this failure of corporate environment management a reflection of narrow specialist minds unwilling to engage with the real political world?

Another very important problem raised by the article, and one to be expected from day one, was in the nature of an inter-governmental Board with no independent professional people of status on it. To be fair to the post-1983 ICIMOD staff, the seed of this problem lay in the formative years of the idea, way back in 1974-75. My recollection is that there were two schools of thought, mostly close to donor governmental (that is, intergovernmental) foundations and support. With the money bags of governments, this school was dominant. The other non-official school was sceptical of a purely intergovernmental body, but had no other option. Ironically, both schools held the common view that the future mountain environment institute should be based on the best that scientific professionalism would offer on ecodevelopment. What the dominant official school never saw then or later, was that governments especially in this part of the world, only know how to run organisations through bureaucracies. As a reaction, it is now interesting to read of revised thoughts, with a professional Board of Trustees, and a Support Group of donors. It sounds too simplistic a response.

For the future, let us all, especially Western donor governments, recognise the strong *sirkari* culture in this part of the world as a reality. It has fouled relations between governments and their 'autonomous' public sectors. In the matter of professional 'autonomy', there is something to be learnt from the International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs), in terms of their constitutions, and their relations with host and other governments.

The Chairman and Board must consider the management of their corporate environment, political and non-political, as a primary concern. SAARC involvement may be desirable. The future management will have to be organisational statesmen as well as fund-raisers. Governments must be able to see the

value of ICIMOD in tangible terms, as they have in the case of the IARCs. Important as they are, training and publications are not considered as problem-solving approaches by most governments of the region.

If ICIMOD expects governments and hill farmers to change, it must first change itself. If it plans to address itself to the social dynamics of village communities, let it first address its own social dynamics in its own environments, external and internal. That calls for really big-minded people.

It is a matter of regret that those of us who initiated the ICIMOD-type organisation as early as 1974-75, were not consulted by ICIMOD's constitution and organisation makers, before or after the inauguration in 1983. The choice of Director must, of course, rest with the Board. Certainty and self-righteousness are dangerous bedfellows in any new learning experience in a new environment, in an old continent in the painful throes of change from village to capital.

A.D. Moddie  
Central Himalayan Environment  
Association  
Sleepy Hollow, Naini Tal

### But Seriously...

Stop me if you have heard this before, but on page 100 of Jeremy Bernstein's book *In the Himalayas* (Simon and Schuster, New York 1989) I came across the following passage:

"One of the consequences of the current spat with India is that forest wood is being used to replace cooking oil. In this respect I was appalled to find in a recent edition of *Himal*, a journal devoted to the environment of the Himalayas, an advertisement for a power saw that will cut down a fully grown pine tree in five seconds!"

Bernstein is described in the blurb as "a brilliant physicist and mountaineer". He is a Professor of Physics and has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* for 27 years. So how come he was taken in by the impugned advertisement which, any reasonably informed/intelligent reader would know was a gag?

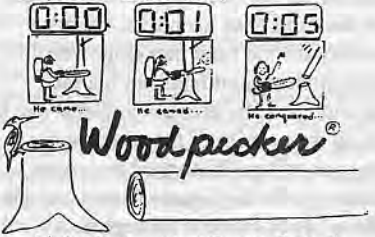
Furthermore, the cartoon appeared on your light-hearted "Abominably Yours" page, and the Yeti makes snide reference to it in the adjacent text.

The question of Bernstein's sense of humour (or the lack of it) aside, what is disturbing is



ARE YOU STILL  
USING AN AXE?

Why use stone age implements? Try our new Woodpecker® hand-held power saw, and chop down a fully grown chir pine in 5 seconds flat!



Sole Agents Marubhumi Traders Syndicate  
Treeless Boulevard, Kathmandu

that his reaction is typical of the affable concension with which Nepalis tend to be perceived abroad. Further on in the book, Bernstein describes Nepalis as "honest, attractive, resourceful and good-natured". Later, he confesses fondness for a travel guide written by two Nepali professors "since it captures the cadence of the way Nepalese often speak English".

Bernstein's failure to 'read' a not-so-subtle cartoon and the consequent indictment of *Himal* is symptomatic of the general reluctance on the part of Northern writers to credit 'natives' with intelligence, a sense for the subtle, and command over the English language. The sun set on the Empire a long time ago, but Bernstein writes on unawares. As a reader who has long appreciated the efforts made by *Himal*, I believe Bernstein owes an apology to the magazine.

Anmole Prasad  
Kalimpong

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in *Himal*. Letters should be short and to the point and may be edited.  
Mail to : PO Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal  
Fax: 977-1-521013

### Goodbye and Welcome

The past two months have seen significant changes in *Himal*. Basanta Thapa, having passed his baton to Managing Editor Suman Basnet, is now with us as a member of Himal Association, the not-for-profit group which publishes the magazine. Omar Sattaur is on board as Associate Editor. Best wishes to Arnico Panday, *Know Your Himal* columnist who leaves for Harvard. Thanks to Ludwig DeBuck and Manoj Basnet, who have patiently served as volunteer representatives these past couple of years, and welcome to Anup Pahari who has assumed responsibility for North America. Welcome also to Manisha Aryal, who joins in September as Staff Writer. Editor





Tashichho Dzong, seat of Government in Thimphu.

# The Dragon Bites its Tail

*Lhotshampas, the Nepali-speaking people of southern Bhutan, are being forcibly evicted from their country by an elite that fears demographic inundation. Such fears are understandable, but not the method of 'cultural cleansing' being applied. Gross National Happiness, which King Jigme Singye Wangchuk wishes for his subjects, seems to be in short supply today.*

by Kanak Mani Dixit

**T**ravelling east on the highway from Siliguri to Guwahati, looking north, the green of the Indian flatlands gives way to the blue hills of Bhutan. Beyond the low-lying monsoon clouds, up in the Bhutanese districts of Samchi, Chirang and Geylephug, unfolds a story of cultures in collision.

A ruling minority feels threatened that its identity is about to be swamped by a growing majority. It decides to counter this threat by a well-planned programme of depopulation. The rulers know the world well. They are astute and use every available advantage: the remoteness of their country, manipulable media, the weakness of all outsiders for 'last remaining Shangri Las', and the blessings of a giant southern neighbour that obligingly turns a blind eye.

The country is Druk Yul, land of the Thunder Dragon. The guardians of the Dzongkha language and the Drukpa Kagyu traditions of west Bhutan have decided to protect their identity, and the losers are the Nepali-speakers of the south. The large-scale suffering of the southerners - *Lhotshampas* in Dzongkha - has yet to make a mark even in the Subcontinental consciousness. The story remains largely unreported. Thimphu zealously guards its image and the little it has allowed to leak to the world media has been through the eyes of carefully vetted journalists and academics.

Many are therefore surprised to learn that Bhutan is home to communities other than the Ngalung Drukpas of the west Bhutan, and that



there are Nepali-speakers in such large numbers. Coffee-table books on Bhutan ignore the *Lhotshampas* and tourist brochures are most perfunctory. Nepali-speakers populate large stretches of the eastern Himalaya and the attitude is - if there is a problem, "they can always go back to Nepal." Drukpa Bhutan, in contrast, is felt to be worthy of cultural preservation for it is the last remaining Lamaist Mahayana Buddhist kingdom, a guardian of Tibetan traditions lost in the home country itself.

## Bhutanese Unification

In the early 1600s, when the reformist Gelugpa sect was ascendant in Tibet, monastic intrigue forced a Drukpa Kagyu monk to flee south through the Himalayan divide. Ngawang Namgyal, this charismatic and strong-willed cleric, entered a rugged and beautiful land, populated by aboriginals and earlier immigrants of the 'unreformed' *Nyingmapas*. Ngawang Namgyal was

a unifier; he is to Bhutan what Prithvi Narayan Shah is to Nepal. By 1639, he had defeated the Tibetans, consolidated the fiefdoms of the area and established himself as a theocrat whose spiritual and temporal rule would continue through successive reincarnations, known as the *Shabdrung*, into the twentieth century. The Drukpa Kagyu order, which he headed, provides the defining identity of the Kingdom of Bhutan today.

The builders of the British empire were quite willing to leave Bhutan alone as long as it made no trouble. When once in 1865 it did, the British went to war and extracted a treaty, which forced Bhutan to cede (or lease, for annual payments were made) the contiguous plains, known as the *Duars*. This was how Bhutan lost its *tarai* and today the country begins where plains meet hills.

The freedom of the *Shabdrung* system gave ample opportunity for the Bhutanese regional warlords, the *penlops*, to bicker. The British eventually decided that a centralised kingship was more in their interest. Ugen Wangchuk, fourth ancestor of the present king and *penlop* of Tongsa, in central Bhutan, was available and willing. It did not matter that the Mahayanic Buddhist traditions did not provide ideological support. With the agreement of the clergy and the nobility, Bhutan's *Shabdrung* system was packed off in December 1907. As the American political scientist and scholar of Himalayan states, Leo E. Rose, writes in *The Politics of Bhutan* (Cornell University Press, 1977), the monarchy came first, and the theocratic rationalisations for the



system were "appended" thereafter. "The Wangchuk dynasty lacked the traditional, ideological legitimation that has been so crucial to the survival of monarchies" in Nepal and Thailand.

With the Shabdrung (at least temporarily) out of the way, the kings of Bhutan began to rule in earnest, consolidating their hold on the country while walking the fine line between the Tibetans and the British. The third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, who ruled from 1952 to 1972, introduced major reforms, such as establishing a national assembly, abolishing serfdom, and beginning development programmes.

For all his sagacity, however, King Jigme Dorji was not above abetting the 1964 assassination of Jigme Palden Dorji, his friend, adviser and Prime Minister. Jigme Palden Dorji, who came from a Kalimpong-based clan of well-educated Bhutanese, had been Bhutan's liaison with the British. He was popular, worldly wise, and a threat to a monarch who had begun thinking of his dynasty.

### Nepali Settlement

The southern hills of Bhutan used to be heavily forested and malarial. A Drukpa official who served there in the mid-1950s recalls that "In those days, Drukpas were afraid to spend even one night in the south. No northerner would ever go down there, other than for brief spells during the mid-winter".

It was the Dorji family of Kalimpong that opened these southern hills to Nepali immigration, encouraged by the British who were employing Nepalis in their tea gardens in nearby Darjeeling. The settlement and administration of southern Bhutan was carried out through a special dispensation given to the Dorji family, first by the penlops and later by the Government. They set up a system of tax collection similar to that of Nepal at the time and engaged Nepalis as collectors, such as Gajaman Gurung, who was for long a power to reckon with in the Samchi region. A prominent family of Subbas became commissioners for Chirang, and overflow from these two regions were resettled further east in Samdrup Jonkhar under the authority of J.B. Pradhan, who was known as "Nyaulibabu".

A special affinity grew between the Dorji family and the Nepali-speaking peasantry, which

rarely came in contact with the penlops of the north. The Kalimpong-based Dorji rule, though feudocratic in character, was based on an understanding of "Nepali culture". This was not the case with Drukpas who were to come later as administrators and representatives of the Government in Thimphu.

Though it is likely that Nepalis have continually migrated from Nepal and the Indian hills eastward into Bhutan and beyond since the 1700s, most migration probably occurred between the mid 1800s (especially immediately after the Bhutan-British war of 1864) and the 1950s. Geographer Harka Gurung believes that most of the movement was not directly from Nepal, but "step-migration" from adjacent Indian regions.

For perhaps a century, because there was minimal interaction, there was little or no conflict between the Nepali-speakers of the south and the northern population of Drukpas. The only point of contact was during the payment of annual taxes to the authorities. After the assassination of Prime Minister Dorji, in 1964, Thimphu assumed direct administration of the south, assigning a special commissioner for southern Bhutan. Even under the new system, it did not seem to matter that the Nepali-speakers were 'different' from the Drukpas. After the mid-1980s, it seemed to make all the difference.

The retired Drukpa official quoted above says, "In the old days when Bhutan was poor and needed cash, we invited the Nepalis in. The money collected from Samchi was taken to the Paro penlop. From Sarbhang, Chirang, Phuntsnoling, Tala, Kali Khola, Dagana, too, money flowed into Bhutan's coffers."

Recalls the official, who like all Drukpas interviewed for this article preferred to remain anonymous: "In the old days, there were strict rules prohibiting new settlements, and the system was tight because you needed data to collect taxes. Following the assassination of Jigme Palden Dorji, the Government assumed direct control, and the system became more slack. Lhotshampa landlords, particularly in Samchi,

did bring over illegal sharecroppers to do the labour-intensive work in the plantations, but their number was not large. And this did not happen in the inner districts like Chirang."

Some scholars, however, believe firmly that Nepali migration is more recent. Tampas K. Roy Choudhury, a history professor at North Bengal University, writes that the Nepalis posed a serious demographic challenge only after fresh immigration followed the introduction of the First Plan in 1958 - "The Nepalese were mostly workers lured from Nepal or Darjeeling district by construction agents."

### The Dragon Turns

For a while, it did look as if Bhutan was the one place where cultures could meet without clash. Communal harmony seemed possible as the Drukpa Government appeared willing to allow southerners to share in the country's wealth. This blunted the ever-present political desires of a more-educated Lhotshampa population. According to Rose, the "comparatively liberal approach" towards Nepali-speakers in the 1950s and 1960s "tended to make Nepali Bhutanese unresponsive to suggestions that political organisations and agitations were required to attain community or regional objectives".

Nepali-speakers were allowed to rise up the ranks in the bureaucracy. They demanded and received citizenship in 1958, and marriage between Nepalis and Drukpas were encouraged with cash incentives. The signboards were in Dzongkha, English and Nepali, and all three were taught in schools. In 1980, the Nepali festival of Dasain was declared a national holiday. The King granted Dasain *Tika* to Nepali-speakers, who willingly wore the Bhutanese national dress of *gho* and *kira* on official occasions. The King proposed the construction of a Hindu temple in Thimphu, and encouraged the absorption of more Nepalis into the army and police.

As a memorandum presented in July to members of the Indian Parliament by refugee leaders states, "the forces of economics, politics and social sciences were already tying together, irrespective of ethnic lineages, all Bhutanese people through common interest and common destiny."

The idyll was shattered in the mid-1980s. A fuse lit in 1958, when the country began its drive for



Phuntsnoling:  
Gateway to Bhutan

### Note to Readers:

For this issue, *Himal* tried to visit Thimphu for interviews with King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, officials and others. This was not possible because an official communication to the editor stated, "your visit to Bhutan at present is not convenient to Royal Government..."

economic modernisation, eventually reached the powder keg. "Until the early 1980s the different ethnic groups in Bhutan were living in a happy atmosphere of brotherhood. But as 1985 gave way to 1986, and the Sixth Five Year Plan of Bhutan was unfolded, almost overnight the Government started to maltreat the southern Bhutanese," says D.N.S. Dhakal, an engineers and economist who is now General Secretary of the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) in exile. The King declared that the preservation of tradition and culture was a priority of the Plan. The Lhotshampas' downfall had begun.

The Lhotshampas were actually the second community to have a falling out with the Drukpa elites. In 1974, the Government had cracked down harshly on Tibetan refugees in Bhutan, ostensibly for conniving with the late King Jigme Dorji's Tibetan spouse, Yanki, to wrest the throne for her son. There was persecution, jailings, many reported deaths; the Tibetans were given the choice to either become Bhutanese citizens or "follow the Dalai Lama" and leave the country.

There had always been a certain ambiguity in Bhutan's endeavour to catch up with the world. The elites, earnest modernisers educated in Darjeeling public schools, were extending their control over a land steeped in lamaist culture. At some point, however, modernisation was bound to come up against the traditionalists' world view and the modernisers' own economic self-interest. When that time arrived, inevitably, the rulers decided that Nepali-speakers threatened not only Bhutan's socioeconomic and political status quo, but their culture, too. Ambiguity gave way to Drukpa chauvinism, spearheaded by single-minded bureaucrats who had a green signal from the King.

As educated Drukpas returned from the Indian schools and needed employment slots, the Lhotshampas were marginalised. Nepali signboards were painted over and the language banished from the classrooms of the south. Senior Nepali civil servants, those that still remain in the civil service, are now cowed and pushed aside. D.K. Chhetri, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Ambassador to Bangladesh, for example, was ousted from the prestigious Foreign Ministry and made

Secretary-General of the Bhutan Olympic Committee. The Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering apparently told him to step aside as "the situation is not right at the moment". Says a friend of Chhetri's, now a refugee, "At least he got to go to the Barcelona Olympics."

In early August 1992, Hari Chhetri, Second-Secretary in the Embassy in Kuwait and the penultimate Lhotshampa in the Foreign Service, defected straight to exile in Kathmandu rather than return and await marginalisation.

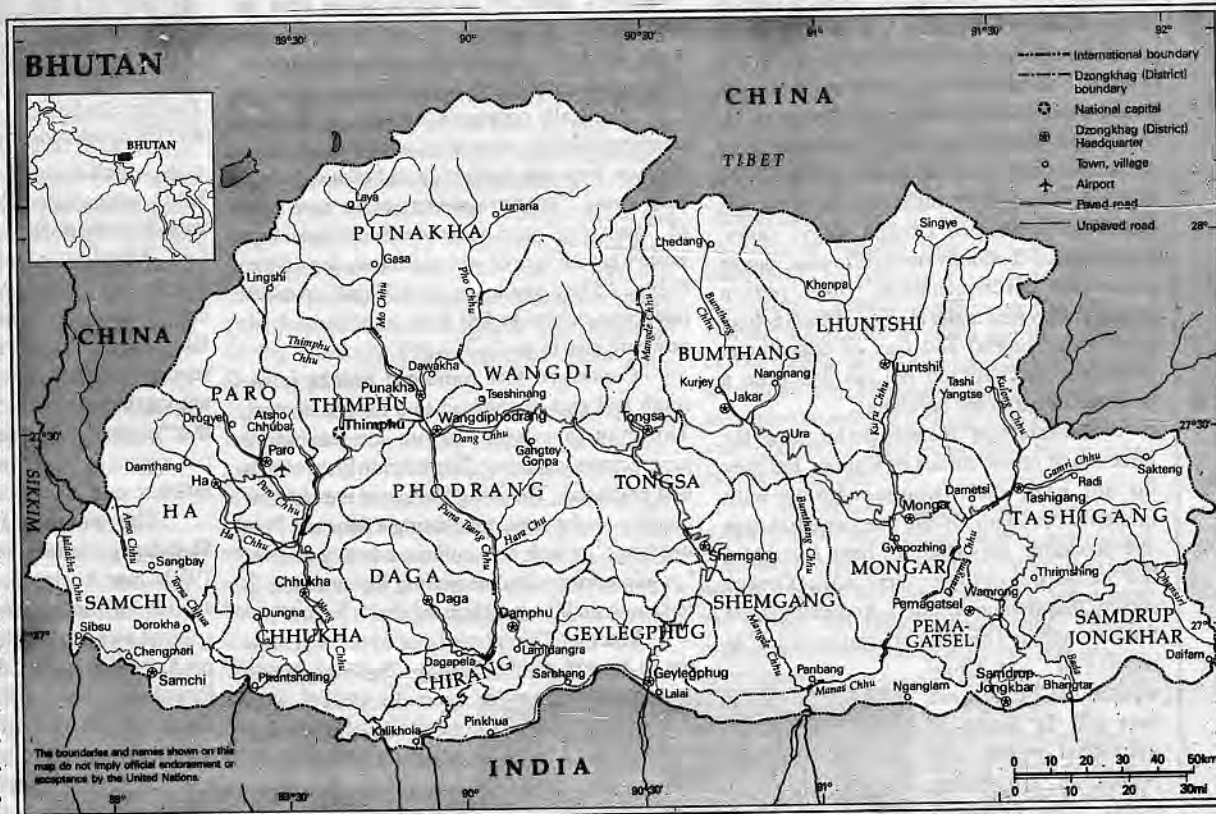
### Fear of Engulfment

The present monarch, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk told the Reuters news agency in February that Bhutan is facing "the greatest threat to its survival since the seventh century." Which was when, according to legend, Guru



Drukpas, and point constantly to Sikkim, where a Nepali majority curtailed the rule of the Chhogyal in 1973.

In January, Foreign Minister Tshering told the *Calcutta Statesman*, that if the "influx" of illegal immigrants continued, in another two decades Bhutan would be turned into "another Sikkim and Darjeeling". King Jigme told the Reuters correspondent that "in the next 10, 15 or 20 years...Bhutan will no longer be a Bhutanese nation. It will be a Nepali state...just like Sikkim."



Padma Sambhava brought Buddhism to Bhutan, flying in from Tibet on the back of a tiger. The Drukpa 'nation' was established much later, in the 17th century.

Towards the beginning of the Sixth Five Year Plan (1987-1992), it appeared that the main danger to Drukpa culture was modernisation through exposure to the outside world. Television antennae were dismantled, tourism curtailed, and the *Drig Lam Namcha* code of cultural correctness implemented. Before long, and as the Lhotshampas reacted to the code's strict implementation, the enemy became not modernisation but the Nepali-speakers of the south.

King Jigme and his senior officials all use the term "endangered species" to describe

Southern Bhutan attracted Nepalis, he said, because of its free education, free health services, higher wages, and the availability of good land for cash crops and cereals.

The refugee leaders in the camps of Jhapa, meanwhile, are incredulous that the King, his officials and gullible foreign diplomats continue to speak of an "influx" into Bhutan when there has been an "exodus" these past couple of years and whatever loopholes existed for illegal immigration were firmly sealed in early 1988.

The northerners' fear of being swamped by the Lhotshampas is real, however. When the rallies spearheaded by the Bhutan People's Party (BPP) shook the southern districts in September and October of 1990, Thimphu residents waited in dread for Lhotshampas who they thought

# The Sarchops and the Shabdrung

Although both are generically called 'Drukpas', the world knows of Bhutan through the pastoral/peasant Ngalung society of western Bhutan rather than the forest-dwelling Sarchops of the east. While there is a grey zone in the central districts of Bumthang and Tongsa, where the two mountain cultures meet, the Sarchops form a distinct community further east in the districts of Tashigang, Mongar, Pemagatset and Lhuntshi.

While the Ngalungs trace their origins to central Tibet, the Sarchops, like the people of adjacent Arunachal Pradesh, are said to be descendants of migrants from Kham in eastern Tibet. Members of Thimphu's elite emphasise that the Sarchops and Ngalungs have practically identical cultures, while Lhotshampa refugee leaders tend to emphasise the differences.

The 'Indo-Mongoloid' Sarchops have distinct dialects, local customs, dress and food habits. They are Nyingmapas whereas the Ngalungs are of the Drukpa Kagyu order. Despite their distinctiveness, however, due to historical discrimination (their region traditionally came under the rule of the Ngalung Penlop of Tongsa) and lack of educational exposure, Sarchops do not, as yet, pose a political threat to the Ngalungs.

The Sarchops' is easily the largest of the three major communities of Bhutan, but they do not have clout commensurate with numerical strength. While marriage linkages and economic opportunities have brought a few Sarchops close to the inner circle of Drukpa society, they remain outsiders. According to Bhim Subba, a senior Thimphu official in exile, "In terms of combined wealth, the Nepalis are best off. In terms of individual wealth, the Ngalungs are doing better. The Sarchops have neither advantage." There is one Lhostampa *lynpo* (minister), for example, but no Sarchop.

There are reports that political dissatisfaction exists among educated Sarchops, and that action against occasional mini-revolts have led a number of leaders to seek shelter in Arunachal and elsewhere. There are concentrations of Sarchops in Kalimpong

and Shillong, the latter being known as "Shillongpa".

At about the time that the Nepali-speakers conducted rallies in Autumn 1992, several Sarchop leaders were reportedly jailed for having their sympathies in the south. These included Rongtong Kinley, who is now out and presently in Kathmandu, said to be contemplating joining exile politics. Even a token presence of Sarchops in opposition would give the Lhotshampas' movement a political flavour that it lacks so far because it is entirely of "Nepali ethnic" character. For the moment, other than a handful of Drukpas who have come as refugees rather than be separated from Lhotshampa spouses who have been declared "illegal", the refugee camps of Jhapa are entirely Nepali-speaking.

Politically conscious Sarchops in exile are treading carefully, says some Lhotshampa leaders, because they fear for family and clan members back home. They are also wary of the reputation of "militancy" and violence that Lhotsampa groups have acquired within Bhutan. Says Bhim Subba, "They say to us, you Nepali-speakers have somewhere to fall back on, but we have nowhere else to go."

Concerned that combined revolts in the south and east might lead to a loss of control, Thimphu has stepped up development programmes in the east. The Seventh Plan reflects that emphasis. The King has spent the last few months in the east conducting "Seventh Plan meetings", which also contain a heavy dose of "public information" regarding the situation in the south and the treachery of the "ngolops".

Much of Thimphu's fears of the Sarchops has to do with the Shabdrung. The Wangchuks

(and the British with them) had hoped that after their 1907 ascendancy to hereditary kingship, the Shabdrung system of reincarnation which began with Ngawang Namgyal would peter out. But incarnations do not follow imperial diktat. Most inconveniently, they continued to appear, and had to be dealt with — with poisonings, pushing off rooftops and strangulations. Successive kings ensured that incarnations made quick



The first Shabdrung, Ngawang Namgyal, and his current incarnation (below).

exits, which is why the Shabdrung has taken to being reincarnated further and further east, away from the power valleys of western Bhutan.

American scholar Leo E. Rose writes that the existence of Shabdrung claimants have been "a matter of continuing concern for the Bhutanese authorities" because "the reincarnation principle is still deeply ingrained" among the public. Professor A.C. Sinha agrees that "as a traditional society, the Bhutanese do not appear to be reconciled to the lapse of the institution of Zhabs-drung."

The present reincarnation of the Shabdrung was identified as a child in the mid-1950s. Nari Rustomji, the then Indian trouble-shooter of the northeast, promptly had him spirited away to save him from the fate of his predecessors. Today, the Shabdrung resides at Rewalsar (known to Drukpas as Chhopema), north of Manali in Himachal Pradesh, reportedly under Indian Government security.

Drukpas, mostly Sarchops, regularly ride the Assam Mail to Delhi and arrive to stay at the Bhutanese Embassy guest lodgings. They then surreptitiously disappear for a few days as they make the bus trip to and from Manali.

Some feel that the Shabdrung is a serious threat to Thimphu's rulers, not least because of the sometimes grudging respect he commands from all ethnicities. India, too, seems to regard him as an option to use in the unlikely event that the monarchy faces total collapse.

One refugee leader even proposes a "constitutional theocracy" under the Shabdrung as one option to pursue. According to Sinha, however, the Shabdrung "is a distant and obscure threat" to the fourth Druk Gyalpo, King Jigme. If so, the Sarchops can expect to ride the Assam Mail for a long time to come.



would at any moment be marching up the highway from Phuntsholing. But are there grounds for such fear or is it paranoia?

A pamphlet prepared by political exiles in early-1988 finds the very ideal of a cultural threat laughable: "Someone learned in cultural anthropology must tell the administration that culture lives or dies by its strengths or weakness. Is Drukpa culture so fragile that it will collapse in the presence of Nepali culture? Such a fragile culture is not worth preserving."

The pamphlet goes on, "Once Chhogyal Raja of Sikkim ruled his country in a [brutal and uncivilised] way but that consequently led the country to become an Indian state. And at present the Drukpa rulers are marching the Chhogyal way." Such language could hardly have helped instill confidence in Thimphu's Samtheling Royal Palace.

North Bengal University's Roy Choudhury takes Drukpa fears more seriously. "In the last decade ethnic problems in neighbouring Sikkim and West Bengal have caused great consternation in Bhutan. Gorkha militancy in Darjeeling arose further Bhutani suspicions about Nepali settlers. They could hardly ignore the fact that the Nepalis had gradually wiped out the Lepcha and Bhutiya communities as political elements in Sikkim."

Whatever its basis, the cultural anxiety of the Drukpas has expressed itself in an unfortunate programme of depopulation. But does cultural anxiety alone explain the Government's heartlessness towards the Lhotshampas? What else accounts for the obvious insensitivity of the *dzongdas* and *dungpas* (District Administrators and sub-divisional officers) as they chase the Lhotshampas from the southern hills?

Despite the bluster of the pamphlet and intermittent militancy along the southern border, the Lhotshampas' assertion of cultural identity as "Nepalis" hardly posed a challenge to the political order. Indeed, it is plausible that Nepali-speakers saw the economic advantage of remaining 'Bhutanese' and might have lived within Drukpa strictures - as long as the regulations did not violate their deeper cultural identity of being a Bahun, a Tamang or a Rai.

There is no indication that the Nepali-speakers were, as of 1988, organising to topple the crown or invade the north. Nor does it seem probable that anyone was seriously contemplating asking India's help to "do a Sikkim" on Bhutan. It is more likely that, as the Nepali-speakers became politicised against the 1988 census exercise and implementation of the Drig Lam Namzha code, the Thimphu decision-makers decided to nip the 'Lhotshampa problem' before it even budded.

### Lhotshampa Allegiance

Excerpt from a *Kuensel* report of 30 May 1992, "While many of the people felt that it was good riddance that some of the Lhotshampas were leaving the country, others felt that there might

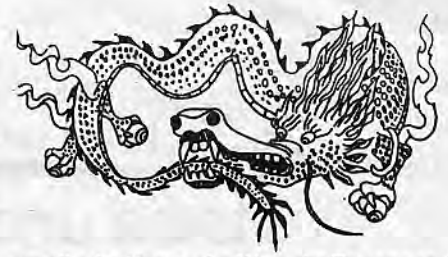
be as sinister motive for these people to leave without anyone forcing them to do so. 'I believe that these people are leaving with the sole objective of slandering the government by claiming that they are being thrown out,' said Tshongpa Tshela, the president of the Tongsa business community."

"One Nation, One People" became the rallying slogan of the Government. "Because Bhutan is small, it cannot afford to have too many divided identities." And the Ngalung Drukpa culture would provide the single identity to the populace.

For the Drukpa official searching for clues, there were probably enough to reveal where Lhotshampa loyalties lay. When the Drig Lam Namzha cultural code was implemented, for example, some Lhotshampa students at the Teacher Training Center in Paro might belt out *Sri Maan Gambhir*, the national anthem of Nepal, to taunt the Drukpa students. Even after King Jigme started his own *Dasain tika* ceremony, many Lhotshampas still waited for Radio Nepal to announce King Birendra's *tika* before starting their own ceremonies. When a village mandal, or headman, would be over-strict with Drig Lam Namzha, youths would discard their *gho* in defiance and don the Nepali *labeda surwal*.

To the Drukpa, this was a clear case of rebellion against the *Tsa-Wa-Tsum*, the King, the Kingdom and the Government ("the three elements of Bhutan"). But refugee leaders insist that by such acts the Lhotshampas are emphasising their cultural identity and not their political allegiance. "Bhutanese Nepalis, when they wait for the Nepali king's *tika* indicate their Nepali cultural roots. There is nothing political in this," says R.B. Basnet, President of BNDP.

How Bhutanese the Nepali-speakers of Bhutan are depends on how you define 'Bhutanese'. If asked to choose between being Drukpa Bhutanese and Nepali-speaking Bhutanese, the Lhotshampas would overwhelmingly opt for the latter. 'Nepali culture' implies a mix of many ethnicities, some of them subsumed under a generic Nepalinness, others retaining distinct tribal and caste identities. But the enforcement of a Drukpa identity affects



equally the Newar, the Kirat, the Tamang or the Bahun/Chhetri.

For a while Drukpa administrators appear to have toyed with the idea of divide and rule - during the census exercise in the south, for example, some *dungpas* tried to encourage the perception that the Bahun/Chhetri were monopolising leadership among the Lhotshampas.

Ratan Gazmere - an Amnesty International "Prisoner of Conscience" who was released in December 1991 - recalls Sangey Thinley, an officer of the Royal Bodyguards advising him in prison, "Bhai, this movement is in the interests of the Bahuns and Chhetris and you will soon be



Taktshang, Tiger's Nest monastery.

sidelined." Says Gazmere, now in exile in Jhapa, "There is certainly an attempt to divide Nepalis, but it will not work because the oppression and evictions are cross-ethnic."

Indeed, the refugee rolls, lists of torture victims and other such information indicate that the suffering runs across caste, ethnicity and gender. One list of death in police custody reads: Chhetri, Sharma, Gurung, Limbu, Rai, Kami, Karki, Adhikari and Pokhrel. Another list of rape victims reads Luitel, Gurung, Rai, Sherpa, Chhetri, Basnet, Guragain, Thukpawalni, Gotame, Sunar, Magarni, Kharel and Niroula. The leadership in exile includes Basnet, Budathoki, Chhetri, Dhakal, Gazmere, Pradhan, Rai, Sharma and Subba.

Bhampa Rai, a doctor who as General Secretary of the Human Rights Organisation of

## Media under the Spell

The Thimpu Government shames every other South Asian government in its ability to charm and manipulate the media. With an expertly choreographed programme of depopulation in progress, the Government had to have ready answers to questions about refugees, so the public relations machinery of Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering ground into action. "Cultural inundation", and terrorism by "ngolops" became the trump cards.

Numerous print, radio, and television journalists have been speaking words scripted by Thimphu over the past two years, and the list stretches from writers for vernacular dailies of Siliguri, to high-flying correspondents of the Western news outlets.

While she has since provided some more-balanced coverage, Barbara Crossette of the *New York Times* once filed a report on the problems of southern Bhutan that quoted only Bhutanese officials and the King as sources. Writing from Thimphu, she reported of "a campaign of violence and terror by small bands of ethnic Nepalese guerrillas in southern Bhutan." The militants' claims were "couched in the language of democracy and minority rights, but the goal of the movement is free access to the underpopulated forests and valleys of Bhutan for those of Nepalese origin." Crossette quoted no 'militant', however.

James Clad of the *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, from a reading of a December 1990 cover story headlined "The Khukuri's Edge" as well as the *Review's 1992 Yearbook*, does not try much harder in trying to fathom Druk and South Asian politics. Among other things, Clad believes that "many militants are advocates of a 'Greater Nepal,' asserting the right of Nepalese to political sovereignty over neighbouring territories they live in."

Journalists who pass muster in Bhutan's New Delhi Embassy are given visas and provided jet passage to Paro airport, from where they are whisked up to Thimphu as royal guests and put up at the Druk Hotel or one of two government guest houses. A chauffeur-driven vehicle awaits to take the reporter around, but never to the south.

The red-carpet treatment can be overwhelming, as can the English-speaking sophistication of the senior officials and King Jigme, and the obvious importance with which they regard the journalist's mission. In interviews, the King is urbane and realistic,

and goes as far as to make confessionals such as "I know that monarchy is an outdated system" and that "Democracy is the best...when the country is ready for it."

A Delhi-based Swiss reporter returned from Thimphu in April to boast that he had had a five-hour audience with King Jigme and two hours each with the Foreign Minister and Home Minister. D.P. Kumar of the *Statesman* was flattered by "the unassuming young monarch — he stood at the doorway of the Throne Room of Thimphu's spectacular Dzong, the Kingdom's temporal and spiritual headquarters, without even an usher, to receive me."

The southern problem is clearly not as worthy of coverage as Bhutan's many other attractions. In October 1991, a BBC reporter made a programme on archery, Bhutan's national sport. Only on 30 June 1992 does he acknowledge that "some" Lhotshampa refugees had left Bhutan. In March 1992, Heinz-Rudolf Othmerding of the German agency DPA chooses to do a write-up on Thimphu's quaint urbanisation.

The most recent journalist to be taken in by Thimphu was Tarun Basu of *India Abroad*, a New York-based weekly, who wrote on 26 June 1992 about Indo-Bhutanese ties ("Harmony between Contrasts"), the King ("Austere Ruler Who likes Work"), the "Wondrous Stamp Museum", and so on. The one paragraph on the Southern problem says: "Operating behind the facade of a pro-democracy movement, the dissenters...had the backing of Gurkha leaders of India and Nepal who nursed visions of a pan-Himalayan Nepalese state."

Bruce W. Bunting wrote in the May 1991 *National Geographic* that migrants "are coming still, seeking jobs and fertile land. In recent years, thousands of Nepalese have resettled as illegal immigrants in southern Bhutan — one reason the royal government recently imposed restrictions on all residents." Bunting, who does not quote Lhotshampas, also writes that the King "wonders that the nation's cultural traditions might someday be swamped by the Nepalese living in Nepal, who outnumber Bhutanese by 25 to 1."

Only journalists out to do some soft holiday reporting seem welcome. One New Delhi writer who recently applied to go was denied permission, but did receive two bottles of Scotch — just to show there were no hard feelings.

While malleable national-level journalists of New Delhi and Calcutta are invited to Thimphu to be charmed out, Thimphu knows that only hard cash will do for the vernacular press of the Duars. Siliguri-based papers that were

'sympathetic' to the refugees in the autumn of 1990 had made a quick turnaround by January 1991. Today, they treat Thimphu with velvet gloves while lampooning the exile leadership.

Just as only a few can resist being carried away by the mediaeval pomp in Thimphu, still fewer will return the bottles of Scotch handed out in paper bags at the end of press conferences in New Delhi. Forty-four cases of Black and Red Label whisky were distributed after the 1988 press conference announcing the multiple marriages of King Jigme, recalls Narain Katel, then a diplomat in Delhi and now a refugee.

The Bhutanese proclivity for giving gifts is sometimes carried to extremes. Even the Foreign Minister might agree that it was carrying things too far when a Delhi-based diplomat turned up at the residence of Justice Krishna Iyer with jam, jelly, books, honey and liquor. Krishna Iyer had made a statement on human rights in Bhutan and was planning to leave for Thimphu as part of a South Asian fact-finding team. He is a former Chief Justice of India, and a teetotaler.

### Nepali Overkill

One reason why the refugee exodus had not received the coverage it clearly deserves could be the Nepalese media's obvious partisanship. In covering Bhutan, Kathmandu's vernacular press has relied almost exclusively on second-hand reports and hearsay. Initially, press releases sent over by the Bhutan People's Party were printed word for word, which led to exaggerated 'reportage' on alleged atrocities. Fresh out of Nepal's own fight for "human rights and democracy", the press took up the Bhutanese story with alacrity in 1990, but the coverage has trailed even as the suffering has increased.

Kathmandu, not New Delhi, is the proper place for Bhutan-watching, but editors of international news magazines and agencies tend not to trust their Kathmandu-based stringers on the subject. News filed by Delhi-based journalists, where the Bhutanese Embassy wields inordinate influence, is accorded more credibility. One particular instance of news overkill — in September 1992, when some Nepalese stringers filed reports of a massacre of more than 300 Lhotshampas by the Bhutanese Army — is said to have played a role in turning the international editors off Kathmandu copy. The episode also provided Thimphu with the opportunity to play victim, and King Jigme told one reporter incredulously, "We don't even find people willing to kill dogs when rabies breaks out."

Bhutan (HUROB) heads the refugees' effort to organise themselves in the camps of Jhapa, agrees that, like elsewhere in the Nepali-speaking diaspora, there are ethnic disparities among Lhotshampas. "But that is for us to sort out once we get back to Bhutan. The Government is mistaken if it thinks it can divide us in opposition."

While Lhotshampa allegiance to Thimphu's political authority was still unquestioned, by mid-1988 the King and his coterie knew full well the feeling towards Drukpa-flavoured Bhutanisation. Cultural indoctrination, mildly pursued, might have been acceptable to Lhotshampas who saw clear advantages in health care, education, employment and economic well-being which Bhutanese citizenship, rather than Indian or Nepali citizenship, afforded them. In time the Nepali-speakers would feel fully 'Bhutanese', as the Drig Lam Namzha desired. Lhotshampas would begin to acquire Drukpa cultural traits and, in fact, they appear to have been willing to go that distance. But the implementation of a rigid policy by zealous administrators and army and the police officers seems to have been unbearable.

### No More a Backwater

Bhutan was still an economic backwater at the end of the 1940s. The economic, cultural and social interaction and sustenance was almost exclusively with the north. The forested southern hills, the malarial jungles of the Duars and, beyond, the India of the British Empire, held little charm to the pastoralists of high valleys.

#### A Note on Usage

**Drukpa:** Specifically, the Kagyu adherents of western Bhutan, the Ngalungs. More generally, the term is used for all northerners, including the various Sarchop groups of the eastern hills.

**Penlap:** Regional governors and warlords, the most important of whom ruled Daga, Tongsa and Paro.

**Lhotshampa:** "Southerner", mainly Nepali-speaking.

**Tshongdu:** The National Assembly.

**Dzongda:** District administrator of *Dzongkhag* (district), such as of Haa, Sarbhang, Chukha.

**Dungpa:** Sub-district officer, such as the *Dungpa* of Geylegphug, Sarbhang *Dzongkhag*.

**Lynpo:** Minister, such as Minister of Home Affairs Lynpo Dago Tshering.

**Druk Yul:** Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon. The traditional Tibetan name is *Lhomon Khashi*, "The Southern Monpa country" of the Four Approaches."

**Druk Gyalpo:** King of Bhutan

**Dasho:** Nobleman

**Ashi:** Princess

As Rose writes in *The Politics of Bhutan*, Nepal had "pervasive cultural, economic and political ties to the South, whereas Bhutan (was) a Buddhist society in which traditional ties, at least until 1960, had been to the north." All that changed with the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959. Overnight, there was a historical shift as Bhutan's external and economic relations spun 180 degrees to realign with India.

With this reorientation, the value of the southern hills to the Drukpa rulers was also to change. In the traditional economy, this region had no role other than as a source of modest revenue, that too as the Nepali settlements grew in the last century. Over the 1970s, however, it became clear that the south was not only of strategic importance as the gateway to India, but

also in itself a storehouse of riches for the modern economy. It was the southern districts that had the cardamom plantations, orange groves, ginger crop, minerals, and hardwood forests. Even the rivers whose source was the Himalayan snows had to traverse to the south before their flows were substantial enough to be tapped by hydropower projects. All major industries had to be based in the south, close to raw materials and to the plains market. The north, the fountainhead of Drukpa culture and identity, had two resources: conifer timber and tourism, with the possibilities of the latter held in check by a cautious clergy.

The realisation that the south had become a potential economic powerhouse must explain in part why the Drukpa elite turned against the Lhotshampas. The Chukha Hydropower Corporation is a case in point. Inaugurated in 1988, the plant suddenly started injecting huge amounts into the national exchequer. Any social scientists (there are few in Bhutan, though) could have predicted social and political repercussions from Chukha.

Says Dipak Gyawali, a Nepali water economist who has studied the societal impact of large dams, "Mega projects bring mega dislocations to society. Those who control the distribution of the additional revenue have the power to destroy social exchange mechanisms and economic balance."

The Chukha bonanza, which started accruing in 1988 clearly provided Thimphu with the self-confidence to move ahead with its plans for the south. Chukha, perhaps, showed the rulers the riches that lay within their grasp but for the Nepali speakers of south who had the potential of agitating for their share.



King Jigme: Will he ever come down to earth?

A Thimphu *ashi* (princess) who back in the late 1960s used to arrive at her Darjeeling school in a battered, dusty Mahindra and Mahindra jeep today drives around in a late model air-conditioned Mercedes. What would she do or not do to ensure that she does not end up back in the jeep?

### King and Tshongdu

The present King's father, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, made the reforms which brought Bhutan part of the way into the present century. He set up the Tshongdu, or National Assembly, initiated a cabinet system of government and made the monarch accountable to the Tshongdu. The Tshongdu became more powerful in 1968 after the King Jigme Dorji surrendered his right to veto bills. The following year, again upon his insistence, it was decided that a reigning monarch could be impeached if two-thirds of the Assembly supported a vote of no-confidence.

But regardless of these innovations, Bhutan's political and legal system remained 'primitive'. Fundamental freedoms - of expression, speech, press, religion, association - are absent. To organise political rallies is considered 'anti-national'. Arrest can be arbitrary, long-term imprisonment without trial is *kosher*, and there is no doubt remaining of the systematic use of torture and extra-judicial punishment. Any action against the *Tsa-Wa-Sum* is, as approved by the Tshongdu in March 1990, treasonable and punishable by death under the *Thrimzung Chhenpo* legal code.

Presently, public trials are being held of 41 "ngolops", or "anti-nationals", the most prominent among them being D.K.Rai, an



electrical engineer and former Secretary-General of the Bhutan People's Party (BPP). The trial, being played out in the square before the High Court in Thimphu, is for "anti-national" activities.

According to the Student's Union of Bhutan (SUB), an exile opposition group that was begun underground in Sherbutse College in central Bhutan, proceedings before the "farical court" are being used to dupe the world into believing that a "judiciary" exists in the country, "while hundreds others still languish in jails without trial." SUB also claims that royal pardons and amnesties granted to so-called *ngolops* are orchestations to gain international sympathy. "Prisoners are released prior to events like the Colombo SAARC summit, and the Amnesty Team visit."

Today's Tshongdu is a conservative body that is, even more than King Jigme, the propagator of Drukpa culture for all of Bhutan. The Tshongdu articulates the sensitivities of the monastic order, the top-level bureaucracy and the feudocracy that together rule the country. A breakdown of the present Tshongdu shows that 77 (51 per cent) of the members are Ngalungs, 58 (38 per cent) are Sarchops and 16 (11 per cent) are Lhotshampas.

The most inflammatory, and at times even racist, pronouncements relating to the Lhotshampas have come from the members of the Tshongdu. They vocalise sentiments that sophisticates like Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering would never let escape their lips. "As Lhotshampas have proved themselves untrustworthy, all Lhotshampas in government service should be retired," says one Assembly member. According to another, Karma Tshering from Tshangkha, "We hope that these *ngolops* will be given capital punishment and publicly executed."

To what extent is the Tshongdu a parliament which incorporates principles of popular participation? A.C. Sinha, a professor of sociology who has just published the book *Bhutan: Ethnic Identity and National Dilemma* (Reliance, 1991), says the Assembly is made up of "the traditional ethnic chiefs or village headmen from the hills or the pliable, loyal, and faithful subjects of southern Bhutan." Sinha says the Tshongdu



King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk

lacks the ability to provide the Government with "critical and frank review of its performance."

King Jigme, as chief executive, sometimes appears to be using the Tshongdu's avowed conservatism as a battering ram for his Government's policies. Reports in the government-owned *Kuensel* weekly paint the picture of a bellicose Tshongdu membership being pulled back from the drastic action against the Lhotshampas by a benevolent King Jigme. It is difficult to say how much of this tussle is genuize and how much it is a charade.

Back in the 1960s, the present King's father had to battle it out with the Tshongdu before he could force through his programme of modernisation. Once, King Jigme Dorji was even forced to point out that all of Bhutan's heritage



Nurse graduates in kamni scarf greet Dasha Penjola.

did not deserve preservation and that the imposition of certain Drukpa rules and regulations would cause unnecessary hardship to minorities - the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese and the Tibetan refugee settlers who had distinct cultural traditions of their own.

The present King had his own row with the Tshongdu during its October 1991 session, "one of the most emotion-charged National Assembly sessions the kingdom had ever seen," according to *Kuensel*. After passing resolutions on all aspects of the "anti-national problem in southern Bhutan," including the "extradition of *ngolops*", "identification of *ngolops* and their collaborators," "withdrawal of citizenship identity cards" and "implementation of the Citizenship Act", the Speaker took note of the almost total unanimity of opinion among the members to stop development activities in the southern districts.

At that point, King Jigme intervened and reminded the members that they had already entrusted him with the responsibility of finding a permanent solution to the *ngolop* problem. If the authority and power to decide on how to go about finding a solution to the problem was not included with the responsibility and accountability involved, it would be impossible to find a proper solution to the *ngolop* problem. The King then pledged to abdicate if he did not succeed in finding a lasting solution.

After the King's outburst, the members

"requested his kind indulgence and understanding" and pledged their complete support, loyalty and confidence in him. The Tshongdu resolved that the responsibility of finding a permanent solution to the *ngolop* problem should be entrusted entirely to the King along with all the prerogatives and powers as would be deemed necessary.

King Jigme was born on 11 November 1955 and became the fourth King of Bhutan in July 1972 at the age of 17. His reign has seen increasing centralisation of power in the Royal Palace. The ability of the Tshongdu to impeach the monarch was abolished in 1973.

Some of the King's critics in exile maintain that in part the problem in southern Bhutan has its origins in his matrimonial links. In October 1988, King Jigme formalised his marriage with four sisters, the daughters of an ambitious businessman from Talo in Punakha District. According to BNDP's Dhakal, "a mistake in private life" (i.e. the royal marriages) might have led to the change in King Jigme's attitude towards the Lhotshampas. "The King was forced to make a political pact with the traditionalists. In exchange for legalising his marriages, the King would implement a Bhutanisation programme and a set of schemes

to reduce the population of Bhutanese Nepalese."

King Jigme is said to be simple, matter-of-fact, and unostentatious. He lives, mostly with his senior queen Dorji Wangmo, in a log-cabin palace near Tashichho Dzong complex, which houses the Secretariat and the Tshongdu. The monarch is well-liked by both diplomats and foreign journalists, who jump to give him the benefit of the doubt. According to Indian journalist Narendra Kumar, writing in the *Calcutta Statesman*, the King is "handsome like a Greek God, is courteous to a fault, publicity-shy, a teetotaler."

Says a Western Ambassador to Thimphu, "The King is very austere, very dedicated to the cause of the people...when they say that people have access to him, it is true. It is quite different from the Nepali monarchy during the Panchayat years."

Before the troubles began, King Jigme was much liked by the Lhotshampa population as well, probably in the belief that his liberalism would save them from the conservatism that lurked just below the Druk Yul's calm surface. "This was a hard-working king who was really in touch with development works around the country," recalls Om Dhungel, a senior civil servant who came into exile in May.

Some refugees in the Jhapa camps who say they have worked closely with the King, firmly believe that he is being hoodwinked by



subordinates, while others are just as convinced that it is King Jigme, and he alone, that is the mastermind behind the depopulation programme.

Even though the King has been touring the southern regions extensively since 1990 (23 times, reports *Kuensel*) those who were present at the time in Samchi, Chirang and Sarbhang say he was kept remote from the public. Despite the large crowd gathered at stage-managed events, only handpicked representatives were allowed to speak to him. The majority preferred to remain silent because of threats of dire consequences by the Dzongdas and Dungsas. These much-publicised trips south have public relations value internationally because they show King Jigme's much-vaunted accessibility, but they do not seem to have provided him with insights on what is really going on.

On 14 July 1992, King Jigme once again travelled down to Geylegphug when he learnt that there was a mass exodus of Lhotshampas from Sarbhang. He reminded a gathering of peasants of all that his government had done for southern Bhutan and asked them not to leave their homeland in the hour of need. A few men and women came to the mike and said now that they had received His Majesty's assurance, yes, they would now stay. But it did not work. The day after the King returned to his palace the Nepali-speakers of Sarbhang, including those that had promised to stay, were shown the door by the local administrators (see page 16).

Perhaps the King means well, but he does seem to have succumbed to coterie which desires cultural purity and unhindered economic access to the southern lands. For all his reported good intentions, King Jigme seems incapable of discerning his goal amidst web of intrigue and vested interests that has been spun around him, especially since his marriage. Five of the most powerful members of the administration are related to the "new royal family", as opposed to the Wangchuk family. They include Home Minister Dago Tshering, Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering, Social Services Minister Tashi Tobgyel, and Bhutan Army chief Gongloen Lam Dorji.

Further, the Joint Secretary in the Planning Commission is Their Majesties the Queens' elder brother; the final authority in deciding Bhutanese citizenship is the youngest brother.

Says Dhakal, "These young inter-related turks posted in key ministries are the backbone of the higher Bhutanese oligarchy and the architects of the southern political problem." Says another refugee bureaucrat, "The cause for the southern problems is within the King's immediate family, the programmes are made outside."

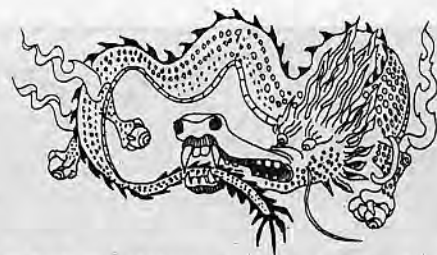
Meanwhile, as the "new royal family" has centralised power, the King's three sisters and his paternal uncle Namgyal Wangchuk, all of whom once had charge of key ministries, have been sidelined.

Says a former Drukpa official (like all Drukpas interviewed for this article, he wished to remain anonymous), "His Majesty does want to know the real suffering of the Nepalis, but the officials will never allow him to meet them. These people will never tell the King what he does not want to hear. The top brass in the army and the various *lynpos* (ministers) are colluding to such an extent that even the king is powerless."

### Western Acclaim

A Western ambassador who is concurrently accredited to Thimphu and New Delhi, said in a recent interview: "Bhutan is a beautiful and well-preserved country, and the present Government is manned by very dedicated people. There is probably no other like it in the Third World. In Thimphu, they know exactly what they are talking about. The Bhutanese authorities take the initiative, they provide information when asked, and are very persuasive."

This awe for the acumen of Thimphu administrators is matched by an appreciation of their lifestyle. The same ambassador: "Everything in Thimphu is on such a modest scale. When you are invited by a minister to his house, it is a family affair. Their hospitality is warm but so frugal. The government guest house in Bumthang is so simple: where else can you have a the log fire like you can in Bumthang? The point the Bhutanese



make is straightforward: we cannot afford to be swallowed by the Nepalis. They are still at a stage when they feel that the Nepali population is not at a suitable level. As soon as they feel that they have administrative control over the south, things will get better."

When learned *sahibs* keep reminding you of your uniqueness, sooner or later you will begin to believe it. A change in self-perception leads to change in world view. Friends and associates become adversaries, if they have the ability to wrest your exoticism away and leave you where you were, a little-known and unimportant pocket hidden between the folds of the eastern Himalaya.

After the takeover of Tibet and the Dalai Lama's exile, Bhutan came to the notice of Western travel writers as the kingdom where Tibetan (Mahayana) Buddhism remained sequestered. Nepal was only half-Buddhist and, anyway, was soon to sacrifice itself on the altar of mass tourism. In contrast, Bhutan's picture postcard image has remained constant - green fields and forests leading up to monasteries that cling to clouded cliffs. High-cost, low-volume tourism has helped Bhutan's exoticism to linger.

This incredible little country is ruled by a monarch who is modern, speaks chaste English, and yet is fervently in favour of maintaining cultural traditions. His country-in-the-clouds is doing "everything right" as it tackles development, Westernisation and international diplomacy. He is clever enough to "learn from the mistakes of Nepal". He is out to save Bhutanese culture, forests, and way of life. It is difficult not to support such a man and his programmes.

International acclaim has helped fuel Drukpa rejection of the Lhotshampas for their potential to ruin this idyll. The Druk Yul political chieftains took to heart the image that travel writers helped create in their coffee-table books. They decided to recreate the country in the image held by the West - culturally pure and ecologically pristine.

The glossy publications, and the Bhutan Governments' own tourist brochures, tell the world that 'Bhutan' equals 'Drukpa'. One such popular picture book, Guy van Strydonck's *A Kingdom of the Eastern Himalayas: Bhutan* (Editions Olizane, Geneva 1984), with 169 pages, has a single sentence on the Lhotshampas; they are "farmers who arrived in the country at the end of the 19th century and are now fully integrated Bhutanese citizens." The rest of the book is on the Ngalung lifestyle and institutions, their Dzongs (forts), the western valleys, close-ups of



Ngalung peasant homes in Paro plain.

# Flight from Sarbhang

According to *Kuensel* (23 May 1992), a gang of terrorists gunned down Chimi Dorji, the Dungpa, or sub-district officer, of Geylegphug, as he was returning home from Taklai village. Dorji, 36, was shot several times on the chest. Four military guards accompanying Dorji in the Hilux jeep were unharmed. "A well known and popular official had been gunned down in cold blood." Dorji's death was treated as a cause celebre in Bhutan. He was declared a martyr and given a highly publicised state funeral in Punakha, with the *Je Khempo*, the Chief Abbot, the Crown Prince, and ministers present.

The Government had no doubt that Lhotshampa "ngolops" killed Dorji, but peasant refugees now in camps in Nepal are not so sure. They wonder how the killers managed to shoot Dorji thrice in a moving jeep, without also hitting the army men with the Dungpa and the jeep itself. They say they had heard of bad blood between Dorji and the Army, and also wonder whether the assassins could be the well-armed Meches (Bodos) from India, a group of whom he had confronted earlier that day on the road to Taklai.

Tobgay Tshering was assigned to take over as Dungpa of Geylegphug, a sub-division of Sarbhang district. Within a few days of taking office, on 4 June, he called a meeting of the surrounding villages in Geylegphug. He first asked for a show of hands whether families of persons identified as "ngolops" should be told to leave Bhutan. Only one man raised his hand.

The following is what Tshering then told the villagers\*, speaking in chaste Nepali:

"Do you still have the dead Dungpa's meat sticking to your teeth, you murderers? So you want to keep the ngolops. That makes all of you ngolops. We Drukpas fought the British, we fought the Tibetans. We spilt blood for this country, not you. This country is ours', and the Government is ours. You all were only guests, so now go back to your country. You definitely cannot stay here. You cannot pretend to be a citizen by just wearing the *bakhhu*. Better to go while there is still time, or you will suffer. You have three days to depart. It does not matter if you are F-1 or F-7. Better that weeds grow here than you plough your fields. Do not run away, fill the form of voluntary departure, take your compensation and go. The people of Samchi who went before you have got citizenship in Nepal and have come back and thanked us for suggesting that they go. Go to Nepal, there the Koirala Sarkar will keep you in comfortable buildings and feed you. When you are all gone, you will come down here to hunt. Let it not be that we get some monkeys when we aim for the wild game."

The exodus from Geylegphug villages and other villages of Sarbhang began. The flood of refugees at the border post of Kakarbhitta notched

another high as an average twenty-five trucks with Assam number plates entered Nepal. (According to camp figures, refugee arrivals jumped from 5149 in June to 9152 in July, primarily peasants from Sarbhang.)

When the Sarbhang Dzongda (district administrator) sent a report on 9 June that more than 400 families, most of them from Geylegphug, had applied to leave, King Jigme sent a high level team to meet the families. On 14 July, he came down for a meeting with the migrant families. According to *Kuensel* the King said, "All of you are bonafide citizens who have been issued with Bhutanese Citizenship Cards. It is very important that I understand your problems and know the reason why you want to leave your country."

The King then said: "Short of literally going down on my knees with folded hands, I have tried everything possible to resolve the serious problem we have today in southern Bhutan. I am therefore deeply pained that all of you here today who are genuine citizens have not only applied to leave your country but even declared that you would not wait for more than two days to have your applications processed. I have come here from Thimphu to ask you all not to migrate and leave your country. I have every hope that you will reconsider your decision and not abandon your country when it is going through a very difficult time.

"I have done everything I could think of to make you responsible citizens. I can now only hope and pray that you will stay back so that we can all live together like members of one household and make our country strong..."

Questioned by *Kuensel* how it could be that almost every migrant said they were leaving because he had asked them to, Dungpa Tshering said it was a frame-up. He said it was hardly possible that he could have said all those things when he had just joined office.

*Kuensel* reported on 19 July that after King Jigme's lecture, a number of Lhotshampas decided to stay back. The newspaper has a front-page picture with a caption that reads: "A woman from Surey who had applied to migrate agrees not to leave after His Majesty spoke to her." The person has now been identified as Dhana Maya Baral. According to co-villager Khagendra Neupane, who arrived at Kakarbhitta by truck on 21 July, immediately after the King went back to Thimphu, the villagers were shown a "list" that included Dhana Maya's name. Within two days, she was out of Bhutan, and a week later, like many others, at the 14 July meeting who had agreed to stay, Dhana Maya was at Goldhap camp as a refugee.

The Cabinet met in Thimphu on 17 July and constituted a team to enquire into the complaints made by the Nepali-speakers against Tobgay Tshering, the Dungpa. The team was appointed by Home Minister Dago Tshering, rather than by the King. The team might have searched for the persons the King spoke to on 14 July. Instead, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service reported that the team had found the allegations against the Dungpa were baseless.

\* This is a composite quote as verified from independent interviews with the following refugees arriving in mid-July at Goldhap refugee camp: Padma Lal Timsina, Tulsi Ram Neupane, Thakur Prasad Luitel, Chet Nath Timsina, Meghnath Khadka and Narapati Pokhrel.



# KUENSEL

Bhutan's National Newspaper

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## THE WEEK

### President



Shankar Dayal Sharma is a well known Indian politician and scholar who served as the 9th President of India from 1992 to 1997. He was a member of the Indian Parliament and served as the Vice President of India from 1985 to 1990. He was also a member of the Rajya Sabha and served as the Minister of Education in the Government of India.

## His Majesty appeals to Lhotshampa migrants not to leave their country

His Majesty the King made a personal appeal this week to Lhotshampa migrants not to leave their country when it is going through a difficult period in its history.

Reports had come from the Sarbhang Dzongda (district administrator) on July 9 that more than 400 families, most of them from Geylegphug, had applied to migrate. Although he had tried to persuade them to stay they had given an ultimatum that they would leave within two days regardless of whether their applications were processed in time or not.

On receiving this report, the Dzongda was instructed to pay daily allowance to the migrant families and ask them to at least stay until a high level team arrived from Thimphu to meet with them. The Seventh Plan meeting for Paro, which was scheduled for July 15, was then postponed and His Majesty the King, accompanied by the Home Minister, Lyonpo Dago Tshering,



A woman from Surey gewog who had applied to migrate agrees not to leave a spoke to her

*Dhana Maya Baral on the front page of Kuensel and at Goldhap Refugee Camp (inset).*

monks and dashos, and whirling dancers. There is not one picture of a Lhotshampa, even in background.

The Drukpa image of Bhutan derives from the core regions of Paro, Thimphu, Punakha and Tongsa, whose "religio-cultural and political practices were accepted as the national ones," according to A.C.Sinha.

There is every reason to appreciate the western Bhutan's heritage and lifestyle; yet the overwhelming emphasis on the Ngalung ignores the population groups that are equally significant if not as interesting to outsiders. These include, cumulatively, the Sarchops; the Brokpa 'aborigines' of the high valleys; the multi-ethnic Nepali-speakers of the lower hills; as well as small concentrations of Totas, Santhals, Doyas and Rajbanshis.

### The Game Plan

Even though Bhutan is a relatively easy country to govern, the Thimphu Government is also among the more efficient in the developing world. The bureaucratic elite is almost entirely educated in the public schools of India and has a common work ethic, which also meshes with that of the King. Solidarity among the rulers, and the 'managability' of their small, under-populated, resource-rich country, have enabled them to fine-tune development policy.

Perhaps the major accomplishment of the King's administration (there has been no Prime Minister since Jigme Palden Dorji was assassinated) has been its ability to keep India placated even as Bhutan explores the boundaries of what the 1949 treaty of friendship allows. Today, Bhutan even has the leeway to negotiate independently with China on demarcation of its disputed north-western boundary. While Nepal still dithers in indecision over selling hydropower to India, Thimphu is already earning from the Chukha Hydel Project. Since 1962, Bhutan has made a success of its postage stamps, which are renowned the world over for their "thematic value and technical excellence." The Government even has the gumption to run (through agents) lotteries in India, which are said to turn in profits in the crores.

King Jigme's administration is sharp, disciplined, and responsive, with a reputation of "getting things done". It is this administrative acumen that has been brought to bear against the Lhotshampas. The result has been devastating in its efficiency.

Somewhere along the way, a plan evolved. Its goal was to defuse the Lhotshampas' demographic threat, and intricate details were worked out. A census would be taken again under more discriminatory criteria; Drig Lam Namzha would be strongly enforced; all political opponents would be termed *ngolops* and terrorists; schools, hospitals and services in the south would be closed; requirement of No Objection Certificates would be slapped on the

southerners; all land found to be 'illegal' would be confiscated and northerners invited in.

This is what a confidential report of a Western bilateral development agency, had to say about the period July 1991 to January 1992: "At this stage many ethnic Nepalese do not feel welcome any longer in this country. In the last year they have been treated as second rate, in principle suspect, citizens. Their participation in public life has been made extremely difficult. There were no schools, no health facilities...sale of produce was difficult, trade licences were withdrawn, and employment opportunities were minimalised. If one then adds the fear of physical violence, it is no wonder that many families see no future in this country and decide to leave."

A well thought-out strategy of depopulation

## Population Politics

Bhutan, wrote the American scholar Leo E. Rose back in 1977, is about as "data-free" as it is possible for a polity of over 300 years old to be. This paucity of reliable data extends most significantly to population, and is said to hamper study of Bhutanese society, as well as the political claims made by the Drukpa and Lhostampa leaders.

S.K. Pradhan, General Secretary of the BPP, however, is of the view that accurate population data exists but is kept secret by the Government. "For example, because the 1981 census showed a Nepali majority, they suppressed the data and decided to hold a re-census in 1988 using new criteria."

When Bhutan joined the United Nations in 1971, it provided a made-up population figure of 1.2 million, apparently in order to be able to gain more *per capita* foreign aid. Projections on that base figure now would have the population over the 1.4 million mark. A year ago, King Jigme sheepishly conceded to interviewers that the population was no more than 600,000. Refugee leaders, while agreeing that the 1.4 million figure is too high, maintain that the real figure is somewhere in the range of seven to eight hundred thousand. At the same time, they use the 600,000 figure to accuse the Government of attempting to depopulate a sixth of the country's population.

The breakdown of the population is equally problematic. According to the Government's estimation, Ngalungs make up 20 per cent of the population, Sarchops 37 per cent, and Nepali-speakers 30 per cent. In an interview with Reuters in February 1992, the King said 28 per cent Bhutanese were of Nepali origin. The data favoured by Bhutan People's Party is: Ngalung 16 per cent, Sarchop 31 per cent and Nepali-speakers 53 per cent. An international agency's estimate of 45 per cent Nepali-speakers gives perhaps the more accurate figure, in between the Lhostampa and Drukpa claims.



and 'cultural cleansing' is underway, and since February 1992 has been at its most aggressive. The picture emerges that the government's hope is to empty the country of a large number of its legitimate Nepali-speaking citizens until their proportion is brought down to a 'managable' level. Ratan Gazmere, who is now in Jhapa, says he learnt from reliable intelligence sources that the plan is to bring down the Nepali-speaking population down to between 15 and 20 per cent of country's reduced population. Foreign Minister Tshering told a visiting ambassador a few months ago that it was absolutely vital to "balance the demographic equation".

The plan is being sold internationally with astute diplomacy that exploits all possibilities: Nepal's fear of India, India's fear of apan-Nepali resurgence, the West's soft spot for oriental Bhutan and a reluctance to bait India, the weakness of journalists when confronted with a kingdom in the clouds, and so on. Bhutan must rid itself of as many Lhotshampas as possible before negative international pressure builds up.

To give the benefit of the doubt to the Thimphu strategists, it might all have started innocently enough, with a simple idea that Bhutanese must be Bhutanese; One nation, One people. But, as the various parts of the plans were implemented successfully, the enthusiasm grew and stricter implementation followed. Before long, Bhutanisation had a momentum all its own, and the strategists seem to have gained confidence in their ability - as long as the world remained silent - of 'reclaiming' their country for themselves while the Lhotshampas were bundled off to Nepal, "where they belonged anyway."

The 1985 Citizenship Act, the 1988 re-census, the Drig Lam Namzha code, the language policy, became the tools that began to be applied. The proof is in the silent, overgrown orchards of Samchi where today only rhesus monkeys roam; the youths hanging around listlessly at crossroads in the townships of Jalpaiguri District in West Bengal; or the broken spirits of torture and rape victims in the refugee camps of Jhapa.

Thimphu claims that the Nepali-speakers in the camps are actually illegal migrants - labourers from work gangs brought in to build the Bhutanese roads who stayed back, or those brought in privately to man the orange groves and cardamom plantations. The argument might be called ingenuous, were it not for the fact that the international community, and even the local politicians in the refugees' own host community of Jhapa, are believing it.

Bhutan has always been strict about importing labour. In the past, the Dorji



administrators of southern Bhutan kept close tabs on population movements, because revenue had to be collected. In building roads and development projects (including Indian labourers to build Chukha), the Government ensures that there is efficient repatriation. In 1986, Nepali road labourers who had managed to remain behind were all rounded up - 15,000 individuals - and trucked out of the country. The refugee leaders say that Lhotshampas supported the action against illegal migrants.

What needles the Drukpa authorities as much as the presence of illegal migrants are the marital links that Nepali-speakers insist on making with non-Bhutanese nationals. Because Nepalis of all castes and ethnicities have a limited marriage market to choose from within Bhutan, many bring brides from outside. To counter this deviation, during the golden years of cultural harmony in the 1970s, cash incentives were introduced to encourage inter-Bhutanese (primarily Nepali-Drukpa) marriages. But the process of assimilation was obviously too slow for the impatient men who had taken over the country's running.

The best non-Bhutanese spokesman for Thimphu's present policies is Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, till recently editor of the *Calcutta Statesman*, who writes: "The kingdom has been increasingly worried not about its own subjects of Nepalese origin, but about constant flow of illegal immigrants from Nepal, Assam, Meghalaya and parts of West Bengal. Hence the 1958 cut-off date which is so bitterly resented... Indeed, the present agitation began only when a census was carried out in 1988 to weed out clandestine migrants."

### Code and Census

In support of the drive towards One nation, One people, a royal decree was issued in 1988 demanding strict nationwide observance of Drig Lam Namzha, a code of social etiquette specific to the Ngalungs.

In one stroke, many years of building towards a united Bhutanese population was destroyed. Had it been voluntary, the package sweetened with economic incentives, it is likely that Lhotshampas

would have gradually accepted at least the outward trappings of dress, etiquette and perhaps even language. But, as the King and senior officials have conceded, local officials 'misinterpreted' the decree and vehemently implemented their version. An investigation team was dispatched to bring extra-zealous officials to book, and half-hearted punishment was meted out to a few, but the code remains in force.

As Drig Lam Namzha was implemented, tailors hiked the price of *ghos* and *kiras* - traditional Drukpa male and female garments supposedly made from locally woven Bhutanese cloth, but actually mass-produced by factories in Ludhiana, Punjab. The heavy material is inappropriate for the south's summer heat, but was made mandatory for the home, the field, office and school. While requirements are said to have been relaxed, the dress code continues to provide ample opportunity for harassment by the police. Penalty for a going without a *gho* is a week's labour or Nu 150, of which the apprehending officer is allowed to pocket half.

In Thimphu, offices come to a standstill in the late afternoons as everyone goes to learn Drig Lam Namzha, which involves tuition in Dzonkha, and training on how to wear the *Kammi* scarf and how to bow with it, how to sit, how to address others, what hair style to keep, and so on. As the code was introduced, the teaching of Nepali in southern schools was dropped, in February 1989.

While Drig Lam Namzha affected the Lhotshampa's cultural identity, the census made refugees out of citizens.

A deliberate and well-organised policy of



Home Minister Dago Tshering prepares for a bite.

intimidation was set in motion to "encourage" the Lhotshampas to leave. Walk into any refugee camp and scores of refugees carrying Bhutanese citizenship identity cards will recall intimidation that ranged from being victimised by hooligans let loose on communities to the psychological distress of proving citizenship before dour officials.

A 1958 National Law, which was the first effort to define who was a "Bhutanese", provided for citizenship by

birth, registration of land holdings and naturalisation (five years' stay). A census and land survey was carried out in 1972, which served as the basis for issuing nationality certificates.

In 1980, another census was conducted and citizenship identity cards distributed, and with it "the Government completed the huge task of identifying Bhutanese citizens and distributing identity cards," says Shiva Kumar Pradhan of the Bhutan People's Party (BPP). "But with the 1985 Citizenship Act applied new criteria of citizenship, and made them retrospective, declaring all previous Government action of granting citizenship as null and void."

The attempts to implement the 1985 Citizenship Act through a census was not begun immediately, probably because the Gorkha National Liberation Front in adjacent Darjeeling District had just begun its agitation. Thimphu did not want any GNLF-inspired violence ruining its careful plans. The census was begun again in 1988, just after Subhas Ghising achieved his Hill District Council.

Amidst strident opposition from the south, the Tshongdu in November 1988 expressed satisfaction with the 1985 Act. In order to assist implementation, the authorities classified Bhutanese into seven categories, F-1 to F-7. Only those who had land tax receipts for the year 1958 were given F-1 status and regarded as bonafide citizens. Other categories were denied the status, including "re-immigrants" who had worked and lived outside Bhutan, children of non-Bhutanese spouses, and so on.

F-1 was therefore the category to hold, but the retroactive application of citizenship back to 1958 papers was an atavistic



requirement without precedent. No other proof of citizenship is accepted, including what had earlier, been acceptable: the *sathram* (land registration) number, house registration number, payment of taxes, and the *goongda woola* labour contribution.

Under the census-cum-identification exercise, Lhotshampas who had been trained abroad by the Thimphu Government, who had worked for decades in the army or police, who have been Bhutanese teachers for all their working lives, who had 'non-national fathers', all were made illegal immigrants at the stroke of a pen. Citizenship cards issued in 1985 with the seal and signature of King Jigme were valueless.

Until January 1992, a No Objection Certificate (NOC) was required for all Nepali-speaking individuals who sought employment, admission in schools, trade licences, or even permission to leave the country on official work. Any whiff of an involvement in "anti-national" activities, even by distant relatives, meant that a NOC was unavailable. The NOC requirement has now been lifted, but the point is moot as F-1 status-holders are also being evicted. If there is a *ngolop* in the family, the whole family has to leave, if not the neighbours and the whole community. The definition of *ngolop* varies, and can be applied loosely to all Nepalis-speakers that have left the country. To some Drukpa, all Southerners have become *ngolops*.

The confidential bilateral agency report quoted above says, "Individuals are held responsible for the deeds of family members. Furthermore, there are no clear guidelines for the term 'family members', and many have been forced to apply for emigration by signing the voluntary leaving certificates. Many of these families would be early settlers (1890-1930), who fall well within the 1958 census criterion."

Recent arrivals in Jhapa say eviction is across the board and need no longer depend on the 1985 Act criteria. Villages are being emptied regardless of whether the inhabitants have citizenship papers, 1958 land-tax documents, records of service in the bureaucracy, Army or constabulary. Lately, even those who helped dungpas and dzongdas as informers ("*Chamches*") to identify so-called illegals, or served extra-zealously as soldiers or prison guards, are arriving as refugees. A number of refugees have identified Lhotshampa policemen who they say had tortured them in Bhutan. "If you would turn against your own kind, what would you do to us?" the Drukpa administrators reportedly tell the *chamches* when dismissing them.

Thakur Prasad Luitel, of Danabari Block in Geylegphug, 52-years-old and born in Bhutan of a father who moved from Sikkim, says the 1988 census gave him F-1 status. He spent 9 months and 12 days in Phuntsholing and Thimphu jails, during which time he says he suffered extreme mental and physical torture. Meanwhile, his

teenage daughter died at home for lack of specialised care. "When they released me I thought my punishment was over, but then the Geylegphug Dungpa called us and said we must all get out." Luitel says the Lhotshampa prison guard who tortured him in prison has been sighted in one of the refugee camps.

The departure is carefully choreographed.



Neither here, nor there: Om Pradhan.

Villagers of Samchi describe the dungpa and other officials sitting before voluminous records. A Lhotshampa is led in to try to prove his 1958 status, and there are any number of ways in which he can be 'found out' - for example, of having hidden a marriage with a non-Bhutanese, or having been silent about a working stint in India, and so on.

When families are declared 'illegal', they are forced to sign a 'Voluntary Leaving Certificate' which states that they are leaving of their own free will accepting the compensation that is provided. Each family is then asked to have a black and white group photograph taken and to bring in eight copies for the files before they depart. Refugees also speak of tape-recordings or video-recordings in which officials exact verbal confirmation that the departure is voluntary.

'Travel expenses' are paid out of the 'compensation' for the properties Lhotshampas leave behind. In Samchi, the 'compensation' was initially set at Nu 40,000 per acre of paddy field, but this figure was continuously scaled downwards until families got no more than Nu 4,000 per acre. In Chirang, some villagers who had been put behind bars had Nu 2,000 per month of prison stay deducted from the 'compensation' they received. A few families managed to steal away without accepting compensation or signing the Government's forms, while others collected as much documentary evidence of their house



and lands as they could to prove at some later date that the property was theirs'.

Dal Bahadur Rai is an Indian national who works as a guard in a tea-estate in Jalpaiguri District, just astride the open border. His Bhutanese neighbours are the villagers of Ahaley and Chargharey, in Ghumauney Block, Samchi District. Rai says: "In Ghumauney Block, there were 684 households. Today, there are only four. They are of the *Mandal* (headman) whose name is Homagain, Dataram Rijal, Bhakthey Giri and Chandru Magar. When the rate for paddy fields was 32,000 rupees per acre, the Dahals of Ahaley sold 10 acres and made good profit. But then the rate came down and now the Government gives only 3,000. Rather than take the money and give up their land forever, people like Parsuram Kafle and Sete Sanyasi sneaked away before the Dungpa could force them."

Across from Rai's property in Jalpaiguri, the fields are empty and the villages silent. The next step is said to be the announced programme of resettlement of northern Drukpas in the vacated lands of the south. According to the Secretary of Bhutan's Department of Survey and Land Records, more than 47,000 acres of illegal land have been freed in Samchi alone, and the Tshongdu for its part has resolved that "illegal land holdings in the southern Districts should be allotted first to security force personnel and the Militia Volunteers." The Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army has expressed "deep appreciation for the proposal."

"The government's idea of a permanent solution for Bhutan's problem seems to be that of a more mixed population in the southern districts," says the bilateral development agency report quoted above. It adds that currently preparations are underway for the first such resettlement in Samdrup Jonkhar District.

### Thimphu High Society

Drukpa society is made up of a small educated super-elite of perhaps no more than one thousand (mostly male, even though the traditional society is matriarchal) and a large peasantry. The former are all in bureaucracy or in business, with their interests intimately tied with those of the state. There is no peer support for non-conformists who might question the basis for policies of state, such as the hard-line crackdown against the Lhotshampas.

According to Rose, there is a "virtual non-existence of competing elite groups" in Thimphu, which means that there are no dissident members from among the traditional elite nor the modernised bureaucracy. To the extent that



Bhutan has "no non-official educated elites of any size or significance," therefore, Thimphu is an intellectual backwater. There is no one to challenge programmes designed and implemented by the administrators of the country or the conservative monastic order. The Lhotshampa civil servants who have dared to ask questions are all in exile or prison. Those that remain are increasingly marginalised, but remain silent.

Om Bahadur Pradhan, Minister for Trade and Industry and highest-ranking Lhotshampa, is son of *Nyaulibabu*, one-time commissioner of Samdrup Jonkhar. He has served as Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. Pradhan is a student of Drukpa Kagyu philosophy, speaks fluent Dzongkha and is married to a Sarchop. Some refugees who know him well consider him "more Drukpa than the Drukpa." A former colleague of Pradhan is angry that he does not use his access to the King: "Why

does he not speak? He knows his father settled Nepalis in eastern Bhutan upon the express request of the Bhutanese government."

Says Bhakti Prasad Sharma, an activist who was recently released, "Om Pradhan is in a fix. He is disillusioned, but he is neither here nor there." However, Pradhan did recently arrange for a group of Nepalis to approach the King with a petition detailing discriminatory treatment, and at the autumn 1991 session of the National Assembly, he did remind members that "not all Lhostshampas were *ngolops*."

The reticence of the Bhutanese civil servant is not a new phenomenon. It has been evident for decades among Bhutanese diplomats at the United Nations and at international conferences, and more recently at SAARC parleys and at ICIMOD in Kathmandu. Today, this unwillingness to speak up has become a great asset as inconvenient questions are never answered.

The bureaucrat's extreme caution on political matters is also born of economic self-interest. The First Class Gazetted Officer and ranks above have perks that best all South Asian counterparts - including the facility to buy a new vehicle every five years, easy access to Royal Bhutan Insurance Corporation's beneficence of low-interest loans, and duty-free liquor privileges.

Much of the real estate in Bhutanese towns are bureaucrat-owned. Pradhan is said to have four mansions besides the one he lives in, and Dawa Tshering is the second biggest real-estate tycoon in Thimphu.

Tshering, who has the distinction of being the world's longest serving foreign minister, has everged as the spokesman of the Government's policies, even though it is said he was not part of the original coterie that planned the exercise. The *Lynpo* apparently got wedded to it after his daughter married into the new royal family. *Lynpo* Tshering is the son of a Kalimpong Chinese and was brought up in a Nepali household there. He has a Bachelor of Laws degree and was a hostel superintendent in Kalimpong before he landed it big in Bhutan with under tutelage of late Prime Minister Dorji.

There might be little 'intellectual culture' in Thimphu, but there is plenty of high society to reap the largesse of the foreign donors and tourism, and economic policies that are increasingly tailored to suit the needs of a few. The jet-setting Drukpas are within striking distance of an exclusive Western standard of living. Druk Air's BAe 146 jet allows them instant access to New Delhi and Bangkok. The Bhutanese highways, built and maintained

## The Bhutan State Congress: First Political Stirrings

The Bhutan State Congress was, for a few years, to make big waves on the placid surface of Bhutanese politics. The Party's rise and fall is instructive for the study of Lhotshampa exile-politics of today.

Inspired by Indian independence in 1947, opposition to the rulers of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan began to organise politically, using the Indian National Congress as a model. The Nepali Congress Party, the Sikkim State Congress, and the Bhutan State Congress were formed.

The Bhutan State Congress was established in Goalpara, Assam, by a group of Nepali Bhutanese 'refugees' led by D.B. Gurung, D.B. Chhetri and G.P. Sharma. Initially, the Congress was more like an association organised for redressal of Nepali-speakers' grievances against the government. Later, however, more serious demands were included in the Charter, including the abolition of Bhutan's feudal system of Government, democratisation of the administration, granting of civil and political rights, and closer ties with India.

The Congress might have extended its activities clandestinely into the Bhutanese foothills. It claimed to represent Nepali-speakers who, it said, made up 64 per cent of the population. However, it made no serious effort to extend its activities into the higher valleys and to enroll Drukpas as its members. In 1958, the party submitted a petition to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, on his way overland to Bhutan.

The Nepalis, divided among themselves on caste and tribal lines, had settled down in the Bhutanese foothills after strenuous efforts. Many of them, unaware of the democratic, civil and political rights, were not willing to take the risk of losing their land and shelter by supporting the cause of a vague forum of doubtful credibility.

The Congress, after submitting a number of memoranda to the king and passing numerous resolutions from the Indian territory, decided to extend its operation within Bhutan. Drawing upon the experience of the civil disobedience (*satyagraha*) pioneered by the Indian National Congress, the party sent a body of about 100 "volunteers" to offer *satyagraha* on 22 March 1954.

The Government of Bhutan, worried of the wild rumours about the intent of the Congress, mobilised the national militia, and chased the activists back to India. It was a fiasco for the Congress. Acting on a request from Thimphu, the Government of India ordered the Congress not to use Indian territory as a base for its *satyagrahas*.

The Congress shifted its headquarters to Siliguri and kept itself alive upto 1969 by issuing statements to the Indian newspapers. With the Congress' strength completely dissipated, the Druk Gyalpo offered amnesty to its leaders such as D.B. Chhetri and permitted them to return to Bhutan on condition that they not take part in political activity.

Why was the Congress such a failure as a political party? To begin with, Bhutan was under the rule of despotic autocrats, who did not recognise civil and political rights of subjects. Bhutan had almost universal illiteracy and no roads, radios or newspapers. Under such circumstances, it was probably premature to even try to educate the Bhutanese politically. Further, the Congress remained exclusively a Nepali political party and never succeeded in building Drukpa membership. Many Nepali-speakers also failed to support the Congress because it threatened their already-insecure presence in Bhutan.

The Congress' attempt to identify itself with the Indian National Congress was also bad strategy for the hostile reaction this produced from the Bhutanese rulers. They remembered well that during the time of the second Druk Gyalpo, in 1931, the then Shabdrung had tried to solicit Mahatma Gandhi's help to regain his lost power. Further, at a time when Bhutan was trying to wrest more autonomy from India, the Congress' announced policy of closer ties with India made the Durbar oppose it tooth and nail.

The Government of India itself was ambivalent about the Congress, for it felt that stability in Bhutan lay in the continuation of dynastic rule. New Delhi had inherited from colonial rule the policy of supporting dynastic rule in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, as that was in the larger Indian interest.

A.C.Sinha

courtesy the Indian Border Roads Organisation (known locally as "Dantak"), carry Toyota Land Cruisers and air-conditioned sedans with ease. Plebeians and Indian traders drive Maruti Gypsies.

High society is almost totally Westernised. The dasho who gives a speech on cultural purity will enter the toilet cubicle of the Druk Air jet out of Paro Airport as soon as the seatbelt sign is off - to struggle out of his *gho* and emerge transformed in jacket and tie. At the border town of Phuntsholing, next to the bus stop, men and women change from traditional to Western attire, or vice versa, jettisoning their Drukpa identity with apparent ease. In Thimphu, under cover of the night, the children of the elites drive to celebrate the National Day with all-night jam sessions, in jeans and skirts.

It is a lifestyle in a dreamland which, goaded by Western and Indian plaudits, is increasingly divorced from South Asia. Thimphu's ruling class rarely visit the south, except to reach the Indian border. There is little empathy in Thimphu circles for the Lhotshampa peasantry which populates the south, and whose best and brightest actually work amongst them. As a *Kuensel* reporter admitted, it was only the killing of a Ngalung Dungpa at Geylegphug in mid-May that "brings to the Bhutanese people the real gravity of the disturbed situation in the kingdom," whereas before "reports of terrorism in remote villages were vague in their anonymity and distance."

In Thimphu, self-righteous indignation tends to greet Lhotshampa demands for equal treatment. "Especially in the period from October to December 1991 (around the very conservative National Assembly), mutual distrust (between the Northern and Southern Bhutanese) was at a peak, with Drukpas very tense and defensive," says one development agency report to headquarters.

A Drukpa official passing through Kathmandu in May (who also did not want to be identified) clearly encapsulated the view from Thimphu when he said: "You must not believe this talk of Thimphu's closed culture. Actually, the people in Thimphu are by nature open. The young intellectual group is sharp and will act. There is no racism as such, but a feeling that this thing should be allowed to take its course. A minister like Dago Tshering might seem to be hardline to outsiders, but he is articulating the threatened feelings of the Drukpa elites and commoners alike. Democracy will probably come when the society is ready for it. Meanwhile, let us not bullshit the farmer. The main thing is to educate the population, which is why there is so much emphasis on education in the national budget. The southern problem has emerged not as an initiative of the Government but as a response to the anti-King activities.

Those that call themselves refugees are not leaving because of brutality. Their departure was voluntary."

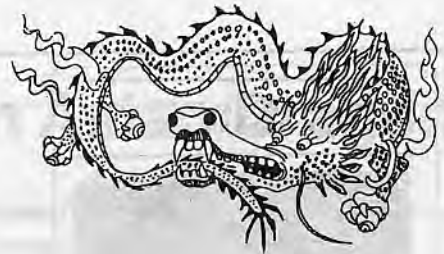
Ngalungs such as the official quoted above, when asked about their society, will emphasise its egalitarian aspects, the absence of caste, and the links each family has with the home village. But it does appear that the class structure is becoming rigid to exclude not only the Lhotshampa, but also a majority of the high mountain peasantry which remains remote from Thimphu's bustle. Inter-marriages and enmeshing of interests among the elite families - the Wangchuks, the Dorjis, or the newly ascendant family of the Queens - results in a see no evil, hear no evil mentality.

### Opposition in absentia

So who are the *ngolops*? Going by Government pronouncements, the most dangerous one would be Tek Nath Rizal, who was the first Lhotshampa leader to be harassed into exile. Abducted and brought back to Thimphu, he is today the seniormost *ngolop* in prison.

Rizal was a civil servant who had impressed the King with his straight talk and dedication and had risen to become member of the Royal Advisory Council. In April 1988, when alarming reports arrived from Chirang of discriminatory implementation of the census, Rizal and another Councillor from the south took the help of Thimphu's Lhotshampa civil servants in drafting a petition and submitted it to King Jigme.

"The people of southern Bhutan most humbly beg Your Majesty for protection and relief," the petition stated, asking that he disallow



Rizal's action was considered treasonous, and he was imprisoned for three days and his Councillorship terminated. In the face of increasing harassment, he left the country at the end of 1989 with two associates and ended up in Birtamod, a junction town in Jhapa District of Nepal. There they set up the People's Forum for Human Rights (PFHR), "to fight for political equality in Bhutan and to inform the world about the happenings within."

With the assistance of Ratan Gazmere, then a lecturer at the National Institute of Education in Samchi, a booklet *Bhutan: We Want Justice* was produced by the exiles. Rizal and his two companions were abducted from Birtamod by Nepali police and taken to Kathmandu. Waiting on the tarmac was the Druk Air jet with V. Namgyal, King Jigme's *aide de camp* and chief of the Royal Bodyguards. They were handcuffed and taken to Thimphu.

Soon after the abduction, thinking perhaps the leaderless Lhotshampas would not react, the Government legislated the wearing of the *gho* and the *kira* "for all Bhutanese at all times".

The first refugees began to leave Bhutan. They were housed with the help of West Bengal's ruling party CPI(M) at Garganda, a tea estate community in Jalpaiguri, where large sheds of a tea companies were made available. The PFHR and the Students Union of Bhutan combined

forces in early 1990 to establish the Bhutan People's Party in Garganda.

Later, the refugee camps in India were dismantled and refugees who did not have relatives and friends all moved west into Nepal, where they began to populate the banks of the Mai Khola in Jhapa. The BPP, meanwhile, established an office in Kathmandu and began a media campaign. But the Kathmandu's media's reach was short, and the BPP ended up preaching to the converted.

As the Bhutanese programme of depopulation progressed, not only the southern peasantry but also



Narapati Dhungel and family of Lamidanda, Chirang, pose for a parting shot.

the retrospective effect of the 1985 Citizenship Act. The petition recalled that the review of the 1977 Citizenship Act had been done at the initiative of the southern Bhutanese, who fully shared the concern about possible settlement of illegal immigrants. "...to view the people with suspicion and to blame them for allegedly colluding with the immigrants to secret them into the country is unfair and unjust."

the high-level Lhotshampa civil servants in Thimphu started feeling the heat. Ten civil servants fled in April 1991, and others followed. The arrival of these senior bureaucrats, some of whom had helped draft Rizal's original petition to the King, provided a degree of political articulation not previously present. Unexpectedly, however, their presence sparked infighting and rivalry among the refugee front ranks.

ANTI-NATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN  
SOUTHERN BHUTAN



THE BHUTAN TRAGEDY  
WHEN WILL IT END?

FIRST REPORT OF  
THE SAARC JURISTS MISSION  
ON BHUTAN

## Selling the "Southern Problem"

Majesty the King, on Monday, dated 26 February 1990 at Samchi. Attended the meeting for six hours."

### *Anti-National Activities in Southern Bhutan: A Terrorist Movement*

(Department of Information, Thimphu, September 1991). After defending the policy of national cultural integration and describing development efforts in southern Bhutan and the availability of education and health facilities, the book focuses on the "terrorist acts that have been perpetrated by the anti-nationals" since mid-1989. The text speaks of extortion, dacoity, sabotage, hijacking, kidnapping, murder, brutal torture, mutilation and decapitations, and as its centerpiece provides colour close-ups of the same.

The militancy that has taken place along the southern border appears to be of great propaganda value to the Bhutanese Government. The Embassy in New Delhi distributes stacks of colour pictures to inquiring journalists, showing in colour burnt schoolhouses, blown up electricity pylons and explicit views of mutilated bodies. The majority of these pictures, most of which are included in the booklet, are from 1990 and the latest one is dated 9 September 1991.

There is also a picture—widely reproduced in Indian newspapers—of "a contingent of anti-national terrorists" under custody. Refugee leaders claim these are prisoners of the September 1990 rally forcibly made to pose in camouflage fatigues. Another shows "arms recovered from anti-national terrorists," the majority of them muzzle-loaders, which the refugees claim are actually licensed arms deposited with the Government under orders.

### *The Bhutan Tragedy: When Will it End?*

(INSEC, Kathmandu and the International Centre for Law in Development, New York, 1992). Subtitled the "First Report of the SAARC Jurists Mission on Bhutan", this report was prepared by a team of South Asian jurists: Justices Krishna Iyer of India, K.M. Subhan of Bangladesh and P.B. Singh of Nepal, as well as lawyer and human rights activist Clarence Dias. The facilitator was Prakash Kaphley of INSEC, who died in the Thai Airways jet disaster on 31 July 1992 while returning from Colombo, where the book was launched. Incidentally, two jurists were unable to visit Thimphu for the purpose of compiling the report because Druk Air in Kathmandu refused to accept their confirmed tickets.

The report contains much information that is valuable for those following events in Druk Yul. Two criticisms are that the tone is too strident and polemical for a jurists' report, which

needlessly undermines its strength, and that the use of the term "SAARC Jurists" implies the mission had the official sanction of the SAARC organisation, which clearly was not the case.

The jurists, in their "unanimous findings", state that the enactment of a number of discriminatory law and policies in the mid-1980s has triggered serious human rights violations in south Bhutan. These laws are being implemented in an arbitrary, discriminatory and "intimidatory" manner; there has been "systemic and manifold discrimination" against the Lhotshampas; the discrimination has been "conscious and directed" by sections of the ruling authorities; citizenship rights of a majority of southern Bhutanese have been illegally confiscated; there have been attempts at forced national integration; there have been widespread violations in the south of the rights to education, health and basic goods and services; there has been massive suppression of the right to dissent, associate and assemble; access to human rights organisations has been denied; and "there have been instances of ethnocide."

The report provides a review of Bhutan's laws, stating that "the 1985 Citizenship Law virtually *confiscates* citizenship rights by the ingenious device of changing the definition of citizenship." It also challenges Government claim that a small country like Bhutan cannot afford the luxury of diversity, stating that no Government document has shown "that ethnic diversity *has in fact* impeded the growth of social harmony and unity." The book's appendix provides much additional material, including relevant Bhutanese laws and Tshongdu resolutions, Government notifications and reports, petitions to the King, statements made by refugees ("Voices of Pain"), "victim's documents", and a BPP-produced chronology of events.

### *Bhutan: An Iron Path to Democracy*

(INHURED, Kathmandu, 1992). Written by S.K. Pradhan, General Secretary of the BPP, this publication briefly reviews Bhutanese history and legal system, and then homes in on "denial of the right to nationality." It describes the process of granting citizenship and provides a comparison of citizenship laws of 1958, 1977 and 1985. The text expresses indignation that "the 1985 act was given retrospective implementation from 1958, superseding all previous laws and bylaws on citizenship before 1985."

The booklet also contains sections on Drig Lam Namzha, the "peace protests" of the fall of 1990, and provides separate lists of the unlawfully detained, killed and injured, the houses demolished and burned, abduction, disappearance and rape.

Over the past two years, Lhostampa exiles and the Thimphu government have published their version of events. Also, a South Asian jurists' report was released in early August 1992 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

### *The Facts behind Recent Developments in Southern Bhutan.*

This booklet was produced to defend the policy of One Nation, One Identity against attack by Lhotshampa leaders. It starts with Thimphu's version of how "anti-national" activities began in the schools and colleges of southern Bhutan and describes King Jigme's magnanimity in granting amnesty based on "his strong faith in the people," and the treachery of Tek Nath Rizal, once "an ordinary bulldozer driver" who was "sent to Australia by His Majesty so that he could learn English and broaden his outlook."

The text goes on to discuss the betrayal of trust by the faculty and students of the National Institute of Education, the Sherbutse College and the Royal Bhutan Polytechnic; defends the need for the 1988 census as "past records were totally unreliable and extremely inaccurate"; defends the mandatory wearing of the *gho* and *kira* underlining the "unavoidable necessity for a small country like Bhutan to have an easily recognisable type of dress"; justifies the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language; maintains that the South has received more than a fair share of the development budget; and on human rights states that, "Every Bhutanese citizen is completely equal before the law irrespective of whether they are Royal Family members, Government officials, businessmen or simple farmers."

The booklet does not have a date on it, but the copy *Himal* received has a penned note on the cover saying that it was "received from His



The politico-bureaucrats who entered the scene first tried to carve a niche for themselves within the BPP, but they claim to have found a party that was ill-organised, lacking realistic programmes and a constitution or ideology. Above all, they criticise BPP leaders of harbouring idealistic visions of a 'free Bhutan' without searching for realistic ways to push forward the agenda of return.

Unable to make headway with the BPP, some civil servants joined the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB), which as PFHR's successor, was involved in managing the refugee camps. Others decided to form the Bhutan National Democratic Party, as a 'democratic alternative' to the BPP. The new party was launched in the fall of 1991 in New Delhi, signifying a shift in lobbying focus.

Rightly or wrongly, the BPP is identified with the left, while the BNDP sells itself as the moderate party to which the Thimphu Government will have to turn to for negotiations when the time comes. King Jigme did tell Reuters that the southern problem could be solved through "honest, sincere and genuine dialogue," but that "dialogue had been difficult with the BPP...because they had no clear leader."

For their part, the BPP stalwarts regard the BNDP as a party of well-to-do interlopers out to wrest away a movement that they have nurtured from the start. One European journalist who has her sympathies with the BPP, says the BNDP people is made up of 'armchair activists' who "tried to get the movement under their control, confused everyone, tried to divide the movement, but did not succeed."

Pratap Subba, who presently works for HUROB as an organiser at Pathari camp, says he left the BPP because of differences in ideology and strategy. "The public should be the last weapon to use, instead they gave the call for mass rallies against the government with no back-up support. There was no media coverage, and a lot of false talk to mislead the people." The BPP, says Subba, "spends more energy fighting the other refugee organisations - SUB, HUROB and BNDP - than for the cause of return."

S.K.Pradhan, General Secretary of BPP, accuses the BNDP of dealing a fatal blow to opposition unity and sowing "absolute confusion" among the refugees. "They want security and a comfortable stay in Kathmandu, whereas our people are on the ground, organising in the Duars, the Hill Council areas, and even within

Bhutan." Pradhan says the BPP plans to restart agitations "within 1992" but will not divulge details as to what form they will take.

Try as they might to give a non-ethnic colour to their politics, the parties in exile have failed to enlist a single prominent dissident, either Ngalung or Sarchop, in their struggle. BPP's Pradhan claims some Drukpa membership, but they are not visible. The BNDP stated at its founding that it expected "to dilute the allegation of ethnic-led struggle," but the few Sarchops in exile have not yet come on board.

BNDP's General Secretary



Dhawal remains hopeful that the distinct political choices presented by two parties will allow "liberal thinkers from the Sarchops and Ngalungs to take a political stand on the crisis in Bhutan."

What Bhutanese politics in exile lacks, clearly, is a figure to rally behind. "Because we lack a leader, there is a dilemma in the camps," concedes Subba. Such a figure exists in Tek Nath Rizal, which is probably why Thimphu does not release him even when his cell-mates have been let go earlier this year. After a long stay at the army-controlled Rabuna prison in central Bhutan, he has recently been moved to the Central Police Prison in Thimphu.

Does Rizal have what it takes to lead the refugees back to Bhutan? A refugee teacher who knew Rizal since childhood says, "He has charisma and obvious honesty. He has the ability to bring unity among the refugees. But I do not think he had the theoretical grasp to put forward the design of the new Bhutan after we go back."

So the BNDP and BPP are not on talking terms, either in Kathmandu drawing rooms or in the Jhapa camps. Regardless of their different approaches, however, neither party has yet succeeded breaking the impregnable diplomatic and media barricade that Thimphu's master diplomats have erected around themselves.

"So far, exile politics has reflected our upbringing in Bhutan. In the beginning, we had no political culture, knew nothing about forming a party, or about ideology. So we have been learning," says Dr. Bhampa Rai of HUROB. He is concerned that sooner or later the refugees will become pawns in party politics of Nepal. "Nepali politicians must look at us refugees - not as Leftists or Democrats, but as but as Bhutanese. When we go back, then of course we will divide along where our ideologies lie."

Ratan Gazmere is despondent about the state of exile politics. "The PFHR we started was to have been a non-partisan organisation fighting for human rights. Coming out, we find that refugee politics is steeped in power struggle. Those of us who have just come out see it as our prime responsibility to bring people together, to have unity, and to internationalise the issue."

Bhakti Prasad Sharma, who was released in December along with Gazmere, says "The movement is in shambles. There is no united front because an element of ego has crept in." The five erstwhile prisoners, he says, were "very concerned and are talking to each other. The coming months are critical, and the priority should be to return with dignity. We can fight for reforms in Bhutan, but only after we go back. Human



Before and after: The family of Purna Bahadur Chhetri, a graduate of Sherbutse College, in formal departure shot in Bhutan and at Pathari Refugee Camp, Morang, Nepal.





rights and democracy cannot go together, one has to precede the others."

Bringing up the question of human rights and democracy, Sharma has put his finger on one of the principle issues up for discussion. The political crisis in southern Bhutan, coming as it did soon after Nepal's successful "peoples' movement for human rights and democracy" of April 1990, suddenly thrust political novices forward as refugee leaders. These leaders picked up the terminology presented to them by the Kathmandu tabloids. The Bhutanese problem too became, simplistically, a movement for human rights and democracy. Whether this was realistic, was a different matter.

BNDP's R.B. Basnet, one of the senior bureaucrats who came out in 1991, has no doubts. "Political reforms are necessary to guarantee human rights. It is not possible to have respect for human rights in the absence of democratic institutions." This might be true, but the word 'democracy' is as anathema to Thimphu's aristocracy as it was to the Ranas of Nepal in the 1940s. It is unlikely that the Druk Gyalpo would be as amenable to opposition demands for democracy as Nepal's *Sri Panch* was in the Spring of 1990.

The pages of *Kuensel* amply demonstrate how remote the Thimphu rulers are from accepting the one person, one vote principle. In October last year, Foreign Minister Tshering asked the Tshongdu not to be confused with the anti-national's campaigns against dress, language, custom and religion. They had "a much more deep-seated, long term objective", which was "the introduction of multi-party democracy".

Once democracy was introduced, warned *Lynpo* Tshering, the Lhotshampas would be in a position to form the government in Thimphu and take over the country. The combination of "ethnic demands" for constitutional monarchy, multi-party system and proportional ethnic representation in the National Assembly and the Cabinet, he said, would be "a highly lethal one for the Bhutanese monarchy."

King Jigme says that he does, ultimately, when he thinks the time is right, wish to relinquish the heavy burden of monarchy. In nearly a dozen interviews over the last two years, he has said in almost identical words, "I do not think that monarchy is the best form of government. I would not oppose democracy as long as I am fully confident that the political changes are for the greater good of our people." Between a King who says he wants democracy, but not now, and a Foreign Minister who says never to a multi-

party democracy, there is very little room for negotiation by the parties in exile.

The militancy in southern Bhutan, some of which took place with the apparent acquiescence of the BPP, was just the thing Thimphu needed to blow up the issue out of proportion. While a few of the militants who infiltrate the border areas might have links with the BPP, others seem to have been acting independently. "These could be unaffiliated youth who are seeking revenge for evictions, lootings and torture and rape of family members," says Om Dhungel, a civil servant who recently came into exile.

### Militancy

Some of this low intensity militancy appears to be occurring still, providing Thimphu authority with further public relations advantage. Both BPP and BNDP claim, however, that the *Kuensel* has gone overboard in blaming every robbery, murder and accident that occurs in Bhutan these days on the *ngolops*. Indeed, Bhutan no longer has crimes other than those committed by us "anti-nationals".

"If these are infiltrators, would it not be more likely that their victims would be Drukpa? How is it that most of the crimes are against defenseless Nepali peasants?" asks BNDP's Basnet. He believes that much of the mayhem is the work of undisciplined units of the Royal Bhutan Army and Police. Many refugees in the camps maintain that the Bodo, known to them as *Meche*, as well as Nepali and Bengali *goonda* hooligans from India are taking advantage of the lawless situation created by the Government. Many recount report of *dungpas* and "*chamches*"

threatening "to let loose the Meches" on Lhotshampas who refuse to leave.

"The use of violence by infiltrators and the burning of schoolhouses was a massive blunder," says a Western ambassador who is accredited concurrently to New Delhi and Thimphu and believes that Lhotshampa militants have been active in the South. "The Government might have exaggerated the threat, but we are not in a position to judge how much."

What is intriguing about the militancy, actually, is how little of it there is considering who Bhutan borders. Adjacent lies the extreme leftist hotbed of northern West Bengal; the Bodo insurgency hugs the southern jungles; and the radicalised cadres of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) are a stone's throw away in the Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district. Besides, the Duars are populated by sympathetic Nepali-speakers who could provide all the cover and protection militants might need.

In January this year, Dawa Tshering told pressmen in Dhaka that "radical groups like communists, leftists and Naxalites in India and Nepal" were patronising terrorists against Bhutan. This is not the picture one gets as the refugees continue to file out meekly as a government asks them to leave their land. *Lynpo* Tshering likes to recall the image of "the martial Gorkhas", but the specimen arriving at the camps by the hundreds each day in cramped truckloads is that of a poor, confused peasantry that has no energy left to fight.

Nepali Police Sub Inspector Hom Jung Chauhan has been manning the Karakbhatta border checkpost since the refugees started



Ngolop terrorists or Ngalung propaganda? "Anti-nationals" who refugee leaders say were prisoners pulled from Chemjang Jail in Thimphu and forced to pose in combat gear.

arriving in late 1990. "You cannot expect any militancy from this lot," he says. "These villagers come with long khukuris slung down their sides, but their *sahaas* (strength) is gone. Sometimes I ask them in exasperation, why this timidity?"

Lhotshampa militancy clearly is long on rhetoric and short on action. The 1988 pamphlet *Bhutan: We Want Justice*, produced by the PFHR group in Birtamod, was hardly timid when it warned that "...a whirlwind of rebellion will shake the hills of Thimphu and bring down the rising towers of terrorist power... We shall hold on to our religion, our culture, our language and our land with our 'TEETH'. We shall fight until we win."

This bluster was also present in loose talk by BPP cadres of "revolution" and the impression created of a well-organised military operation. "We do not even have money to eat, where would we buy the guns and ammunition," asks one member. Being a loosely run organisation, it is possible that the party has its share of 'wild cards', but the BPP's General Secretary Pradhan forcefully denies that his organisation has ever espoused militant violence.

Such protestations have little effect against the proven ability of the Thimphu propagandists to reach the media with the proper "spin". *Lynpo Tshering* told the *Statesman* in January this year that sophisticated weapons were being brought "all the way from Afghanistan and Peshawar for use by the BPP terrorists against us."

A person who was at Garganda when it still housed large numbers of refugees says that at one time he did see 100 or so guns, "but practically all of them were antique muzzle-loaders."

Even the little Lhotshampa militancy that is occurring might peter out as the BPP, too, takes the high road of diplomacy, and as news spreads of free rations in the refugee camps in Nepal, courtesy UNHCR. But there is every likelihood that militancy bred of frustration will ignite, and much more dangerously, if a negotiated return of the refugee population looks remote.

### Blind Developers

Aid agencies love Bhutan because here in the eastern Himalaya, at last, they have found the one country that might yet prove that the 'development' they propagate, works. Here is a land that is exotic, backward, with a benevolent monarch, a Westernised bureaucratic elite, underpopulated, but with ample resources.

UN agencies, bilateral donors, and international NGOs regard Bhutan as a laboratory to prove their legitimacy, and the

brochures they all bring out are tinged with wonder. In February 1992, UNDP's Chief William Draper waxed lyrical about Bhutan leading in "sustainable development" and providing a model for others, quite unmindful of the fact that the factors that come together for Bhutan (history, climate, green cover, population and geography) do not for most developing countries. One Western ambassador who was recently in Bhutan conceded that, "The aid agencies have great sympathy for the Drukpa point of view, not because what they are doing is right, but because their culture is threatened."

Bureaucratic efficiency and the buzzword "absorptive capacity" does make Bhutan unique and attractive for development planners. In addition, the Bhutan's well-paid bureaucracy is practically incorruptible in comparison to those of the rest of South Asia.

In the absence of resident embassies in Thimphu and the extremely controlled access to malleable media, the aid agencies are the world's ears and eyes to Bhutan. Unfortunately, they are as good as deaf and blind. Too busy praising the activities of the Government, their influence on events in the south has been near-zero.

An aid worker, who requested anonymity for fear of losing future contracts with an aid agency, accuses the Thimphu-based international staff of UNDP, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation, of complacency. "If someone in the staff drafts a report on the southern problem, it is invariably diluted before it is transmitted to headquarters. I cannot fathom why development agencies, whose mandates is humanitarian, continue to act like ostriches," she says.

Although NGOs and volunteer service workers tend to be more concerned than the



international civil servants of the UN, they do not speak up for fear that an irate Government would terminate their programmes. Which agency will take up the role of the mouse that bells the dragon?

The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Australia, Switzerland, Germany and Canada, all have development volunteers active in Bhutan. The international NGOs are Helvetas of Switzerland and Save the Children US and UK, while there are also several bilateral development agencies such as DANIDA of Denmark, GTZ of Germany and FINNIDA of Finland.

The inaction out of Thimphu contrasts sharply with the development agencies in Kathmandu, which are directly and indirectly supporting the refugee efforts in Jhapa.

With its commanding presence in Bhutan as the lead agency, the inaction of the UNDP office in Thimphu is curious. According to Lhotshampa counterparts as well as officials of some aid agencies in Thimphu, UNDP's Resident Coordinator Terry Jones, a Briton, has failed to be assertive with the Government. Even though he arrived in 1990 after the problems had begun, Jones has had ample opportunity to understand the nature of the events in the south, especially when his own Bhutanese staff members leave house and hearth to end up in the bamboo thatches of Jhapa. If there is any back-door lobbying being done in Thimphu and at UNDP's New York headquarters, the result is not obvious.

Like Jones, practically every expatriate in Thimphu has his or her own experience with Lhotshampa colleagues and counterparts who have been relieved of the jobs, sidelined, or harrassed into exile. Conversation at Thimphu expatriate gatherings tends to center on the southern problem, with about equal numbers supporting or questioning the Government policies in the south. Many of those who are disillusioned vent their frustrations when they come to Kathmandu.

Although UNDP's efforts, if any, are still *sotto voce*, it did publish in 1985 a booklet entitled *The Case of Bhutan* which identified potential problems. The booklet, prepared by the Danish United Nations Association, speaks of "the danger of growing regional inequality" and calls for



Whither the Ngalung?



"development planning in favour of the more densely populated and poorer Southern and Eastern parts of Bhutan... Regional difference that are connected with linguistic, ethnic and religious differences in Bhutan might otherwise develop into a challenge to national unity and social harmony."

One outcome of driving out the Lhotshampas is already evident: there is a shortage of mid-level professionals to man government services and development programmes. The projection is for an acute shortage of labour, especially as the implementation of the major infrastructural works under the Seventh Five Year Plan get underway. Already, the hospitals in Thimphu are understaffed. A plan to induct Indian workers under contract might work in the short term, but even Drukpa administrators have been known to concede that highlander Nepalis make better labourers in Bhutan.

One aid agency reports that the departure of a number of government staff ("counterparts, colleagues") has affected development work in the country. The Bhutan People's Party (BPP) claims in a pamphlet that "already 3,000 civil servants including professionals, skilled and technical manpower such as doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses, agriculture and forestry personnel have been forced to leave the civil service." The party demands that international volunteers be withdrawn as they are being used to substitute for evicted Lhotshampas.

Before the Aid Bhutan Roundtable was to meet in Geneva on 8 March to make pledges for the Seventh Plan development projects, Foreign Minister Tshering suggested that the southern problem not be brought up in Geneva as there would be little time and the 'technical delegation' would not be able to answer questions. Tshering asked instead that the Delhi-based representatives of the donor countries and agencies meet prior to the Roundtable to hear a report on the southern situation.

This was a master stroke, for it meant that already-sensitised Delhi-based diplomats would be present rather than the more senior delegation in Geneva. (Even ambassadors of the same country but based in Kathmandu and New Delhi tend to have differing perceptions on Bhutan. The Delhi view generally prevails.)

At the pre-Geneva meeting in Delhi, when Tshering was asked

about the south, recalls a diplomat who was present, "he replied that the problem was not very acute. He was very open in his answer, and we all went away satisfied." In Geneva, according to a refugee who has read the Bhutanese delegation's report to the Government, Switzerland and Germany did raise the matter of human rights violations, but this apparently made no impact on the actual pledging.

Thus, at the very time that the Lhotshampa exodus was at its peak and the death rate from a meningitis epidemic was the highest in the refugee camps, Bhutan was presented the largest aid package it has ever received. Even *Lynpo* Dawa Tshering expressed surprise at the windfall: "...We did not expect so much pledging." And the lesson he drew from it, as reported by the *Telegraph*, was that "Bhutan's image remained untarnished in the international community despite the attempts of Nepali-speaking agitators to project the Royal Government in a poor light."

Otherwise, too, development programmes have been stepped up by the donors. New countries are offering development assistance, while others increase their commitments. GTZ is going ahead with new plans, much to the unhappiness of some Nepal-based German volunteers. According to one expatriate development worker in Bhutan, the Dutch and the Danes have significantly raised their ODA over the past year. The ADB has too upped its disbursements slightly, while the World Bank has started new programmes.

To give the donor governments some credit - particularly Austria, Denmark and Japan - they did shoot down the Government's funding proposal for a 'Green Belt' a couple of years ago. The plan was to evacuate a one-kilometre swath of forest right along the southern border with India. The plan was sold as an environmental project, but the donors got wise to the fact that the maximum concentration of Lhotshampa population is in the proposed stretch.



Prime Minister Koirala and King Jigme in Colombo.

## Nepal's Problem

The refugees who come down to the roadheads in the Assam Duars and Jalpaiguri are told to turn right and to head for Nepal. For a cut, agents arrange for further passage and the families make their payment of IRs 4,500 to IRs 4,800 per truck, inclusive of bribes to police and officials all the way to Jhapa. It is a day-long journey across fields, forest and tea plantations to the Mechi river, across the border, and to the junction town of Birtamod in Jhapa. The trucks unload their human cargo and promptly head back to Daadghari in Assam for another load.

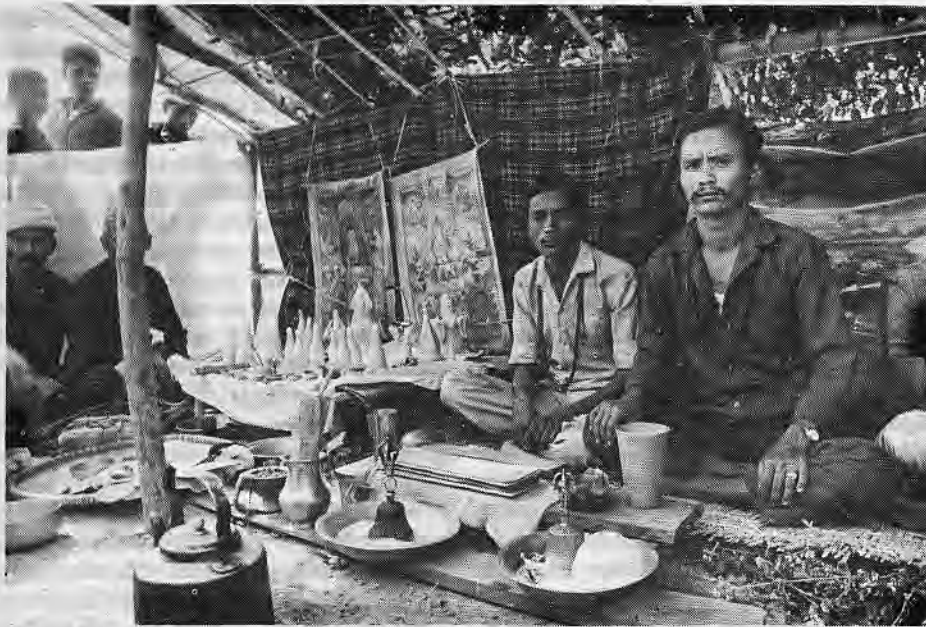
The problem is now Nepal's, a country most Lhotshampas regard as the original home country, but a place most have never visited and where few retain familial links. The Lhotshampas make up the largest refugee population ever to come into Nepal. For Nepal's insular elites, who have never had to confront problems of identity that most Nepali-speakers outside Nepal have (see "To be or not to be Nepali," *Himal* May/June 1992), the Bhutanese influx has been unsettling. Here are thousands upon thousands of individuals that clearly look and speak like Nepali peasants (except for some distinctive Drukpa mannerisms and speech), but who do not regard themselves as Nepali citizens. While Nepali migrants have for long been leaving for *muglan*, this is the first time that such large numbers have returned as refugees - to a mother country that is over-populated and full up.

The eastern Tarai district of Jhapa is actually made up settlers: Nepali highlanders from Taplejung and Panchthar districts, as well as Burmese refugees who arrived in the 1960s, when General Ne Win implemented his own *Bhumiputra* programme.

There are already about 65,000 Lhotshampa refugees living in the Jhapa camps, and a few thousands more living outside in Nepal and in India. With assistance now available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more refugees who have been staying in India are expected to arrive at the camps. If the present rate of evictions in Bhutan continue, says UNHCR, there could be between 100,000 and 130,000 refugees out of Bhutan by year-end.

Acting host to a refugee population in the most politically volatile corner of the country, Kathmandu sees it in its interest to send back the refugees as quickly as possible. Thimphu, on the other hand, seems to be banking on the hope that the longer the refugees stay away, the greater the chances that they will assimilate into Nepal's (and India's) larger population and stay away.

Other than going to war across 100 kilometres of Indian territory,



*Tamang rituals for a dead father at Maidhar Refugee Camp.*

withdrawing landing rights to Druk Air at the Tribhuvan International Airport, or refusing entry to Drukpa (mostly Sarchop) pilgrims to the holy places of Kathmandu Valley, there is little that Nepal can do to directly influence Bhutanese policy. If India is not to help, the only option available for Kathmandu is to try and blemish Bhutan's Shangri La image with an international campaign. Even this, it has been unwilling to do for fear of ruffling feathers of the Indian eagle.

And so, for a year, Nepal tried Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's "Quiet Diplomacy". Through this period, several attempts were made to discuss the matter with the King Jigme and his Foreign Minister. Thimphu's tactic has been to sound conciliatory and ready-to-act, but then to let the matter languish. Even a month's inaction means another few thousand Lhotshampas more are out. Every window of opportunity must be utilised as Nepal dithers on going public.

There is, of course, no question of where the Nepali Government's sympathies lie. Prime Minister Koirala has revealed that he was personally involved in the establishment of the Bhutan State Congress, which led a short-lived agitation for Nepali-speakers' rights in the early 1950s.

Nepal's quiet diplomacy has involved Prime Minister Koirala and Foreign Ministry emissaries talking to their counterparts in Thimphu and Delhi. At the SAARC summit in Colombo, Koirala broached the subject with King Jigme, who was most reassuring and said the problem should be solved "through contact". As soon as Koirala arrived in Kathmandu, he sent off a letter stating that as of 31 December 1991 the refugees numbered 6,000, and let us do something about it. There was no response till March, by which time the number in the refugee camps had swelled to 25,000.

On 29 March 1992, the Nepali Foreign Secretary Narendra Bikram Shah was dispatched with a letter to the King. He came back with a reply that King Jigme would himself send an envoy. That envoy, T. Topgyel, arrived the following week, by which time another 5,000 had arrived, bringing the refugee figure up to 30,000.

Thimphu's argument through all of this has been that the refugees come from elsewhere, not Bhutan. In response, Nepal has suggested that a joint commission be set up to investigate the authenticity of refugee nationality, with UNHCR's and India's help if Thimphu thought it necessary. Says a Nepali Foreign Ministry official, "The basic proposal is bilateral. It can be expanded to include any other party, including India, if Bhutan so desires."

Since Thimphu again chose to prevaricate on the proposal sent back through T. Topgyel, the Nepali officials who went to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in early June had the intention of confronting the Bhutanese delegation. But the latter stalled, with the King's sister Ashi Sonam Chheden refusing even an informal cup of tea in between environment and development sessions. One Bhutanese diplomat did accuse a Nepali official of being parochial, however. In Rio itself, Koirala brought the matter of Bhutan up with Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, who contacted the Bhutanese King and relayed back to Koirala the response, which was that the King and Koirala were in close communication, and they would solve the problem between themselves.

(When Nepali officials at one meeting referred to the presence of thousands of Bhutanese in the camps with citizenship identity cards, the Thimphu counterparts said their printers in Calcutta had proved to be crooks and were flooding the camps with fake ID cards. When the



Nepalis invited the Bhutanese to discreetly bring in forgery experts to check the authenticity of samples, there was no response from Thimphu.)

In order to salvage its credibility, and with the monsoon session of Parliament coming up, Koirala's Government decided finally to end the phase of quiet diplomacy. In his opening address to Parliament, King Birendra announced the Government's desire to work towards a return of the Bhutanese refugees to their country "with dignity". An all-party meeting was held on 7 July, which agreed on a three-pronged strategy: Koirala was to continue to try to make direct contact with Thimphu, if that failed to seek the good offices of India, and if that too fails, to internationalise the issue.

Following the all-party meeting, the Prime Minister sent another letter to the Bhutanese monarch. A response is still awaited. Says one Nepali official, "If even this fails, we must remind India that Nepal is now a multi-party democracy, and this refugee problem has the potential of bringing great instability here, which is hardly in India's interest."

If India proves reluctant to use its clout in the months ahead, the official says that Nepal will reluctantly "go international". He says, "Since under the Bhutan-India treaty, India is Bhutan's guide on foreign affairs, we in Nepal must respect that position and try and work through India. But if Nepal's own internal-security gets jeopardised by a hundred thousand refugees, we have to do something."

Internationalising the issue could mean anything from quietly approaching influential Western countries, broaching the subject at the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, or bringing it up at the next SAARC summit. One option, which Kathmandu probably will not choose, is to try and garner international support in order to get an item inscribed on the agenda of the UN General Assembly, when it meets in mid-September.

### **The West's Un-Response**

If Nepal cannot utter a squeak for fear of India, what about the powerful Western countries that selectively are so keen in standing up for human rights? When human rights were trampled in Nepal in early 1990, the international concern was enormous, and decisive. Pressure was brought to bear on King Birendra: threats to cut the aid pipeline, letters from United States senators, even a warning from the World Bank.

In Bhutan's case, the scale of suffering is immeasurably larger than Nepal's in 1990, and in addition there is a forced mass exodus in progress.

B. RAUNJAR



A senior Western diplomat in Kathmandu says that Western countries have only begun to respond to the humanitarian aspects of the Bhutanese refugees, but a policy level change has yet to occur in any of the individual capitals. "On the merits, Bhutan would have a difficult time trying to justify its policies, but it is getting away with it. You have one country solving its population problem dumping refugees on another country which is not even on its borders."

The diplomat ascribes Western inaction to several factors: "Bhutan's isolation, the fact that it does not have diplomatic relations with many countries, the exotic aura that surrounds the country, the 'Buddhist lobby' in the West, and the lack of media attention. Official visits by diplomats are strictly controlled and the Western journalists try not to be too critical because, so they say, they want to be able to get a visa when things 'really get bad'."

At one time, Bhutan was keen to move out from under India's foreign policy umbrella by inviting more resident embassies in Thimphu. That today only Bangladesh and India maintain resident embassies has become a blessing in disguise. Lack of diplomatic relations and lack of in-country representation are two main excuses by Western inaction on the southern problem.

And so Nepal remains the only country to have broken the silence on Bhutan. Germany and the US, for all their pre-eminence in world affairs today, have less influence on Thimphu than even Norway or Switzerland. Partly this is an instance of not trying hard enough. Even without diplomatic relations, influence can be exerted through the control of UN agencies and the World Bank. The outcome could be decisive.

### India's Soft Spot

It would be disingenuous of India to imply that the problem of overpopulated camps in Jhapa is a bilateral one between Nepal and Bhutan. The refugee population enters India before ending up in Nepal. It is also Bhutan's public claim that most of the refugees have their origins in the Indian northeast. New Delhi has yet to accept or counter the claim. Also, interpretation of the 1949 treaty which formalised relations between the India and Bhutan would indicate that India is treaty-bound to try and help sort out the problem. Article II states that "The Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations."

Neither does New Delhi seem too perturbed over the presence of refugees in India, particularly in Jalpaiguri. Nirmal Bose, a prominent politician

from the district and close associate of Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, has no doubts. "Who says there are no refugees in India? I can tell you that there are 25,000 to 30,000 Bhutanese refugees in the Duars. And more will come, there is a serious human rights problem. Nepal and Bhutan must sit together, and India should be associated with these discussions," says Bose.

India's support for Bhutan takes different forms. At the Geneva meeting of the Aid Bhutan Roundtable, it was after New Delhi took the lead in pledging US\$ 300 million that the other donor countries and agencies followed through with the additional US\$ 570 million. Every time King Jigme visits New Delhi, he comes back with a gift project or two. India also spends, for obvious strategic reasons, crores of rupees annually to maintain Bhutanese highways.

The economic subsidies that India provides Bhutan ensure that commodities are cheaper in Bhutan, and shortages are rare. The residents of Jaigaon in Jalpaiguri regularly cross over to Phuntsholing to buy cooking gas, kerosene, sugar and other essentials. There is no rationing in across the border.

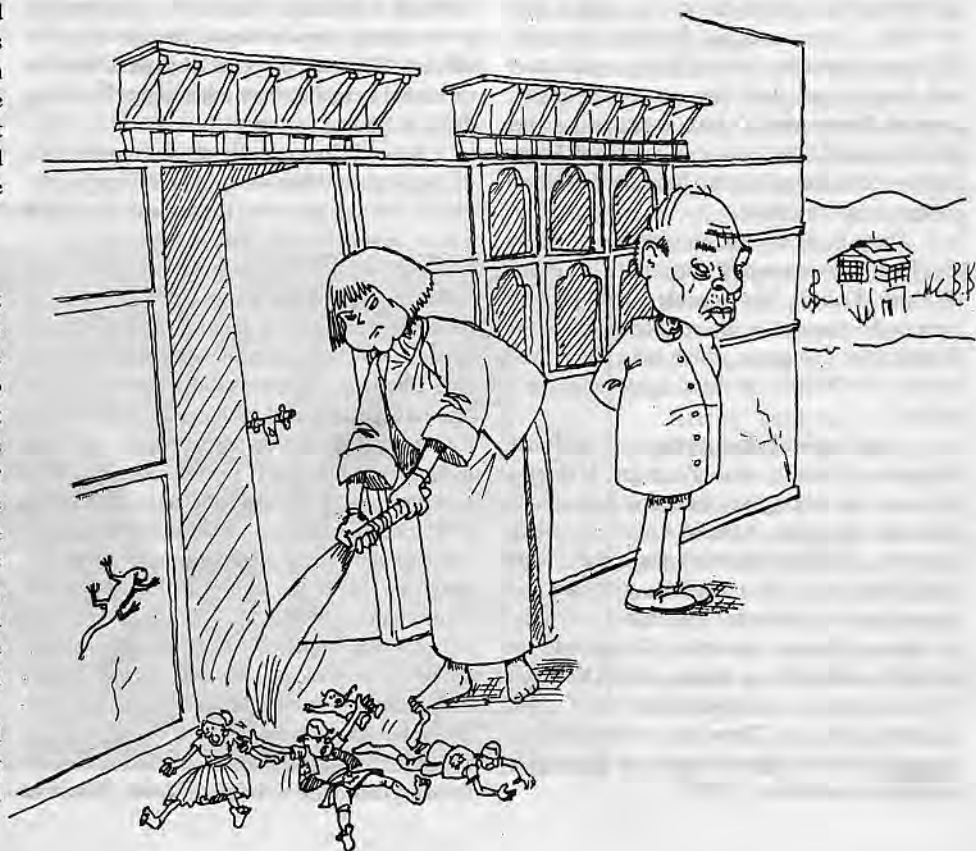
Most intriguing is the question of extra-territoriality. A Bhutanese Army contingent is allowed to camp in Kalimpong to guard the Queen Mother. According to reports, in early 1992, the Queen Mother refused to renew the lease of a mansion that the liquor company Shaw Wallace was using as guest house. When Shaw Wallace brought up the question of tenancy rights, the Bhutanese contingent went over and had the premises vacated at gunpoint. The

company has submitted a writ application in the Calcutta High Court against the Government of India for failing to provide protection.

On June 1992, a phone call from Thimphu to New Delhi was enough to activate the Indian military. An Indian army officer and three *jawans*, all armed, enter Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim and disrupted a meeting of monks. The meeting was discussing the reincarnation of the new Karmapa to head the Kagyu order, of which the monastery has been the center in exile since the Chinese takeover of Tibet. One of the monastic factions is known to be close to the royal family of Bhutan.

With acts and omission, therefore, the Indian government seems bent on keeping Thimphu happy. Why? First, it apparently has no intention of nursing another Sikkim to maturity, perhaps even for the heavy economic burden it would entail in keeping an annexed population happy. Secondly, India would like to retain Bhutan as an effective buffer state on its sensitive northern border. A sedate, pliable monarchy is always preferable to a rowdy, and Nepali-dominated, democracy. Thirdly, New Delhi is counting on Bhutan's cooperation in not providing safe haven for Bodo insurgents, who are reported to camp in the jungles of southern Bhutan.

But the most important reason to want to maintain the status quo as long as feasible seems to be the fear of the "pan-Nepali" clout. While the "Greater Nepal bogey" as presently propagated both by Subhas Ghising of Darjeeling and Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering is just that, New Delhi is, nevertheless, cautious.



Says a perspicacious academic from Siliguri, "With democracy in Bhutan, there will be one more pocket of Nepali sentiment. You already have the Nepali nation-state, the district of Darjeeling, the state of Sikkim, the Duars with its concentration of Nepali-speakers - and with Bhutan you would have another Nepali-dominated nation-state. Without anyone having planned it, this mix might be too volatile for New Delhi to stomach."

B.S.Das, a former Indian envoy to Bhutan, warned in a 24 June article in *The Pioneer* that the dangers of "MahaNepal" were real. "Bhutan's stability and the balancing structure, which its ethnicity provides, is important for India from several angles which can easily be defined but cannot be stated."

Whenever it is beneficial to stoke New Delhi's fears, *Lynpo* Dawa Tshering calls in the media and spins a story of illegal immigrants



entering Bhutan as part of a well-planned strategy (the strategist is never identified) to create a 'Greater Nepal'.

Thimphu leaves no pebble unturned to keep Indian diplomats happy. When Indian Foreign Secretary J.N.Dixit and his spouse Vijaya flew into Thimphu in early June, writes Tarun Basu of *India Abroad*, "the Bhutanese accorded him a welcome befitting a head of government (with) a ceremonial welcome complete with red carpet, siren-blaring pilot cars and a squad of crack Royal Bhutanese guards who formed a ring around him wherever he went. The State Guest House, where the Dixits stayed, was festooned with multi-coloured flags and buntings, and King Jigme Singhe Wangchuk, along with his four wives, was host to the visitors at lunch."

*The Economic Times* reported that Dixit assured his hosts India would use its influence to stabilise the situation in its southern districts by not only increasing policing on its border with Bhutan "to check illegal Nepali immigration", but also to advise Kathmandu against "doing anything to destabilise the situation in the region."

### David and Goliath

Bhutan's success in handling the media belies the fears expressed by Sunanda K Datta-Ray in a much-quoted 1990 article in the *Statesman* headlined "The Phoney Crisis: Propaganda War Against Bhutan". Wrote Datta-Ray: "But for all its inconsistencies, untruths and half-truths, its criminal conduct and treasonable aim, the agitation has decided advantage. With their implicit faith in the national ideal, the King and his advisers cannot match rebel stridency. Monarchies are out of political fashion today, and ethnic minorities very much in. The Bhutanese monarchy may be additionally handicapped by a conscious decision to keep the world at bay. Because of geography, compounded by the deliberate cutback on tourism, international opinion has no independent assessment to fall back on as the cry - however false - goes up of human rights in danger in yet another of the world's tucked away countries. The reality of Bhutan, serene, warm-hearted and gentle, is far less familiar even to most Indians than the raucous demonstrators... Simple trust is always a disadvantage when faced with shrill propaganda."

Datta-Ray mourned too soon. He underestimated the ability of the King and his advisers, who in retrospect hardly seem handicapped.

On the one hand there is a government that has the resources, the energy, and the ability to influence world capitals. On the other is a refugee

## Amnesty International in Bhutan



Amnesty International sent a team to Bhutan in mid-January 1992. It was well-received, kept in the Kunga Chholing royal guest house, and provided with official escorts who accompanied it everywhere. The three-member team, led by Secretary-General Jan Martin, met with King Jigme and ministers, and visited Samchi District, although evictions were then highest in Chirang. "It seemed that Chirang was not available to us at this time," Martin told *Kuensel*.

Prior to the Amnesty trip, on 17 December, the King had granted amnesty to a number of prisoners, including Ratan Gazmere, Bhakti P. Sharma and Bishwanath Chhetri. Following the trip, on 4 February, he released 313 prisoners, including Jogen Gazmere and Sushil Pokhrel.

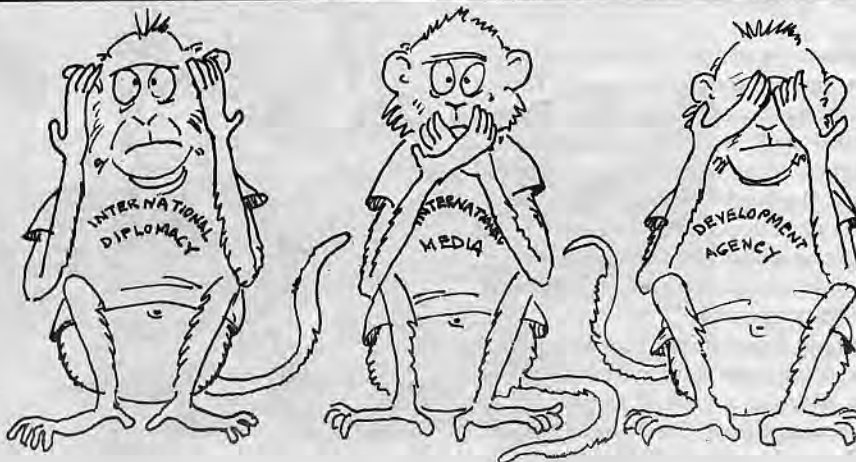
Amnesty released a press notice on 10 February welcoming the latest releases, but expressing concern about reports of human rights violations, prolonged detentions without trial, torture, death in custody, and the practice of keeping prisoners in shackles. Government opponents were "also reputed to have arbitrarily and deliberately killed civilians. Amnesty called for "the unconditional release of Tek Nath Rizal, who is starting a third year in detention without trial." It also asked about 200 and 300 detainees still being held without charge or trial.

The Thimphu Government immediately spread the word that Amnesty had issued a

"favourable report", although it was only a press release that had been released and it could hardly have been called favourable. The Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering told the *Times of India* that the Amnesty team had informed him that "not all the accusations were...valid". Correspondents who visited Bhutan with the German Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in April were also told that "The Amnesty report was good for us." One official told the *Calcutta Telegraph* on 1 July, "Amnesty gave a very favourable report and found the charges very highly exaggerated." In mid-August, Amnesty's London office is said to have sent a protest note to the *New Delhi Sunday Observer* for reporting that Amnesty's evaluation was favourable to Thimphu.

Even though the Foreign Minister has maintained that the Amnesty team "had been allowed to investigate the charges without any hindrance", the Government had gone about organising the Amnesty trip to its satisfaction.

According to refugee sources, including Bhakti Prasad Sharma and Ratan Gazmere, who too have arrived in the camps after first trying to stick it out in Thimphu, Amnesty was allowed to visit only Samchi districts (where most of the evictions had already been carried out.) The refugees show photographs which they claim show branches and leaves used to cover up foundations of evictee houses — so that the Amnesty team would not see them. Hundreds of soldiers were asked to hide in the forest during the visit, while others were asked to put on civilian clothes or taken to video parlours.





population whose voice is as feeble as their numbers are large. The refugees do not have lobbying power of Thimphu's authorities, and the only government that would come to its aid, Nepal's, does not dare offend India. The only media that is sympathetic, again Nepal's, has little credibility and clout worldwide, particularly on matters Bhutanese.

It is a measure of what the refugee leaders are up against that even at this late stage the question of credibility remains. Foreign diplomats in Kathmandu were still asking, in August 1992, if it is true that most of the refugees in the camps are from Meghalaya. That Thimphu has the capability to act cruelly is considered remote

Who is a Bhumiputra and who is not? What makes a man a son of the soil? If you have not invaded a territory but instead have settled



Lynpo Dawa Tshering with ousted Foreign Ministry official, D.K. Chhetri.

unpopulated lands upon express invitation, is that enough to gain nationality? Or can you be at the mercy of later generations of rulers who decide that they have changed their minds, and they want back the territory that you developed?

Is there a chance that the Nepali-speaking refugees will assimilate and melt into the Nepali diaspora? The longer the return takes (and as hope fades), the more likely that the Nepali-speakers will be absorbed into the larger populations outside Bhutan. In the short term, however, assimilation is unlikely. Opportunities in Nepal are limited for the majority peasant refugee. Most have lost their roots in Nepal and would not know where to go, and the Nepali economy does not hold out better prospects than would the Bhutanese economy if they were to return. There are no more forests left to clear and settle down, as was the case when the Burmese refugees came over three decades ago.

So, while a few well-to-do refugees have

already bought property and a small number of professionals have gravitated towards the Indian cities and Kathmandu, where they would make do somehow in the event of no return, the bulk of the exile population will tarry in the camps, living on UNHCR rations, waiting to go home.

As of this writing, it appears that a turning point on the "Question of the Bhutanese Refugees" - as problem might be titled if it ever manages to get on the General Assembly's agenda - might be reached soon. In fact, the next few months look crucial for a breakthrough. The electronic media, which is so important in these days of satellite television, has finally started showing up at the camps. With the UNHCR having certified the Lhotshampas' refugee status, it will be harder for Thimphu to point the finger at "Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal..." Lynpo Tshering, when he calls in journalists for exclusive interviews, will find that the questions are harder, less fawning.

Some human rights organisations have begun lobbying with the Human Rights Commission, and a group of eminent South Asian jurists recently issued a report that is sharply critical of Thimphu and calls for action by "the

governments and peoples of SAARC." Even if belatedly, the refugee leaders have begun to turn their sights on New Delhi. A BPP delegation just visited the Indian capital, and the BNDP has been distributing a memorandum to Indian parliamentarians. But the going will be tough.

For the refugee leaders, mostly senior to mid-level former bureaucrats and school teachers, are up against the amenable presence of King Jigme, ably supported by Dawa Tshering, the master in the art of making friends and influencing important people.

Interestingly enough, Thimphu itself might decide to come sit at the negotiation table. For one thing, as the number of refugees creeps towards the 100,000 mark, it is certain that even the sleeping giants of the West will begin to sit up and take notice. One hundred thousand might also be Thimphu's secret threshold beyond which it will ease up, because that is the number of "illegal immigrants" it claims to have discovered through its re-census programme.

Also, the diplomats of Thimphu are much too astute not to know that for the international media, it takes just a twist of the pen for the headline to change from "The Peaceful Dragon" to "The Dragon Breathes Fire". Once the Shangri

La aspects of Bhutan are used up, and once television viewers tire of clouded cliffs and archery contests, the attention will surely shift to the refugee camps and close-ups of citizenship ID cards bearing King Jigme's seal.

Exoticism is something that dissipates quickly with overuse. And ostracism must be what Thimphu's ruling elite fears most.

In February 1992, King Jigme told Reuters that "he believed the problem would continue for at least another year but could be solved through "honest, sincere and genuine dialogue." If the King really thinks so, perhaps he could be persuaded not to wait till February 1993. In the refugee camps of Jhapa, there are reasonable men waiting to talk to him. Many are former-officials that he knows well.

The chasm between the Drukpa and the Lhotshampa has been dug deep these past two years, but it is not unbridgeable. If the core group of Drig Lam Namzha hardliners were to be sidelined or scapegoated, the King and the refugees could probably work out an arrangement - firstly, for a quick return, and secondly for a long-term formula of power-sharing in which Drukpa identity is safeguarded even as Lhotshampas gain a satisfactory level of political freedom.





# Economic Blueprint for a South Asian Dragon

*Forty years of socioeconomic development in Bhutan have resulted in Indocentric trade and the emergence of a class of economic manipulators who have gained from the political problems of the south. Bhutan's development strategy must hinge on investing revenue from its hydroelectricity sales into education and health, while promoting economic interdependence with India.*

by D. N. S. Dhakal

**B**hutan's economy, which had historically looked north to Tibet, reached a turning point in 1865, when the Sinchula Treaty was signed with British India. This reorientation from north to south was the result of repeated attempts by the British to use Bhutan as an intermediary for commercial and diplomatic ties with Tibet. Early British travellers to Bhutan have chronicled the cautiousness with which Bhutanese society treated these approaches, but it was only a matter of time before it gave in.

The links forged by the Sinchula Treaty were reinforced during the visit to Thimphu in 1958 by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Cross-border relations with Tibet were broken the following year, and Bhutan's integration into India's

economy began in earnest. Today, interaction with the Indian states of Assam and Bengal has become indispensable, India continues to provide large grants for development projects, and Indian companies have commercial ties with the major industrial projects.

Economic integration did have its opponents. Traditionalists who supported the Shabdrung theocracy were vehemently against falling under Indian influence. But the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, with advice from his prime minister, Jigme Palden Dorji, used the Chinese occupation of Tibet to convince the traditionalists of the need for Indian support to counterbalance the communist threat.

In 1964, the traditionalists engineered the assassination of Prime Minister Dorji, the architect of Bhutan's Indian-inspired First Five-Year Plan (1961-1966). Since then, the monarch has assumed responsibility for development plans, working hand-in-hand with a small coterie of advisers. Since his father's death in 1972, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has directed development activities, serving as the Chairman of the Planning Commission till June 1991.

Since 1961, Bhutan has completed six five-year plans. The first three concentrated on basic

infrastructure, and were entirely funded by India (except for US\$9.3 million in United Nations technical assistance for the Third Plan). Major highways, schools, hospitals and initial work on the prestigious Chukha Hydroelectric Project were completed during this period.

The last three five-year plans emphasised industrial ventures to generate revenue and

Cement Plant, the 60 megawatt Kurichu Hydroelectric Project, the 60 MW Bhunakha Reservoir Project, the 45 MW Tangsibji Hydroelectric Project and the 1930 MW downstream Chukha II and Chukha III integrated power generation system. Other donors will help with domestic telecommunications, mineral-based industries, tungsten mining ventures, health care and manpower development.

The Bhutan Aid Consortium meets in Paris every five years, bringing together all UN organisations, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Community as well as bilateral donors. The most recent Consortium meeting was in March when the

donors pledged the entire US\$ 870 million required for the Seventh Plan. Out of this, India's commitment was equivalent to US\$ 300 million, and US\$ 570 million was to be borne by multilateral agencies and bilateral Northern donors.

The unusually high assistance committed (amounting to \$290 per capita per year under the official population figure of 600,000) conflicts with the now well-established policy of donors linking aid to the Third World to human rights. Perhaps even more significant is that Bhutan's absorptive capacity to utilise such generous assistance is limited, particularly at the present time when development projects in the south are halted and the flight of refugees has created an acute labour shortage. Past experience has also shown that a major portion of the external



employment. The major projects completed over the past 15 years include the Chukha power project in 1986, the Penden Cement Plant in 1980, the Gedu Plywood Project in 1984, the Bhutan Calcium Carbide Project in 1988, and the Bhutan Particle Board Project in 1989. Except for Chukha and Penden, which were built with Indian help, funds for other projects came from bilateral and international sources.

## Power to the Plans

India's share of the plans has decreased steadily — down to 63 per cent in the Fourth Plan and 25 per cent in the Sixth Plan, which ended in 1992. The role of diversifying the sources of development finance has been taken up by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Thimphu, under whose stewardship Bhutan's plan outlay grew from Nu 1106 million for the Fourth Plan to Nu 9559 million in the Sixth (Nu1 = IRs1).

The Seventh Five Year Plan, which began in July 1992, has an outlay of about Nu 22 billion (US\$ 870 million). The Plan document emphasises more power projects. India is to provide US\$ 300 million in grant assistance and project-tied finances for the 1500 tonne-per-day Nanglam



assistance will actually seep back to India or other donors through the stipulated purchase of materials, labour or professional services. It is also important to note that the later development plans have allocated less for education and public health and more for infrastructure-building and industries. Under the slogan of privatisation, many of the industrial units established with foreign assistance have now been acquired by the "new royal family" and other members of the Thimphu elite. Without careful monitoring by donors and in the absence of check-and-balance mechanisms within Bhutan, this trend could continue with the Seventh Plan as well.

### Running on Deficit

The government runs persistent fiscal deficits in hundreds of million ngultrums. In 1988, the annual current expenditures, estimated at Nu 909 million, constituted 24 per cent of the total GDP. But this is only part of the picture. If Bhutan had to pay the Nu 690 million needed annually for maintenance of Phuntsholing-Thimphu, Tongsa-Geylephug, and Tashigang-Samdrupzonker trunk roads (financed so far by the Indian Border Roads Task Force) and the yearly Nu 200 million for the security forces (financed by the Indian Ministry of Defence), the annual current expenditure would total Nu 1799 million.

In 1988, the annual Government income, which accrues as taxes, tax-refunds, and surplus revenue from public enterprises, amounted to Nu

735 million. About 43 per cent of this collection came from the sale of Chukha electricity and Penden cement — both projects located in south Bhutan where political turmoil is presently concentrated.

In 1988, the difference between the annual revenue and the current expenditures amounted to a deficit of Nu 174 million. If the ad hoc grant assistance from India for the roads and the Royal Bhutanese Army were added, the difference would widen to Nu 1146 million. If the donors, particularly India, were to reduce their assistance for whatever reason, the budget deficit would be considerable.

The figures cited above, which are the latest available, are for 1988. The situation might have improved considerably over the past three years after the full-scale operation of the Chukha calcium carbide plant and particle board projects. However, revenue from the agro-forestry sector has suffered due to the political turmoil. Under normal conditions, the annual revenue from the sale of southern Bhutanese produce such as oranges, cardamom, ginger and betel nut is around Nu 150 million.

A constant worry of those who manage the

Bhutanese economy is its "Indocentricity". Political advisers to the King prescribe trade diversification to keep Indian influence at bay. To promote diversification, the government provides export subsidies of up to 30 per cent for all exports to third countries. However, in 1989, such exports fetched not more than US \$0.5 million, from the sale of wood products, cash crops, and boulders and minerals to Bangladesh and Singapore. The need to service Bhutan's US \$74 million hard currency debt has provided ammunition to those who call for trade diversification as a means to earn foreign exchange.

Opponents of Indocentric trade even

prescribe reopening trade with Tibet, harking back to the cultural and historical links with the northern neighbour. But this would be futile, as the demands of the modern Bhutanese economy can only be met from across the southern border. As an illustration, the major imports of Bhutan from Tibet in the 19th century constituted yak tails, Chinese silk, silver and blankets. In 1988, the economy's demands, in descending order of value, were diesel, rice, tires and tubes, truck chassis, iron rods, machinery, fabrics, and so on.

The foremost advocates of trade diversification are Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering, Minister of Trade and Industry Om Bahadur Pradhan, and Sangey Nidup Dorji, the first brother-in-law of the King who is practically the *de facto* Prime Minister of Bhutan. The three make it a point to meet once every week with UNIDO's representative and trade expert, Richard Lisak, who has been stationed in Thimphu since 1989. The purpose of these meetings is to work out the logistics of trade diversification schemes.

Serious thought is thus being given to strategies that would minimise dependence on India for trade, development assistance and defence subsidies. There are two primary reasons for this urgency. First is the rich urban population's escalating demands for luxury goods and, secondly, the need to maintain infrastructural and institutional projects set up since 1961. However, any realistic appraisal shows that Bhutan's efforts to correct Indocentric policies by the strategy of 'India escapism' may be counter-productive to long-term national interests.

### Mismanaged Economy

The policies on privatisation or export promotion are seen as ways of transferring ownership of public resources to members of the Thimphu elite. The foremost example is the case of the Gedu Plywood Project, built in the 1980s at Nu 145 million with grants from the UNDP and soft-term loans from the Kuwait International Development Fund. This project has now been sold to Yab Ugen Dorji, father-in-law of the King, at discount of 80 per cent of the book value. The initial share value of the project was Nu 1000, but was bought by the Yab ('father-in-law'



The dam across the Wang Chhu at Chukha in southwest Bhutan.



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in Dzonkha) at Nu 198, with the entire foreign exchange burden to be borne by the Bhutan Government.

Another instance was the 'secret' auction bid on the duty-free import business owned and operated until 1991 by the Ministry of Finance. The Yab submitted three tender offers to the Ministry valued at Nu 1.1, 3.0, and 4.0 million while others were discouraged even to bid by Government officials. Sonam Wangmo, owner of Yu-Druk Travel Agency, withdrew her Nu 1.5 million bid, but found to her surprise that the Yab won the auction on payment of a royalty less than her bid.

It is important to focus on the activities of Yab Ugen Dorji because they not only symbolise, but are at the center of the mismanagement of the Bhutanese economy today. The Yab's economic competition with the Dorji clan is also significant in explaining the problems in the south, for it was the Dorjis who helped to open up southern Bhutan by inviting in Nepali-speaking settlers. The Yab and his followers hold no brief for the settlers and in fact feel that expelling them would also weaken their Dorji competition.

More recent mischief of Yab Ugen Dorji has been his capture of a contract for felling the young forest plantations on the southern slopes of the Siwalik foot-hills and in the plains near the Indian border. The contract, which is expected to fetch monopoly profits in millions of Ngultrums to the Yab, goes against an earlier decision of the 69th National Assembly, held in November 1989, to create a two kilometre-wide green belt along the Bhutan-India border.

Educated Bhutanese are not against the rich getting richer, as long as the competition is fair. For example, Dasho Ugen Dorji, popularly known as Dasho Rim, does not draw as much fire as the Yab even though his corporate assets run to over Nu 2000 million — from ownerships or business portfolios held in the Tashi Commercial Corporation, Royal Insurance Corporation, and Bhutan Carbides and Chemical Ltd. His annual contributions in taxes and dividends to the Government exceed Nu 100 million. Actually, Dasho Rim's peak period was pre-1988, when he had near-monopoly control over key sectors of the economy. In retrospect, however, his manipulation of the governmental machinery in his favour was on a much lower scale than the Yab's is today.

The Yab had a medium-sized retail business before the marriages of his daughters to the King. From a retail merchant to an economic power within less than half of a decade was a journey made by riding roughshod over rules and regulations. The Yab's skills in manipulating Government

policy is reflected in his acquisition of the Wangdiphodrang Timber Saw Mill owned until 1990 by Kabji Penjor, a prominent citizen from Thimphu district. After the Forest Department denied lumber for the saw mill, he sold his business to the Yab. Immediately thereafter, lumber supply was resumed.

Yab Ugen Dorji and family now own Singye Enterprises, Dhendup Enterprises, Bhutan Engineering Corporation, Lakhi Cement Project and Bhutan Tourism Corporation. His cumulative assets, presently worth over Nu 1000 million, are expected to increase rapidly to catch up with his rival Dasho Rim in just a few more years. The Yab's unfair business practices are also affecting members of the royal family who were once active in mining, trading and manufacturing. The King's aunts Ashi Choeki, Ashi Deki, and Ashi Pema have all withdrawn from big business in order to avoid clashes with the Yab and his associates, who today form a powerful clique.

The current state of nepotism, favouritism, and gross interference in the functioning of the Government machinery has disillusioned many. Unless political reforms are introduced urgently, with proper mechanisms to check and balance, Bhutan could face continual social unrest irrespective of the policies it adopts to arrest the current political crisis.

The royal family members must be discouraged from running affairs of the Government. Instead, they should be encouraged to utilise their by-now considerable assets to lead industrial development, but under fair competition with Bhutanese participants. Healthy competition between the Yab, the Wangchuks and the Dorjis would actually do a lot of good for the economy, particularly if each three "houses" could develop loyal followings in the managerial and labour levels by extending shares in business and profits.

Despite its disadvantages (of being landlocked and Indocentric) the prospects for socioeconomic development in Bhutan are good, particularly in comparison to other countries in

the region. The country must now look beyond the scope of traditional business and economic opportunities, taking the people and the mountains as assets in future socioeconomic development programs.

## The Way Ahead

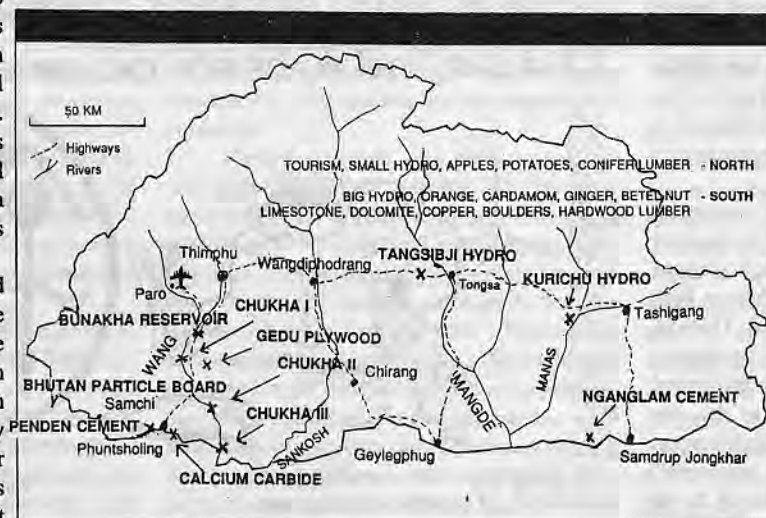
Agriculture cannot be the focus of development for Bhutan. The available cultivable lands, estimated at less than 8 per cent of the total area, are by and large already covered under improved agricultural practices. The Third and Fourth Five-Year Plans prioritised agricultural development, but ended in the realisation that Bhutan cannot become self-sufficient in food production unless it accepts negative rates of return on investments. Except for cash crops — such as apple, potato, cardamom, and orange — almost all efforts went to waste.

Equally frustrating was the experience with wood-based industries established during the Fourth Plan with enormous subsidies on the capital costs. Bhutan owes over US\$ 22 million to foreign banks because of wrong investments on the Gedu Plywood Project, Bhutan Particle Board and other wood-processing industries. The Gedu Plywood Project has an annual capacity of 40,000 cubic metres of logs and required construction of 200 km of feeder forest roads in western Bhutan. The roads, though useful in some places, have caused significant downstream sedimentation. According to a World Bank forestry survey report, the present rate of timber extraction in Bhutan is over two-and-half times the ecologically sustainable limit of 13 million cubic metres per annum.

The Government might end with the same experience in the case of mineral-based industries. Deposits of dolomite, limestone, graphite, and gypsum have been discovered, but these are low-value and high-volume commodities requiring large scale extraction procedures.

Prospects exist to develop power-intensive industries, such as manufacturing of ferro silicon, ferro alloys, and calcium carbide and chemicals.

A ferro silicon and ferro alloys project is underway as a collaboration between Tashi Industries and Japan's Marubeni company. These projects have been set up to utilise cheap Chukha power, which is to be supplied at almost one-third the export price. Such concession is desirable as long as industrial projects promote long-term growth in the country by making use of local raw material, creating employment opportunities, or adding value to finished products. If the requirements of bulky raw materials are large, however, as is the case for Bhutan Calcium Carbide Project with regard to





limestone feed, the cost of transportation becomes the decisive factor even for power-intensive industries.

Hydropower is Bhutan's most obvious economic resource. The successful implementation of Chukha (which brings in Nu 500 million annually, almost half of the national income) has encouraged planners to think of the hydro resource as the main area for future development. About 10 per cent of Bhutan's total area is under perpetual snow cover and four major river systems (Torsa, Wangchu, Sunkosh, and Manas) drain from Bhutan into the Brahmaputra. These rivers, combined, have a theoretical hydropower capacity of 20,000 MW with energy generation potential of 40 billion kwh. Given the Seventh Plan proposals, including the decision to prepare feasibility reports with Indian assistance for 1930 MW Chukha II and III downstream projects, Bhutan seems to be on the right course in this sphere. Income is generated to fund future development programmes and mutually beneficial interdependence with India is promoted.

Tourism, which was begun in the late 1970s, has not been given adequate attention of late and hence has not been able to generate significant export revenues. At present tourism's earnings amount to less than Nu 50 million (US\$ 2 million) annually — which is small compared to one estimate of US\$ 50 million that Bhutan could earn if it serviced more tourists. The delays in tourism development is attributed to the conflict of interests between the "traditionalists" and "realists" among the Bhutanese elite. The former, in alliance with the monarchy, regard tourism as a threat that could erode the traditional base of theocracy. Though it is now given some more importance, after a short break in late 1980s, tourism is likely to be de-emphasised again. This is because the interest of the Thimphu rulers is to retard change, whereas tourism's ultimate impact is to accelerate it.

Bhutan's unspoilt mountain environment hold tremendous promise not only for holiday tourism, but also other service-oriented businesses such as retirement villages, holiday homes, high school education and health facilities. There is, for example, scope to generate jobs by tapping the global retiree market and the Subcontinental market for good schooling, and to develop linkages in the local economy through support infrastructures and consumer target industries.

The development strategy should be to

invest more on resources in the establishment of hydropower projects or tourism-related infrastructures and invest the surplus resources generated by these projects on manpower development, with specific training on service-oriented mountain-related businesses where there are comparative advantages. Traditional development sectors, such as agriculture, forestry and mineral-based industries have serious limitations in terms of sustainability.

In June 1991, Bhutan's per capita Gross National Product (GNP) jumped from US\$ 190 to US\$ 425. This upward revision was due not to a sudden spurt in national productivity, but because of a drastic official reduction of the population estimate from 1.4 million to 0.6 million. This was done on the pretext of correcting an earlier mistake the Government says it made in 1971, when it joined the UN. Bhutanese dissidents do not agree with Thimphu's revision, although they too have doubts about the 1.4 million figure.

### Equity

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), estimated for 1988 at nominal Nu 3858 million, does not necessarily reflect the welfare level of the average citizen. This is because the national income is greatly skewed in favour of the Thimphu gentry. Subsistence farmers, who constitute about 90 per cent of the total population, depend on income from livestock products and agricultural produce. Rural per capita GDP is still at US\$ 138 despite the revised figures.

The future of the Bhutanese nationstate depends upon the cooperation of the different social groups, each enjoying its fair share of the economy's possibilities. Traditionally, the Bhutanese people used to be divided only into

the nobles and commoners. But a third group has emerged in the past decades of development planning — the educated middle class. This group is under the lid at the moment, but is acutely aware of what it sees as a conspiracy by the nobles and the royal family to control allocation of resources in the development plans. And it is up to this middle class to steer the economy on a liberal, equity-based direction. The middle class will ultimately form the link between the nobility and the peasantry and will also provide the economic leadership that will offer alternatives to today's way of doing things.

In the final analysis, Bhutan's socioeconomic development must go hand-in-hand with political reforms. The political crisis of the past two years which has at the time of writing forced over 85,000 Bhutanese into exile is partly a by-product of 'development' and education, which led to political consciousness and awareness of one's rights and issues of equity. At the same time, the perception grew that past projects have benefited primarily the Drukpa elite.

Southern Bhutan, the epicentre of the tensions, is where the hydroelectric plants, the cement factories, the timber industry and cash crop plantations are located. Major mineral resources are also concentrated in the southern foothills. Without resolving the crisis of the southern Bhutanese, it will be unrealistic to expect the national economy to live up to its incredible promise. ▽

D.N.S. Dhakal was economic adviser to the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Thimphu until October 1991. He is now the General Secretary of the BNDP. The views expressed here are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of his party.

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# A Policy Born of Apprehensions

*History, culture and politics set the Lhotshampa and the Drukpa apart.  
The Drukpa has decided to act, but can he prevail in the long term?*

by A.C. Sinha



*Drukpa ritual dance, known as chham, and Lhotshampa maruni dance (right), performed by Bhutanese troupes before guests at Motithang hotel.*

It was Kazi Ugen Dorji — the chief of the King's household (*Deb Zimpom*), the Royal Chamberlain (*Gongzim*) and the Governor (*Jongpon*) of western Bhutan, who encouraged large scale Nepali settlement in the southwestern part of the country in the last decades of the 19th century. British diplomat Charles Bell found 14,000 Nepalis on the Torsa river bordering India in 1903. In no time, the land-hungry Nepali cleared the thick vegetation and organised themselves as cultivators in the southern Duars.

Some 25 years later, in 1932, Captain C.J. Marris of the Gorkha Regiment was commissioned to investigate the possibility of recruiting Bhutanese. He made an extensive tour of the two Nepali districts of the south and made a crude estimate that the 1,500 households of the eastern and 4,000 households of the western districts contained a population of 60,000. He remarked upon the largeness of Nepali families. Marris stated that the actual number of Nepali settlers in Bhutan was much higher than his estimate because he had not included Sipchu area to the extreme south-east.

Nepali immigration to Bhutan continued well into the present century even though there was a shortage of arable land. The Drukpa *darbar* eventually banned further Nepali immigration in 1959. In addition, the Nepalis were forbidden to settle beyond an imaginary east-west boundary drawn north of the Himalayan foothills.

The bamboo and thatch houses of the Nepalis are less substantial than the multi-storeyed stone houses of the highlanders. The Nepali areas are predominantly agricultural, producing rice, maize, wheat, pulses, orange, pineapple, ginger, cardamom and so on. Migrating across from Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim over

the past 125 years, the Nepalis turned this 'negative land' into a productive breadbasket.

The Nepalis lead a frugal life. They are available for doing any type of work, and well-suited to the extreme climate of the Bhutanese hills. In addition to agriculture, they have provided the work force for the recent development programmes. With the emergence of Samchi, Phuntsholing, Daga, Sarbhang, Geylephug, Chirang and Samdrup Jongkhar as the new commercial and (albeit modest) industrial towns of southern Bhutan, the role of the Nepalis in the national economy became more pronounced.

Food, dress, the *khukuri*, perseverance, industriousness and 'mercenary' character make the Nepali-speakers one on an alien soil. They look to Nepal and India as the founts of their civilisation, their historical achievement, and where their places of pilgrimage are. Elite Nepali castes practice ritual purity and shun beef, polyandry and widow remarriage.

The Nepalis are new entrants in Bhutan, and also occupy lower economic and political status in national life. As residents of Bhutan, however, Nepalis do expect to share in the destiny of their new homeland. They have some expectations of the Bhutanese nation state.

As the Nepalis found the Bhutanese environment stifling, they started to turn to India, where economic and educational opportunities existed. In the process, they also got politicised in schools and colleges, in trade unions, and in political parties. They returned to Bhutan expecting a rightful democratic share, which the Wangchuk regime ruler denied them.

The cultural, political and economic gulf between the Nepalis and the Lamaist Drukpa was, therefore, deep.

The Drukpa regime maintains no distinction between the sacred and the secular. For the average Drukpa, the King is not only the ruler but he is also to be revered. Traditionally, revenue collected by the State was paid in kind and was largely spent in maintaining a large body of monks. For the past 125 years, up until recently, state expenditure was drawn mainly from the subsidy provided by the Indian government.

## Faith and Loyalty

In the Bhutanese hierarchy, faith and loyalty to one's superiors goes unquestioned. A society of pastoralists and subsistence farmers was happy to leave trade, commerce and industry in the hands of the royal family. Bhutan's dynastic rule did not permit an aristocracy to emerge. Thus, in today's Drukpa society consists of an all-powerful ruling family at the top, the commoners at the bottom and a monk body in between.

The geographical compulsions of a mountainous country further isolated the Drukpa commoner from the shared experiences of a modern technological society. Under such circumstances, the urge for democratic participation practically does not exist. Any semblance of representation has to be sponsored from the top, and the regime is notoriously intolerant of dissent.

The stage was thus set for conflict. While the Drukpas tried to impose an assimilationist policy, demanding oneness in language (*Dzongkha*), dress (*Gho* and *Kira*) and cultural systems, Nepalis regarded themselves as culturally superior. They naturally look west to Nepal and south to India, to populations with which they feel ethnic affinity.

The Bhutanese administration had always

kept a careful watch on the course of anti-feudal movements in Sikkim and Nepal, because the Lhotshampas have natural allies there. It therefore came as a shock to the Bhutanese ruler when the 334-year old Namgyal rule over Sikkim came to an end in 1975, succumbing to a movement organised almost entirely by Nepali-speakers.

Even closer to home, the Bhutanese found the armed struggle in Darjeeling ended with the Districts also being governed by Nepali-speakers. The realisation dawned that, in the long run, New Delhi's commitment to prohibit anti-Bhutanese movements on Indian soil had no meaning. In a changed political scenario, the Nepali-speaking rulers of Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling could nullify New Delhi's assurances. This they could do by instigating, supporting or even financing agitation.

Acting on these fears, the Bhutanese implemented an aggressive policy of cultural assimilation, starting with the implementation in 1988 of the Drig Lam Namzha code. The rest is the story of Lhotshampa flight from their Bhutanese paradise.

A classical theocracy turned into an exotic Wangchuk-ruled Bhutan had little experience of ethnic coexistence on its own soil. It has not been able to weigh the implications of its aggressive ethnic policy to assimilate an ancient, martial and substantive Nepali commonwealth into its relative thin, simple and recent Drukpa fold.

Drukpa policymakers, such as Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering, appear to have an exaggerated image of their powers. They tend to forget that their aggressive ethnic policy and false sense of absorptive capacity is bound to affect the pace of economic transformation. The Bhutanese aberrations might slow but cannot stop the Nepali expansion in the Eastern Himalayan foothills; rather, such antics as the Drukpa regime is currently engaged in may provide an impetus for a Nepali resurgence in the region.

Professor Sinha is Head of the Department of Sociology at the North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya. His most recent book is *Bhutan: Ethnic Identity and National Dilemma* (Reliance Publishing, 1991).



Seal of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

# Refugees of Jhapa

Arrivals at Goldhap Refugee Camp, 22 -29 July 1992.

Pictures by Laxmi Prasad Luitel



**T**he Bhutanese refugees have a problem. The world outside Nepal does not know they are there. The few that hear of them are told that they are migrants from the Indian northeast, illegal immigrants finally being deported, or that a few are Bhutanese who have left voluntarily after receiving generous compensation from the Thimphu Government.

Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering told the BBC in March 1992 that most of the residents in the camps of Jhapa District in Nepal's eastern Tarai were not really refugees. Patrick de Silva, who heads the South Asia desk of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR in Geneva, told the BBC that he had witnessed the exodus and had heard from refugees that they were "leaving because they felt there was no place for them."

Who to believe, the longest serving Foreign Minister in the world or the UNHCR official? A visit to the camps of Jhapa helps to resolve doubts. Every day, for the past few months, 300 to 400 refugees have been arriving in trucks from the roadheads of Bhutan in West Bengal and Assam, says M.A.Awad, UNHCR's Nepal officer-in-charge.

Sub-Inspector Hom Jung Chauhan, chief of the border post of Kakarbhitta where all the refugees enter Nepal, has no doubts about the origin of the refugees. "The Bhutanese Nepalis speak of 'Mandal' (headman) and 'block' (village units), words that Meghalaya Nepali would not know. They are also submissive and have peculiar

formalities. When they realise that I represent authority, for example, they bow in a very special Bhutanese way."

Arno Coerver is chief of the Lutheran World Service's (LWS) refugee operations in Jhapa. Asked about the refugees' origin, he replies, "All I can say is that 95 to 98 per cent have lived their last year in Bhutan."

## The Refugee Count

The arrival figures in Jhapa speak of the relentless pace of Thimphu's eviction programme. The refugee-run Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB), which manages the camps, counts arrivals. There were 234 refugees in 1991 July, and an average 1500 Lhotshampas arrived every month since then until December 1991, when there was a sudden dip to 412 arrivals for





January 1992 — coinciding with Amnesty International's visit to Bhutan. Immediately thereafter, the arrival rate shot up to average 10,000 a month, where it remains today.

By 23 July 1992, there were 62,723 refugees registered in the six camps of Maidhar, Timai, Goldhap, Beldangi I and II, and Pathari. At the time of going to press, UNHCR estimated 65,000 in the camps.

According to conservative estimates, there are perhaps another 8,000 refugees not in the camps in Nepal and 15,000 living in rented premises or as squatters in Assam and Jalpaiguri

District of West Bengal. (Nirmal Bose, prominent Calcutta politician from Jalpaiguri puts this figure at between 25,000 and 30,000 refugees, while refugee sources say there are up 15,000 outside the camps in Nepal.)

A conservative estimate therefore puts the total number of Bhutanese refugees already out of their country at 88,000. As the influx shows no signs of slowing down, UNHCR expects the numbers in the camps to rise from 65,000 to 75,000 by the end of September. The World Food Programme has already been requested to make arrangements for supply of provisions for that number. By the end of the year, says UNHCR, the figure could easily top 100,000.

A few unlikely factors made life a little easier for new refugees. It was reassuring for them to find Nepali-speakers in the Duars and Nepal's Tarai full of Nepali-speakers. They must have been relieved that the host population was not so hostile. The refugees from Samchi, for example were helped by the labourers of Luksang, Dhumsipara and other tea gardens. Dal Bahadur Rai, who works as a guard, says he and hundred of co-workers raised IRs 10 each on two occasions when the refugees first started arriving.

As they made their way to Nepal, many refugees found that because the Jhapa houses were built on stilts, the underneath made perfect shelters. Because the region is rich in bamboo, the problem of housing was also solved. "Can you imagine the problems of shelter there would

be if the camps were in the western Tarai?" Coerver of LWS.

In the beginning, when the refugees were arriving in tens and twenties, they received support from locals in Jhapa. As the numbers swelled, the Nepali Government asked UNHCR to provide assistance, and the agency started work with the Nepal Red Cross in July 1991. In October 1991, UNHCR charged LWS with setting up and managing the camps. In May 1991, ill health, malnutrition and a climbing death rate forced UNHCR to declare an emergency, which released special funds from Geneva. Since June, the work has been divided between LWS, which handles camp infrastructure and feeding, while Save the Children Fund (UK) looks after health and nutrition. A number of other NGOs are also active, from women's support to physical and psychological rehabilitation - there are numerous victims of rape, beatings, torture, solitary confinements and prolonged imprisonment.

Health in the camps has since improved, but a medical officer of the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta says the danger now is of malaria during the monsoon, and Japanese encephalitis after the rains.

### Refugee Diplomacy

Under normal circumstances, persons who flee persecution in one country and enter another are regarded as refugees. But these are abnormal circumstances, in which the Lhotshampa refugees



have entered a third country, only to be treated as refugees under international safeguards of the UNHCR. "It is a peculiar situation with Bhutanese refugees that you have a corridor to Nepal through Indian territory," concedes UNHCR's Awad, who has worked with refugees in the Chad, Indonesia and Thailand. UNHCR is not working with refugees in the Duars and Jalpaiguri in India, the "host government", has not formally invited the agency.

As for UNHCR's presence in Bhutan, High Commissioner Sadako Ogata has made three requests to Thimphu to allow a high-level mission to visit Bhutan. Foreign Minister Tshering stopped by in Geneva on 28 July, on his way back from the Olympics inaugural. He told Ogata that he was in close contact with the International Red Cross and Amnesty International, which had recently visited south Bhutan, as had a group of Indian journalists. South Bhutan "is now quite peaceful", Lynpo Tshering told the UNHCR chief, and he felt it unnecessary for the agency to send a mission.

The camp residents seem to be mostly peasants whose world until eviction was limited to their "gewogs" (villages) and "blocks" (village units). While they were quite aware of the cultural links with the Nepali-speaking world beyond Bhutan, most individuals interviewed in the camps had never visited Nepal and, at best, barely knew where their ancestors had migrated from in Nepal or India. The "Nepaliness" of the Lhotshampa refugee immediately makes his/her identity as Bhutanese suspect in the eyes of those who have not cared to study the country's peculiar history and the circumstance of Nepali migration. The porousness of being "Nepali" turned a

disadvantage for the Lhotshampa as a refugee.

Writers on refugee problems emphasise that there are only three possible fates for long-term refugees. They can be repatriated, they can become assimilated in the "host country", or they can be resettled in a third country. Only the first two options apply for the Lhotshampas, and

and maintains records. "It is extremely unlikely that interlopers can get away with claiming to be Bhutanese. Besides, it is not in our own interest to take back more people into Bhutan than the number that came out."

The relationship between the locals of Jhapa and the refugees have been civil rather than cordial. And there are potential problems because, by year-end, 100,000 refugees may have settled in a district with a population of 650,000. Says C.K.Prasai, senior politician of the ruling Nepali Congress party, who lives in Birtamod, "So far, there have not been many untoward incidents. But once the refugees begin to affect the economic well-being of the locals, the situation would be ripe for conflict."

Jhapa being a district of recently-cleared Tarai jungle and peopled almost entirely by recent migrants (hillmen from Nepal's Taplejung, Panchthar districts, plains peoples from the south, Burmese Nepalis of the 1960s and a few that fled Meghalaya in the mid-1980s), the Lhotshampa refugees are more welcome here than they might have been anywhere else. But there is no guarantee that this will last. In the

junction town of Birtamod, one can feel resentment just under surface. A bookshop proprietor at the main chowk who has seen more than a thousand Assam trucks pass his shopfront believes many are coming to partake of the easy life as refugees consuming UNHCR rations. He says the local price of essentials has shot up due to refugee demand and, apart from the few who have lucrative contracts to supply the refugee camps, local people are finding life difficult.

While they await return to Bhutan, the refugees can only ruminate over how it is that mid-monsoon 1992 finds them in the humid plains of Nepal's eastern Tarai. Says Om Dhungel, a civil servant recently arrived as refugee, "If we are being kicked out because our ancestors went into Bhutan as labourers, who is safe? The Indians who were taken as plantation and railway labour a century ago to Fiji, Mauritius and South Africa? Are they all now to be repatriated?"

Kanak Mani Dixit

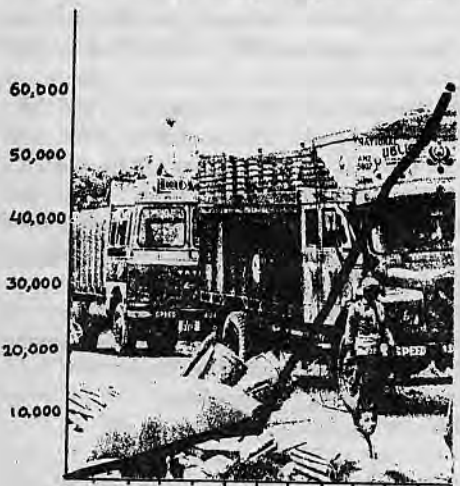


refugee leaders are acutely aware of the potential problems of the second. "Our interest lies in as rapid a return as possible because we realise that the longer we stay away, the greater the possibility that the population will give up hope," says Dr. Bhampa Rai, who heads HUROB.

When repatriation does take place, (such as for the Cambodian and Laotian refugees from camps in Thailand), under ideal conditions there would have to be a tripartite agreement between Bhutan, Nepal and an international monitoring agency such as the UNHCR, with India possibly acting as observer.

The importance of documentation is vital during repatriation, to prove the origin and nationality of a refugee. It is for this reason that, with UNHCR's help, the Nepali Government on 9 August 1992 started registering the refugees and distributing identity cards. HUROB, meanwhile, has kept its own records listing age, date of departure, land and house registration numbers, reason for leaving, estimated value of property left behind, "compensation" received, as well as photocopies of Bhutanese citizenship ID cards and other relevant documents.

Dr. Rai discounts the possibility of non-Bhutanese entering the camps. He says HUROB organised settlement according to districts and blocks in the home country. A mandal, if in exile, or another senior person establishes contact with new arrivals



REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN JHAPA JULY 1991 TO JULY 1992

(Source: HUROB)



# The View from Thimphu

## Hoping for a Gentler Judgement

*"It began with a straightforward census, but now the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is caught up in what many here see as a struggle for national survival. And the country's young monarch has put himself on the line by taking full responsibility for resolving the crisis and saying he will abdicate if he fails."*

by Kinley Dorji

**"I**f I, as the King, cannot protect the sovereignty and integrity of our country and ensure a secure future for our people, then it will be my duty to accept full responsibility and abdicate," King Jigme Singye Wangchuk told the nation, a pledge later repeated to an emotion-charged session of the National Assembly.

The 1988 head-count, the first detailed census in the country's history, was organised because the government officials said they needed better statistics to plan a process of modernisation after years of self-imposed isolation. The finding sent shock waves through the government: census officials estimated that more than 100,000 economic migrants had settled among the ethnic Nepali minority living in the kingdom's southern districts. The Buddhist Bhutanese, a population of farmers scattered over the world's highest peaks and valleys, suddenly saw the possibility of being — in the words of a government official — an "endangered species".

Immigration laws were immediately reinforced and all recent immigrations declared illegal, sparking protests and violent demonstrations by those declared illegal. The protesters were supported by a section of Bhutan's ethnic Nepali minority, who the government says form one-third of the country's 600,000 population.

Looming in the background, in the view of the Bhutanese Government, were another six million ethnic Nepalis on the Indian side of the border. They eke out a meagre existence in crowded hutments along the highways and tea gardens. For them, the greener Bhutanese pastures, with free education and health services, more employment opportunities and higher wages, represented an irresistible temptation.

The situation brought home to the Bhutanese the spectre often raised here by political analysts, academics and historians — the Sikkimese parallel. After years of migration by ethnic Nepalis into the kingdom of Sikkim,



sovereignty was lost in 1974 when the government was confronted by a Nepali majority opting to become part of India. That example heightened reactions to the realisation of recent large-scale settlement in Bhutan. Initially, the protest movement gained momentum through the regionally-dominant Indian press and the international media. Its direction has been somewhat incoherent, with the leaders first alleging a range of government abuses such as cultural and religious discrimination and more recently switching to issues of democracy and human rights.

The guerilla wing of the foreign-based Bhutan People's Party made raids into southern Bhutan, destroying property, looting villages, kidnapping and killing those refusing to join or support the movement. Other Kathmandu-based groups stepped up an anti-Bhutan propaganda campaign with support from political parties and a section of the Nepali press. Development in the area was virtually brought to a halt. The King has now ordered the resumption of activities, and ordered the reopening and renovation of schools. The security forces have been told to relinquish control of schools which they took over during the height of last year's terrorist attacks.

To heal the wounds of the past months, the King has pardoned more than 1,520 people arrested for "anti-national activities". Some have been allowed back into the civil service. Government officials and security personnel responsible for excesses against the people have

been dismissed and tried in court.

Despite a lukewarm response by many members of the public to such fence-mending measures, the King has visited the disturbed districts 24 times in 22 months. His Government has stayed firm on its immigration policy, but has recently expressed concern about the departure of Bhutanese citizens of Nepali origin. Some left because relatives were not given citizenship or were allegedly evicted by district officials; others cited insecurity or said they were persuaded to leave by anti-Bhutan groups.

In July, the King rushed to the south to talk to more than 400 people who had officially asked to emigrate. His appeal still echoes through the country: "Short of literally going down on my knees with folded hands, I have tried everything possible to resolve the serious problem we have today in southern Bhutan..." (For full quote of the King, see page 16.)

In response to complaints from some of the evacuees, Thimphu sent a high-level team to investigate alleged excesses by district officials and to examine the security situation in southern villages. The King also repeated his edict that no Bhutanese citizen will be evicted from the kingdom and that people had the right to apply to the judiciary, the Government, or to himself if they felt they were being unjustly treated. In a gesture of encouragement to people of Nepali origin, exemption from rural taxes was granted in the five southern districts.

But international media focus has shifted to eastern Nepal, where UNHCR estimates that 55,000 Nepalis live in refugee camps, arriving in trucks and buses from India. Coverage of allegations of government atrocities emanating from the camps has overshadowed Bhutan's demographic concerns.

"History has been unkind to kings," King Jigme once told a journalist. He must be hoping for a gentler judgement as, almost a lone figure, he tries to steer his kingdom through the biggest crisis in its modern history.

K. Dorji is Editor of the government-run *Kuensel*, Bhutan's only newspaper. This article is reproduced here courtesy the Panos news service, London.



## UPCOMING...

**International Congress on Democratic Alternatives for Development, Justice and Peace**  
Kathmandu, 18-25 February 1993  
The Congress seeks to bring together some 150 foreign participants and a wide cross-section of Nepali society to discuss the following: political democracy, representative, responsible and accountable governance; elections and participatory electoral process; participatory democracy; economic democracy; culture, religion and spirituality; human rights and social justice.  
Contact: INSEC, PO Box 2726, Kathmandu, Tel: 270770.

**Environmental Regeneration in Headwaters and Highlands**  
6-12 September 1992, Prague, Czechoslovakia  
Contact: Martin Haigh, Geography Unit, Oxford Polytechnic, OX3 0BP, UK. Fax: 44-0-865-819073

**The 13th Annual Conference of the Linguistic Society of Nepal**  
Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 26-27 November 1992.  
The conference will focus on: Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan languages; syntax and semantics; phonetics and phonology; sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics; orthography and lexicography; applied linguistics; linguistics and literature. Papers on any aspect of linguistics welcome.  
Contact: Chandra Prakash Sharma, Campus of International Languages, Tribhuvan University, Exhibition Road, Kathmandu.

**Ganga-to-Himalaya Padayatra**  
The Bihar-based activists of the Ganga Mukti Andolan are preparing a marathon walk — *padayatra* — from their Kahalgaoon to Kathmandu. The marchers will gather by the banks of the Ganga on 11 October and will cross the Ganga the next day begin their march. The organisers welcome activists from other states of India as well as neighbouring countries. Kahalgaoon is on the south bank of the Ganga, about 30 km east of the railway station at Bhagalpur.

Contact: Anil Prakash, Ganga Mukti Andolan, Jaya Prabhanagar, Majhauria Road, Muzaffarpur.

## Free-for-all in Lo Manthang

The inhabitants of Lo Manthang, in upper Mustang, must be wondering what has hit them since their doors were tentatively opened to the rest of the world. Forcing their way through the crack are all kinds of people insisting on access to caves, gombas, palaces and archives.

Trekking agency personnel hunt potential camp sites for trekkers wealthy enough to fork out \$ 3,000 each, per tour. Would be discoverers track the source of the Kahi Ga-daki. A Japanese group is already making a documentary. Tourists-cum-donors pledge money for schools and health posts. The Nepali government, besieged by studies carried out by travel agents, tourists and self-styled experts, is trying to ensure that it all doesn't end in tears.

Some advisors offer considered suggestions on the best way to manage tourism in upper Mustang; others are fly-by-night chroniclers of local rumour and hearsay. Among the more preposterous is a Western journalist whose sole concern seems to be furthering his own agenda of producing a coffee-table book on the latest Shangri-La.

With scant knowledge to back him, the writer warns the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Home Affairs of the possibility "total depopulation of the area" from deforestation. He presumptuously informs his readers that "the environment of Mustang has been under attack for at least five centuries". The writer reassures the Nepal government that it is "in NO WAY responsible for the destruction that has taken place" before incisively laying the blame on "historical processes operating in an extremely fragile environment". In a community that can hardly sustain micro-hydro projects, the writer proposes the construction of massive hydroelectric projects.

More alarming, however, is his attitude to the understandable reluctance shown by the guardians



Lo Manthang

of the gombas to allow him to photograph their sacred art. He writes, "It will ... be important to convince the local people that tourist (sic) will have to be allowed to take photographs of the statues and paintings in the temple, for an appropriate fee (as in every monastery in Tibet), if the people are seriously interested in allowing and increasing tourism to the area". Not only does the writer forget that the policy of paying to take pictures of sacred art in Tibet is formulated by the Chinese government, but he also reveals blatant disregard for local decisions.

Elsewhere, he rationalises the need for Westerners, and for him in particular, to photograph gomba artwork. "Local people appear to be afraid that if the statues are photographed they might then be stolen. No one understands that if they are stolen, the only way they can be traced and recovered is if the monastery possess (sic) photographs of them". However, he admits more than altruism when he writes of shooting "several thousand photographs of the paintings and the statue inside the Champa Lha Khang" in Lo Manthang, which "will figure prominently in the book and magazine articles that I will produce on the area".

The rest of the report reads like a Machiavellian treatise on how to manipulate the people of Mustang into following decisions imposed by Kathmandu. Hiring local people as police, rather than sending lowland Nepalis, "would

earn HMG a great deal of local political affection", he writes. Because the monks of Ghemi did not allow the writer into their monastery, they "must be induced to change its attitudes, and perhaps a (sic) offer of money to help restore the monastery, linked to changes in their attitude, might help". Spliced between are speculations on how best to access the places he wants to, and some good old-fashioned condescension: "Unfortunately, the Loba believe that any 'rich' person, local or foreign, should hand out money or candy to everyone they meet".

From the latest decision made by the Ministry of Tourism, it would seem the government is relying instead on competent scholars within and outside Nepal who have studied and worked in upper Mustang. On 21 July, the Ministry of Tourism handed the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), under the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, the mandate to bring the entire Mustang district into its jurisdiction. The Ministry has also approved a Rs 820,000 budget for the following year, which comes from 60 per cent of the funds raised by charging each tourist \$ 500 per week. Niranjana Koirala, senior advisor to the Ministry of Tourism, said the ministry "fully supports ACAP in its efforts to work in Mustang".

ACAP has been working in the Annapurna area to promote locally controlled tourism, sustainable development and

## Long Haul Home for Stolen Nepali Idols

A small bronze image of the Buddha has made its way back to Sikkim after an absence of 80 years. The statuette, presented in 1912 AD to French explorer Alexandra David-Neel by the Chief Abbot of Phodong Monastery in north Sikkim, was returned there in April, amidst much fanfare.

One of David-Neel's last requests, before she died in 1969 at the age of 101, was that the statue be restored to Phodong Monastery. Sadly, the reinstatement at Phodong is hardly a harbinger of glad tidings for the thousands of gifted or stolen Himalayan icons presently scattered around the world.

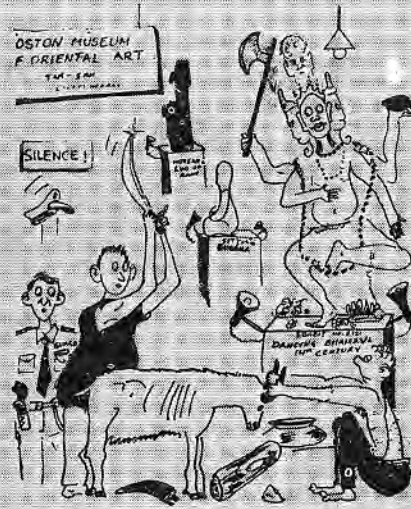
The return of idols, thangkas and other historical and religious items depends upon the conscience and goodwill of possessors. It seems unlikely that the thousands of images and statuary in Western and Japanese museums and private collections will suddenly call it a day and head home.

Has Nepal ever been beneficiary of the goodwill of Western collectors? "Not really," says Shaphalya Amatya, Acting Director of the Department of Archaeology in Kathmandu.

"Through government-to-government cooperation, India did send some Nepali idols back a few years ago. But nothing of substantial value has been received from the museums or private collections of the West".

Without an inventory, it is not even possible lay claim to many pieces of antiquity. "Unless we know precisely what we have, where, how many, of what make and so on, there is little we can do to get back our idols once they disappear", says Lain Singh Bangdel, an eminent Nepali painter who is presently compiling a comprehensive catalogue of idols.

Repatriation depends not only on personal goodwill but also on political will. "Our lost idols will not come back to us easily," says Karna Sakya, President of Nepal Heritage Society. "Internally, the Government should arrange for effective coordination between the Depart-



ment of Archaeology and the customs office. Externally, it should push for Japan, England, France and other art-hungry countries to sign the UNESCO document that calls for government-level cooperation to combat international art theft".

Incidentally, magazine reports that the statue presented to British soldier/explorer Francis Younghusband in Tibet, and which remained by his bedside till his death in 1942, today resides in a storage box in the store-room of the British Geographical Society in London. Who's going to ask for its return?

Asutosh Tiwari and KMD

environmental protection. Its activities in rural communities range from forming forestry committees and lodge-owners committees to electrifying villages and promoting fuel-efficient stoves. The organisation has received tourism and environment awards from both Germany and the UK. The Forest Management Committee of Ghandruk, where ACAP's headquarters are located, won the J. Paul Getty Conservation Award in 1991. Among the indigenous NGOs in Nepal, probably none is more lauded for its integrated approach to nature conservation.

ACAP's work in Mustang begins this fiscal year with a comprehensive need assessment study that will dictate its agenda.

Like its programme in the Himalayan region, ACAP's Mustang project will focus on placing local people in control of planning, deciding and implementing projects. As further south, ACAP staff will be living in the communities and working closely with the local people. Unlike in the Annapurna area, however, the government has mandated an entry fee of US 500. Donors are also eager to make their mark in one of the most picturesque places in Nepal. The population of Mustang district is 13,000. How will ACAP's work in Mustang transform the community?

Chandra P. Gurung, the Head of ACAP, expects that at the end of the decade allotted for

ACAP's project in Mustang, the local people will have access to basic facilities like health care and education. Their standard of living will be higher and more comfortable than before, he maintains, and their awareness of nature and culture conservation will increase.

With a mandate for virtual autonomy, and with the blessings of the Ministry of Tourism, ACAP is under pressure to find a way to make the local people beneficiaries of the tourism that takes place in their area. This will require nothing less than reversing a long history of feudalism that has deprived the people of the opportunity to act for themselves.

Manjushree Thapa

## Propaganda, promises and politics at Rio

Dharamsala's representatives at Rio jumped at the chance to show the world how Chinese presence has harmed Tibet's environment. The Dalai Lama's office forcefully lobbied delegates at Rio, staging talks and distributing its 140-page report, *Tibet: Environment and Development Issues 1992* (see Abstracts).

Tempa Tsering, an official of the Tibetan government in exile, claimed that the presence of more than seven million Han settlers and half a million Chinese troops had wrought irretrievable environmental damage to Tibet's unique landscape. China's unsustainable exploitation of Tibet's mineral and timber wealth had led to severe environmental damage.

Not to be outdone, Beijing, too, had a stall offering copies of *China Environment News* which makes the incredible claim that the scenery of Three Gorges (a major tourist attraction on the Yagtze) will be "reborn" after the building of a major dam recently okayed by the National People's Congress. The water line will rise up to 174 metres in places, but the reporter is not perturbed. He says that in some areas the rise in water level will cover the bases of cliffs, making them "even more precipitous." At another point, he says the water "will submerge ugly factory buildings and dormitory buildings".

Bhutan was also represented although its stall was mostly unattended. On the table were copies of *Bhutan: Towards Sustainable Development in a Unique Environment*. The booklet claimed that Bhutan "may be among the few countries in the world...where population pressure is still so moderate that it does not hinder orderly planning for sustainable development; where external debt is manageable and does not prevent planning for sustainability; where the natural resources base is largely intact."

Binod Bhattarai and IPS.

# Nepali-Bihari Bhai Bhai

Millions of people living in the plains of Bihar may have suffered because of New Delhi's hard bargaining with Kathmandu on harnessing Himalayan waters. Some academics attending a workshop on Cooperative Development of Indo-Nepal Water Resources in May in Patna said India's past policy of "giving Nepal a hard time" had rebounded against the people of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The workshop was organised by the Centre for Water Resources Studies, Bihar College of Engineering and attended by 74 top Indian political, bureaucratic and intellectual leaders in the field of water resources. Seven non-governmental Nepali water experts also participated.

"Bihar is also landlocked like Nepal," said one participant. "Both India and Nepal must stop trying to deal with a zero-sum mentality."

Many shibboleths of 40 years of water diplomacy between the two countries seemed set to collapse. Former Indian diplomats were finally able to speak their minds, while current administrators were inadvertently forced to concede points that they could never have conceded in public.

Unfortunately, Nepali officialdom, though invited, failed to turn up at the workshop.

Through the murk of self-interest that has pushed Delhi and Kathmandu thus far in dealing with the water resources, one could discern a groping for realistic positions. Some speakers, for example, pointed out that the geopolitical interests of New Delhi and the geophysical interests of the population of the Bihar floodplain need not necessarily coincide. Others felt that Kathmandu must look to the interest of the floodplain population while developing hydropower, irrigation and navigation.

It did seem, however, that the workshop had been organised to prepare opinion in favour of the proposed Kosi high dam at Baraha Chhetra in Nepal.

"At whatever cost, and whatever the difficulty, the Kosi High Dam must be built. Bihar's flood problem and power shortage cannot be tackled in any other way," said one Bihari participant.

In his opening address Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav urged New Delhi to go into joint development of Nepal's water resources. Without dams in Nepal, Bihar's flood problem,

irrigation-needs and power-shortages would not be addressed, he said. Accusing New Delhi of exploiting Bihar's mineral resources, Yadav implied that New Delhi has dealt with Nepal all these years on Himalayan waters and Biharis have been left high and dry, as it were. Some participants even discerned a conspiracy in fomenting distrust between Nepal and India. "And it is the poor Bihari and Nepali people that ultimately suffer," said one delegate.

Interestingly, the question of navigation in the Gangetic waterways, something which Kathmandu always raises and New Delhi always rejects in bilateral talks, found ready acceptance among the Patna participants. Prominent Biharis actually supported Nepal's demand for navigation rights. Some interesting contradictions emerged: Indian Water Resources Secretary M.A. Chitale claimed there would be no irrigation benefits from the Karnali project to India (which is the standard Indian position), while

S.K.Bhargava, Engineer-In-Chief of the U.P. Irrigation Department, thought there were such benefits, including 13 million acre-feet of "additional regulated flow".

Just-retired Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey conceded that India's past stance on water negotiations had been faulty and required revision. He said in any joint effort to exploit water resources, Nepal's opposition as well as the population at large should be taken into confidence. On the Tanakpur debate (see *Himal* May/June 1991), he said Nepal had asked for very little — only 25 MW, but India had refused, giving only what amounts to about 1 MW. Now India is losing more with a reluctant Nepal dragging its feet on the larger Pancheswar project upstream as well as the Karnali. Merely damming and inundating land in Nepal, it was felt, would not necessarily lead to a solution in the plains. Dubey felt lack of generosity costs India more in the long run.

Rajendra Dahal

## Ecofriendly crematoria



Taking less with you when you go.

An early issue of *Himal* (July 1988) reported experiments on "fuel efficient cremation" on trial in Una District, in the Shiwalik region of Himachal Pradesh. Queries on the project, run by the Energy and Environment Group (EEG), flooded in. EEG's programme has now apparently picked up steam. Ten such fuel-efficient crematoria have now been erected at various

locations in Una. Training conducted by the Delhi-based Consortium on Rural Technologies (CORT) is underway, and some groups in West Bengal have started their own crematorium project. In addition, a demonstration unit is being set up at Delhi's Nigambodh Ghat. Contact: EEG, Post Bag No. 4, New Delhi 110 066.

## Bhopal postcards say you care

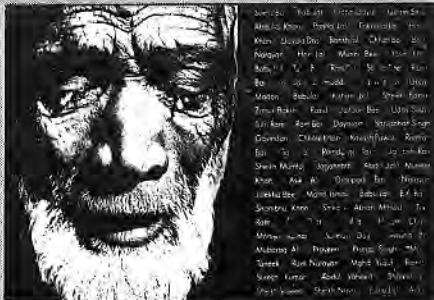
The Bhopal disaster continues to claim victims seven years after toxic gases leaked

from Union Carbide's pesticide factory in Madhya Pradesh.

Victims who survived the immediate disaster are dying at double the rate of those never exposed to the gas. The Supreme Court of India has, in its final judgement, allowed the multinational to wash its hands of the affair by paying a one-time compensation of US\$ 470 million, which the Bhopal Group for Information and Action (BGIA) calls a "pittance".

Victims have taken matters

into their own hands by launching schemes for community health care and other welfare.



To raise funds for rehabilitation, BGIA is selling postcards (above). The suggested price is US 25 cents per card. (IRS 8). Send your orders to BGIA, E1/208 Arera Colony, Bhopal 462 016, Madhya Pradesh, India.

# Slippery Slopes of Himalayan Publishing

*Himalayan publishing in European languages spells big money, but the market is dominated by books about idyllic mountains and touristic pursuits. While serious publishers in the region face hardships, some fly-by-night book packagers take short cuts to big profits.*

By Binod Bhattarai

Rama Tiwari started selling books 10 years ago on the streets of Benares. He moved up to Kathmandu six years ago and today runs Pilgrims, one of the busiest bookshops in the heart of Kathmandu's tourist district with a collection of 70,000 titles and a yearly turnover of NRs 35 million.

Tiwari's rags-to-riches story provides a peep into the world of Himalayan publishing and book-selling. But such success stories mask the industry's largely tourism-dependent nature. Publishing is not institutionalised and sometimes appears as fragile as the ecology of the Himalaya.

With one million tourists visiting the Himalayan region every year, publishers agree that the local market for books is big.

The fact that visitors on holiday are ready to spend money means that books go easily. Bookstalls make a tidy sum because they buy mostly "off-price" copies in the West and charge the cover price. Others specialise in ferreting out turn-of-the-century books on the Himalaya by colonial adventurers and selling them at stratospheric prices.

## Foreign Buyers, Local Market

A visit to any Kathmandu bookshop shows shelves catering almost entirely to visitors or resident expatriates. Saraswati Bookshop is strategically located near the United Nations office in Patan and carries titles that range from mountaineering picture books to teach-yourself-Nepali series. Yoshikazu Shirakawa's portfolio of Himalayan photographs, Sandro Tucci's 'Gurkhas', 'Honey Hunters of Nepal' by Eric Valli and Diane Summers and Pashupati Sumshere Rana's 'Kathmandu a Living Heritage' are prominently displayed.

Publishers catering to the Himalayan region include university presses from North America or Europe and their subcontinental subsidiaries, big-time transnational publishers like Random House, struggling local presses trying to carve out a market niche and reprint merchants who come up with exorbitantly priced out-of-print editions.

The biggest subject for Himalayan publishing, of course, is the Himalaya itself — its mountains and the inhabitants of its deep valleys.

Shirakawa's portraits of Himalayan peaks have been ever-lasting on the shelves. *Honey Hunters of Nepal* (Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, 1988) latched on to a subject that was uniquely Himalayan — with not a shot of the snow mountains, just daringly photographed view of highland Gurungs battling honeybees. The book has gone on to be probably the most-translated and most-sold book on the Himalaya.

Kathmandu Valley, both as a geographical phenomenon as well as the font of Newari/Nepali culture, has been another exotic draw for the publishers. Since Perceval Landon's two-volume *Nepal* (Constable and Co., London, 1928) took a detailed look at Kathmandu, and even before, the Valley's well-packaged offerings have proved an attraction for writers and publishers. The most recent output on the Valley is Pashupati Sumshere Rana's *Kathmandu: A Living Heritage* (The Perennial Press IBD, Bombay, 1989).

Tibet, of course, is everywhere. Tibetan subjects in print include *dharma*, mysticism, anthropology, trekking, Lhasa, history, independence, human rights, Dalai Lama, exploits of the Khampas, and so on. "Anything on Tibetan society sells because of its exoticism, its politics and its mystery," says a satisfied Kathmandu bookseller. Bookshops that have a pulse on the market have started specialising on Tibet. Pilgrims, for example, has already published or reprinted nine volumes on Tibet and Buddhism (one of the originals dates back to 1877) and has three more reprints in the pipeline. Bhutan and

Ladakh, too, ride the crest of the interest in anything Tibetan.

## Trivial Pursuits

The lack of serious bookshops in the region, which in itself is a function of the absence of readership, inhibits publishing. Whereas the bookshops in the main cities such as Delhi, Islamabad and Calcutta do stock books on the Himalaya for a local readership, the Himalayan region itself is barren. The great reading traditions in the British hill stations of Mussoorie, Shimla or Darjeeling have all but vanished. Hallowed bookshops such as Maria Brothers in Shimla are increasingly forced to heed the mass market interests of Punjabi tourists, who are more interested in picture postcards and film magazines. Punjabification in the hills of Himachal and Uttar Pradesh and Bengalisation of Darjeeling and Kalimpong has shrunk the local market for Himalayan publications (which are overwhelmingly in English). Thimphu last year opened its first bookshop, but it caters mostly to tourists.

It would be wrong to think that English publishing on the Himalaya is new. It goes back at least two centuries, and the writers invariably were European adventurers out for some good old spying, climbing and exploring. The explorers and imperial agents wrote as they went, or produced tomes once in retirement in Kent or the Cotswolds.

The early writers, many of whose labours are now reprinted and turning a tidy profit for Indian and Nepali publishers, include Brian Houghton Hodgson, whom Landon described as "one of the greatest labourers in the sphere of Indian research and record that has ever lived"; M. Sylvain Levi in archaeology; Dr. Wright, a scholar and Dr. Oldfield, a surgeon assigned to the Kathmandu residency; Sir Charles Bell, Laurence Oliphant, and so on. These were, of course, preceded by accounts written by Kirkpatrick, Hamilton and Fraser.

It used to be that explorers and ex-diplomats wrote on the Himalaya. Today's "serious" books increasingly are written by anthropologists, sociologists, historians and other academics, as



Pilgrims bookshop in Kathmandu.

well as by ex-Peace Corps volunteers, ex-Gurkhas, ex-mountaineers and ex-development workers.

In India, the tiny publishing house of Mani Press continues to maintain traditional standards. Founded decades ago, at Kalimpong, by the formidable literateur and educationist, the late Dr Parasmani Pradhan, Mani Press has contributed a small but important number of primers and textbooks in Nepali, bilingual dictionaries, collected essays, poetry and fiction books in English and Nepali. Mani Press is also the earliest, and arguably the best, publisher of books in Dzongkha. Latest offerings include a seminal work on Himalayan orchids by Udai C. Pradhan, exquisitely illustrated on handmade paper and bound in Bhutanese plaid. Bharat Mani Pradhan, who runs Mani Press, is currently investigating the possibility of bringing out a Lepcha/English dictionary as well as a collection of fiction and poetry by writers from the Darjeeling district.

Of the other publishing in the area, the journal, *Himalaya Today*, produced in Gangtok, deserves mention. But, although it is certainly eco-friendly, *Himalaya Today* is less user-friendly and often carries abstruse pieces culled from the research papers of academics.

### Malice in Wonderland

The irony of Himalayan publishing is that Nepali publishers, in the heart of the Himalaya, poo-hoo the idea that the field is a gold mine. "How can you say that the region is a publisher's wonderland?" asks Govinda Shrestha, of Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Nepal's senior book-seller and publisher. "Show me any good book on a serious subject published here in the last ten years?"

Shrestha considers as "serious", publications such as Toni Hagen's *Nepal* (Kummerly & Frey, Berne, 1960), Dor Bahadur Bista's *People of Nepal* (HMG Department of Publicity, Kathmandu, 1967), and Kirkpatrick's old classic *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (William Miller, London, 1811). Ratna Pustak has published more than 60 titles ranging from the Barnamala to the *Bibliotheca Himalayica* series on the Himalaya. But does he sell? "It takes a minimum of three years to sell one thousand copies of a good book," Shrestha says.

*A Guide to Trekking in Nepal* by Stephen Berzuchka published by Sahayogi in Kathmandu is an example of the potential market for high-quality products targeted to tourists. The classic is in its sixth edition and is now printed in North America and UK. The book took five years to sell its first editions. Now, there is a new edition almost every year.

The *Bibliotheca Himalayica* series may be considered jewel in the crown of Himalayan publishing. The series was initiated in 1973 by Halvard K. Kuloy, a Norwegian who was Resident Representative of Unicef in Kathmandu

in the 1970s. *Bibliotheca Himalayica* was well received among academic Himalophiles, but their number is small. Its first edition came out in 1973. The most recent reprint, *The Traditional Architecture of Kathmandu Valley* (1989), has sold only 300 of the 1000 copies, which shows how fast the market saturates. Another piece of serious publishing, also from Ratna Pustak, is the journal *Kailash*, which has failed to come out for the last three years. It has a print run of 500 for 200 subscribers and is on the verge of extinction.

Sales to the local intelligentsia of *Kailash* or any other academic publication, is practically nil. This is due both to a lack of scholarship among the locals as well as the relatively high cost of books and journals. Once in a while, a particularly striking book will attract some local sales, such as anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista's *Fatalism and Development* (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1991), an analytical work on the Hinduisation of Nepali society which has something for everyone to be angry or pleased about. The book is already well into its second edition, and there is talk of a third.

But Bista's book is an exception. On the whole, local publishing on the Himalaya is a labour of love. The profits just are not there, say publishers and distributors in Kathmandu. Himalayan publishing is not a high-volume business. The maximum a book can sell is about 10,000 copies, after years on the racks. Print runs of books that do well are between 2,000 and 3,000 copies. According to one estimate, there are about 80 regional publishers on Himalayan topics. In New Delhi alone, there are about 50 publishers on Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Ladakh and Sikkim. Publishers with good distribution networks include India Book House, Vikas, Manohar, Sterling and Natraj (of Dehra Dun).

### Carpetchbagger

However, there are the publishers who are not as 'serious', a new breed which cares little for quality but everything for quick profits. Fast-buck book peddlers based in Benares, Jaipur and Delhi are invading the Himalayan market with cheaply produced, badly edited titles with little intellectual weight. The intention is to tap the exoticism of the Himalayan market with catchy titles and flashy covers, and to make off with the cover price value before the readers get wise to the what's inside. These publishers are averaging one title on a Himalayan subject every month.

A typical scam runs thus. The India-based publisher (where printing costs are a third of Kathmandu rates) is on the lookout for manuscripts that can be palmed off as real scholarship. Someone comes along with his Masters dissertation, unedited and of little value. The book is printed and hard-bound in, say, Jaipur. It is given an attractive colour cover and a mark up of IRs 200. The writer's contract is to sell 200 copies, which she or he does by peddling

the book in Government departments and among friends. That already provides IRs 40,000, which covers all the costs. The rest is profit. Some of these pseudo-publications are given to bookshops, while rest are bundled off to libraries and institutions through agents who do it for a commission (which is as high as 40 per cent).

At other extreme are the big-time publishers from North America, who use their power and resources to sell the Himalaya for high profit. Those that regularly publish on Himalayan subjects include Simon & Schuster (New York) which published Jeremy Bernstein (of *The Wildest Dreams of Kew* fame), Fodor's Travel Publications Inc (London and New York) and even Unwin Hyman Limited which publishes paperbacks like *Escape from Kathmandu*.

A few years ago, Random House, the New York-based giant, took over Shambhala, a publishing house that focuses on oriental mysticism, and especially Tibetan Buddhism. The fact that it specialised on Himalayan subjects indicates profits are there. Unfortunately, the local publishers of the Himalayan region are in no position to tap this multi-million dollar market. The problems are: low print and paper quality, the poor quality of the (largely un-edited) copy and, most important of all, lack of marketing and distributing muscle. The best the local publishers can hope for, therefore, is to nibble at the edges of the vast market that does exist.

While the distribution bottleneck exists it is also true that there is a lack of business skills and knowledge of the worldwide market and how to tackle it. Indian mega-publishers such as Vikas seem to have successfully tackled this, but not so the smaller publishers. Rivalry and pettiness add to the problem.

"Some booksellers will write to the publishers rather than get the books from the distributor in Kathmandu," said Madhab L. Maharjan of Mandala Book Point and secretary of Nepal's Booksellers' and Publisher's Association. "Booksellers are still not functioning professionally, which affects publishers and ultimately Himalayan scholarship as a whole."

To gear up for the market that is bound to develop, publishers and booksellers must institutionalise. Must a *Bibliotheca Himalayica* languish because Kuloy is gone? Must a Sahayogi give up a lucrative book in hand because it does not have reach? Unfortunately, successful publishers are mainly family businesses. They revolve around individuals with vision, and decelerate once those individuals lose their drive. Even Pilgrims' Rama Tiwari is not sure that his successful business, the envy of other booksellers in Nepal, will survive him. "I have built up this collection ... once I die this (bookshop) will also die. I do not see the zeal in my family to continue with this business," Tiwari says.

B. Bhattarai is a Kathmandu journalist.

# Rio Mountain Document: Right on Buzzwords, Wrong on People

by Nigel J. R. Allan

Including mountain environments on the Agenda of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, the "Earth Summit", was a great coup for the organisers of this report. Deserts, coasts and oceans all had a place in the 1972 Stockholm conference but mountains were nowhere to be seen. The hordes that descended on Rio de Janeiro, in contrast, were at least offered chapter 13 of *Agenda-21*, as the 800-page Earth Summit document was called.

Pages 67-75 of *Agenda-21* are entitled "Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development" and were aimed at politicians, aid donors and, of course, aid recipients, too. It is replete with all the contemporary buzzwords that litter foreign aid documents related to mountains; sustainable, ecosystem, fragile, integrated, appropriate, risk, hazardous, regenerative, environment-friendly, participatory, and so on *ad nauseam*. But one nice buzzword, marginality, is absent from the *Agenda-21* chapter: it does, thank goodness, appear in the "Overview and Appeal" to Stone's book.

The book reviewed here is a companion volume linked to Chapter 13 of *Agenda-21*. A group of natural scientists met in Switzerland last summer to plan the publication and attempted to compile it in six months. Peter Stone, the editor-in-chief, was an assistant to Maurice Strong (the *major domo* of Rio) at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Stone, now an international consultant in Geneva, can be considered 'director' of this compiled volume, and the Swiss government the producer. The cast of characters was large. Almost every pimple on the Earth's surface was covered, no doubt because all delegates at the Earth Summit were proud of their country's mountains and wanted to be a part of the mega splash in Rio.

Stone's compilation has many shortcomings but, in all fairness, most of the contributors are aware of them. First is its failure to provide a balanced view on mountain environments and development, surely a prerequisite for a Summit document. There is little or no discussion about development issues; a serious omission given that the perceived problems in mountains today have little to do with the geophysical attributes of the environment but instead with 'human agency'.

The opening chapter of this almost 400-page tome is entitled "Overview and Appeal: Sustainable Development in Mountain Areas". The first problem introduced from the book's list

## The State of the World's Mountains: A Global Report

Edited by Peter B. Stone  
London: Zed Books, 1992



Woman in the Bolivian Andes.

of four is right on the mark. Mountains are (here's another buzzword) marginalised. We all know that mountains are marginal in a biophysical sense; otherwise why would all these people troop up and down the Himalaya exploiting the seasonal fodder sources? Marginalised now means that the mountain population is peripheral to the urban, industrial, or plains populations with whom political, and therefore economic, power rests. Recent events in Afghanistan illustrate vividly the far-reaching effects of increased accessibility. After the then Soviet Union and the USA built tunnels and roads into the Hindu Kush, all the marginalised ethnic groups gained quick access to cheap education in Kabul, and also to the world. It was only a matter of time until the dominant Pushtun hegemony at the core was challenged and eventually overthrown. If foreigners want to deal with Afghanistan now they will have to confront 55 ethnic groups speaking 20 languages!

Unfortunately, the links between marginality and development are not maintained throughout. The remaining three themes listed at the beginning of the overview are: agriculture and forestry, the side-effects of mining, construction and tourism, and that much debated topic, climate change. Compared to the hyperbole of the *Agenda-21* mountain chapter, the "Overview and Appeal" is measured and reasonable. One recognises the hand of Martin Price in this section.

Given the fact that the book was conceived and financed in Switzerland the reader might expect that the chapter on the Alps would be the best but, to my great disappointment, it is the

weakest because it ignores the manipulation, in the Alps, between the fixed biophysical environment and the great documentary record of people, in period and place. Even Tacitus in the 1st century CE noted how Germanic people lived in dispersed settlements and Romance farmers lived in nucleated settlements in the Alps. Nothing is said about the diverse ways in which people exploit the biophysical mountain environment by arranging themselves in such a manner.

Richard Weiss' famous study in Graubunden Canton of what we now call common property resources might have given us some inkling of the great complexity that we find in the Himalaya. The whole phenomenon of partible and impartible inheritance in the Alps results

in a totally different manipulation of the mountain environment but nothing is said about the rates of emigration, varied carrying capacity, and the high degree of celibacy that now occur under modernisation. In nearby Wallis Canton, pastures are owned by individuals. The result is that women work the high pastures and men work the lower fields. Nothing is mentioned about how women's and men's roles and attitudes are imprinted on the mountain environment.

If the aim was to concentrate on only the contemporary situation it would have been interesting to ask how transfer payments affect the maintenance or transformation of the mountain environment, or how foreign ownership of land influences attitudes toward the mountains. Some mention is made on page 89 of the Alps section of "Communal Master Plans", but there is no discussion of their acceptance or rejection. No laws relating to Alpine land use are mentioned. Despite the authors' claim that there is now a new socio-economic definition of the Alps that is based on stated policies there is no mention of what these policies are all about. For me, there is no vibrancy in the Alpine environment as portrayed in this book; it is inert. If I have spent too much time on the Alps it is because the documentary record is superb compared with the meagre record we have of the Himalaya. Mountain people exploit and shape their environment in many ways. Knowing something about the Alps might help us formulate good questions about the Himalaya.

Further chapters on Africa and the Andes competently sum up the literature on the geophysical attributes of the mountains and

human biology found there. Again there is no mention of development concepts and theory relating to the mountain environments. We are not even provided with a summary of the effects of recent Marxist regimes on the mountains of Ethiopia and Madagascar. Chapter 7 is a useful summary of mountains of the former Soviet Union. As these mountains, especially the well-populated Caucasus and Pamir mountains and forelands, are opened to international research we will learn more about how the command economy annihilated mountain settlements yet, in many places, indirectly conserved the environment to a degree not found in contiguous areas in Asia. The bibliography is a useful guide to general literature and especially works relating to conservation. For those readers interested in mountain protected areas and climate change in mountains there are short, very competent summaries by Hamilton and Barry.

The only chapter in the book that meets the book's purpose of relating the mountain environment with development is extracted from a Woodlands Mountain Institute report on the USA's Appalachia. The authors skillfully weave in various development models with a litany of resource exploitation. It is well worth buying this book for the modest price of US\$ 25 just to read Chapter 8. All the mountain issues are found here: colonialism, poverty, cultural integrity, usurpation of traditional land rights, legislation, emigration, conservation and protected areas

and so on. This chapter should be required reading for all Westerners working on development projects in mountains around the world.

What can be said of the Himalayan chapter? It is lumpy because, like the other chapters, it is the product of several writers of varying ability. Too many pages (17) are spent describing the well known biophysical features of the mountains. Only 10 pages are allocated to "The People-Environment-Development Relationship". Here the writer appears to adopt the well-known "Grenoble School" three-stage model of mountain development created by the Veyrets (although it is nowhere cited). Stage One was "The Age of Autarky", Stage Two (for the Alps) "the Age of Communications (1850-1945)", and Stage Three, "Radical Transformation", which is underway in the Alps now. For much of the Himalaya, although not Nepal, the second stage is being completed and the anguish of the third, especially as seen through the eyes of coffee-table-book writers, is now underway. Nepal is still groping its way through Stage Two but the impact of its evolution is now seen in the cataclysmic political changes of the past couple of years.

"Development", even though it is an elusive concept, is never defined in the book. Of course it varies with place and period so not all mountain regions can be covered under general statements. Contemporary ideas of development such as ecodevelopment, participatory development,

basic needs, growth with distribution, direct eradication of poverty, appear to have no impact on the mountain environment for they are not addressed. But surely the 100 or more development agencies existing in Nepal, for example, have some guiding principles. As in the Alps chapter the reader would like to know the effects that irrigation water allocation, land tenure, access to communal pastures and forests have on the development of Himalayan society.

A second edition of book is already being discussed. The generosity of the Swiss must be appreciated in funding the first edition but, for a future edition, there needs to be a concerted effort at meshing the nomothetic view of the natural environment with the ideographic conditions contingent in the Himalayan and other mountains societies. This situation is not new for it is a reflection of the 19th century dichotomy between "Man and Nature". Furthermore, the compiler needs to be someone who has a thorough knowledge of mountain society and habitat.

This book addresses the biophysical aspects of the mountain environment well but neglects almost completely the issue of development. We look forward to reading a book that addresses both mountain environment and development.

N. J.R. Allan has researched in Tajikistan, Xinjing, Tibet, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal over the past 25 years. He edited *Human Impact on Mountains* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1988).

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**Ancient and Medieval Nepal**

by *Rishikesh Shah*

Manohar Publications

New Delhi, 1992

ISBN# 81-85425-69-8

NRs. 275

The manuscript for this book was first drafted in 1969-70, while the author was in jail. It lay idle for two decades before being updated and published. A detailed description of the Licchavi dynasty (5th to 9th centuries C.E.) is followed by a chapter on society, religion, economy and arts. The book chronologically follows through to the rule of the early Mallas and King Jayasthiti Malla. A whole chapter examines other Kingdoms outside the Kathmandu Valley before the later centuries of the Malla Kingdoms of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur are described. After that are chapters about social conditions, religion, art and architecture during the Malla Era. The book ends with summary tables of all the rulers.

**Tibet: Environment and Development Issues**

1992

Department of Information and International Relations  
Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness XIV  
Dalai Lama

Dharamsala, 1992

Prepared to coincide with the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro - where it was distributed - this 124-page report takes a comprehensive look at Tibet's natural and human endowment, patterns of economic growth, and the role of natural resources in economic development. The transfer of seven million Chinese into Tibet since 1949 has put unsustainable pressure on Tibet's natural resource base. Whereas before, "by all accounts", Tibetans subsisted off a rich natural resource base and a stable environment, and "people and wildlife lived together in extraordinary harmony", the report says Chinese occupation has led to widespread destruction or extraction of the land's living and other natural resources. The report presents an impressive collection of data and information on Tibet, including: economic and demographic trends, land resources, water resources, energy, minerals and mining and biodiversity. The sources used are impressive, from Chinese scholars to international researchers, recent Tibetan refugees, and members of the Dalai Lama's fact-finding missions. There are 392 references cited at the back of the book, from wire services copy to *Beijing Review*, *Tibetan Review*, to scientific journals, World Bank reports, and human rights publications.

**Bhutan Environment, Culture and Development Strategy**

by *P.P. Karan*

Intellectual Publishing House

New Delhi, 1990

Price: IRs 175, US\$ 30

ISBN 81-7076-027-5

With the construction of the country's first road, linking the Paro and Thimpu valleys with the Indian frontier of Phuntsholing, Bhutan has seen massive transformation. Karan's book tries to draw Bhutan's pattern of development since 1960. India assisted in the kingdom's development planning which began in 1959 and culminated in 1961 with the launch of its first Five Year Plan. Since there is virtually no scholarly work on the economy of contemporary Bhutan, Karan attempts to outline Bhutan's cultural and environmental development.

Other chapters discuss Bhutan's energy, mining and manufacturing sectors, the impacts of transport,

trade and tourism on the lives of its people, forest use and management, development of human resources and land use and agriculture. The unique process of developmental change, with seemingly negligible adverse effects on the country's environment and culture, is discussed in the concluding chapter. Most of the materials for the book were gathered by the author through prolonged periods of field observation starting in 1960 when he was invited, by Bhutan's King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, to undertake research in that country.

**Children and Women of Nepal: A Situation**

Analysis

HMG National Planning Commission & UNICEF

Kathmandu, 1992

ISBN 92 806 1029 5

A follow-up to the 1987 version which brings up to date the state of women and children in Nepal under a new political system. Development constraints and opportunities, with special emphasis on women and the girl child, are presented in a comprehensible and logical format. Much background data on development in Nepal is given in tables and diagrams that are easy to read. The book is filled with valuable data on demography, income, food production, health statistics, legislation, education, water and sanitation and communications.

**Bhutan and its Natural Resources**

*Vikas Publishing House*

Price: IRs 195

ISBN 0-7069-5794-6

Bhutan is modernising. But, at the same time, this country has values and traditions that conflict with the side-effects of some paths of development. Consumerism and materialism increasingly infect the tradition-bound Bhutanese. Their belief in the souls of plants has an immense impact on the conservation of the environment. But the planned economy is affecting ecology although adequate emphasis is given to afforestation and conservation programmes. The book focusses on increasing the level of understanding of the causes and effects of environmental degradation and urges policy decisions to address it.

The chapters at the beginning deal with the policy programmes of the Royal Bhutanese Government on forestry and agriculture. A study, comprising articles by several authors, advocates the concept of sustainable development and creation of protected areas where man and nature can coexist. The book also explores the raising of public awareness of environmental issues and the teaching of environmental studies in institutes of higher education.

**Sherpa of Khumbu, People, Livestock, and Landscape**

by *Barbara Brower*

Oxford University Press

New Delhi, 1991

Price: IRs 290

ISBN 0 19 562614

The Sherpa world has changed considerably since 1953, when Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa first climbed Everest/Qomolengma/Sagarmatha. Becoming a part of the rest of the world and being defined as a nature reserve has had a major impact on the environment of Khumbu and on the society and economy of the Sherpas.

There are new pressures on the people and land, new expectations about what Sagarmatha National Park ought to look like, whom it is for, how and by whom it should be managed. These pressures and

expectations profoundly affect the animal husbandry practices of cattle herders. Foreign visitors are often shocked at the contrast of parks in their own country with one in which some 3,000 residents make full use of its resources.

The study looks at animal management in the Park in the context of Sherpa subsistence, demonstrating the intricacy of the relationship between herders and the land, the adaptability of herders and considerations that must be taken into account in any attempt to modify traditional land-use practices. The work provides a well-rounded account of Sherpa society in transition. Although the book focusses on the Sherpa, its relevance stretches far beyond them to the study of all traditional societies subject to the pressures of change and the debate on the apparent hiatus between conservation of the environment and the legitimate rights of the people who depend upon it for a livelihood.

**Bahadur Shah - The Regent of Nepal**

by *B.R. Bajracharya*

Anmol Publications

New Delhi, 1992

Price: IRs 205

ISBN 81-7041-643-4

Bahadur Shah, the son of Prithvinarayan Shah (1743-1775), ruled Nepal from 1785 to 1794 AD as Regent to his nephew Rana Bahadur Shah, the king of Nepal during the latter's childhood. A series of military victories in the west extended Nepalese territory to the Ganges and introduced Nepal as a powerful state in the region. Bahadur Shah fought against the Chinese invaders, who had come to rescue the Tibetans, and defeated them in the battle of Vetravati in 1792.

The book begins with the early life of Bahadur Shah and his relationship with his brother Pratap Singh and his sister-in-law Rajendra Laxmi. It throws light on the inner workings of the court, whose political manoeuvres greatly influenced Bahadur Shah's career.

The administrative reforms carried out by him are also discussed while his relations with the East India Company to secure help to fight the invading Chinese depict him as a man of tactics. One chapter deals focusses on Nepal-China relations to examine Bahadur Shah's foreign policy.

**Nepali Community in India**

by *Suman Raj Timsina*

Manak Publications Pvt Ltd

1992

Price: IRs 150

ISBN 81-85445-09-5

This detailed analysis of Nepalis in India traces the history of conflicts they have experienced in India. Historical documents including census reports provide details of social origin, the Indo-Nepali Treaty of 1815-16 and the spread of the Nepalis to different parts of India and form the basis of understanding of the ethnic character of the Indian Nepalis.

The Nepali population, concentrated mainly in the hills of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam and Meghalaya, feel insecure because of their socio-economic backwardness and political alienation vis-a-vis Indian people. The book discusses the ethnic consciousness as reflected in some of the recent movements and activities as an offshoot of the frustrations among the Indian Nepalis.

One chapter deals with the emergence of the Gorkha National Liberation Front as the question of 'outsiders' in the district of Darjeeling became the focal point for the Nepali demand for the formation of Gorkhaland.

## ABSTRACTS

### *South Asia Research*

Edited by David Arnold

School of Oriental and South Asian Studies  
London

*South Asia Research* is a bi-annual interdisciplinary area journal for the region. Its aim is "to give rapid access to current research work" and to provide opportunities for publication, to research students as well as established scholars. The journal publishes reports on research in progress, reviews, interpretive essays and a cumulative index of research work. Subscription: US\$ 24 outside the United Kingdom. Contact: Centre of South Asian Studies, Room 471 SOAS, Thomhaugh Street, Russel Square, London WH1H.OXG.

### *Mountain Research and Development*

Vol 12, No 1 and Vol 12, No 2

Edited by Jack & Pauline Ives  
University of California Press  
USA, 1992

In *No 1*, Joelle Smadja tries to show "that there is no direct relationship between human pressure, monsoon rains, and erosion in the Middle Mountains of Central Nepal". Smadja studied the Salme slope, in Nuwakot district, where French researchers have worked intensively for the past few years. There are impressive time-lapse photographs showing the progression of erosion on mountainsides.

Another article, by Roger Barry of the University of Colorado, discusses the basic controls of mountain climates and illustrates the availability of data in several mountain regions. Climatic knowledge of mountain regions, he says, is limited by paucity of observations

and insufficient theoretical attention to processes within these regions.

*No 2* Guest Editor, Professor Adam Kotarba brings together papers from several disciplines in this special issue on the "Environmental and Human Impact on the Polish Tatra Mountains". The papers focus on the natural environment, climate, flora and fauna. They introduce readers to the present status of mountain research in Poland and current threats to the Polish mountain environment. One article traces the history of Tatra National Park.

### *Spiny Babbler*

Vol 1, No 1

Edited by Pallav Ranjan  
Godavari Alumni Association, Summer 1992  
Kathmandu

This first issue of a new poetry magazine begins with a profile of Nepal's best-loved poet, Laxmi Prasad Devkota. The collection of poems from around the world has a pleasing design and is sprinkled with line drawings and photographs.

### *Bibliography on Women in Mountain Development*

ICIMOD Bibliographic Series

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development  
Kathmandu, 1991

This bibliography concerns itself with the status, role and activities of women in the management of natural resources in the mountains. Prepared in collaboration with institutions in China, India and Nepal, the selections include case studies, project evaluation reports, serial studies, masters and doctoral theses, seminar reports

and study reports. There are 633 bibliographic references, an author index, a keyword index, and a keyword-in-context (KWIC) title index. Contact: Anwar Ali Chaudhry, Documentation and Information Exchange Programme, ICIMOD, PO Box 3226, Kathmandu.

### *Down to Earth*

Society for Environmental Communication  
New Delhi, 1992

This fortnightly magazine, which brought out its first number in May 1992, reports on science and environment in "India, South Asian, and World". According to the editor, the magazine "reports on all things that a regular magazine will report, but from a science and environment perspective. *Down to Earth* looks at underlying trends and processes. This is the first magazine of its kind in India." While recent issues have devoted much space to the analysis of the Rio summit and other global issues, the magazine has also made a strong effort to print local grassroots news. Vol. 1 No. 2. examined droughts, while No. 3 put the issue of Indus River ecology, which had so far received little media attention, on its front cover. The fertile Indus River Delta has shrunk from 3000 sq. km. to just 250 sq. km. and continues to shrink because of the decrease in water flow due to barrages and canals built upstream. The blurb on the back of the magazine states that while it "ignores the Bofors issue, avoids Pamela Bordes, and leaves Ram Janambhoomi...*Down to Earth* is a magazine full of volatile politics." Contact: F-6, Kailash Colony, New Delhi 110 048 Tel: 6438109, Tlx: 031-65295 SK EXIN, Fax: 91-11-6438109.

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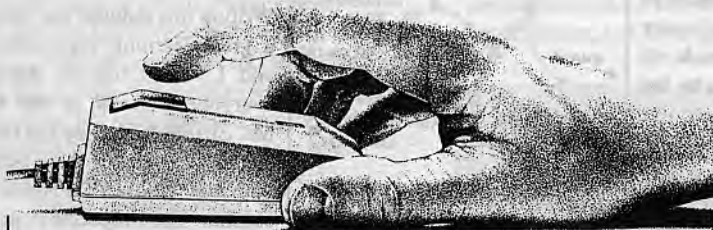
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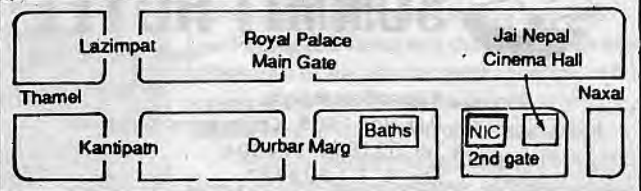
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# Choba Bhamare: Searching for the Needle

by Arnico K. Panday



Choba Bhamare rising above Pamari Himal/Lapchi Kang, from the southwest.

Separating the upper watersheds of the Sunkosi and Tamakosi rivers north-east of Kathmandu is a long saw-tooth ridge of black rock known as the Pamari Himal or Lapchi Kang range. It runs northwards from Ama Bamare, 5325m, along the border between Tibet and Nepal's Dolakha district to a 6070m high unnamed peak 20 kilometers further north.

Dwarfed by the Jugal and Langtang ranges to the west and the lofty peaks of the Rolwaling and Khumbu to the east, this lesser Himalayan range has largely been ignored. What little recognition it has received has almost exclusively been due to the presence of one peak that juts prominently upward like a dark fang. The peak, nicknamed 'the Needle,' stands 3.5 kilometers north of Ama Bamare. It has three sheer snowless sides (the west, south and northeast faces) that rise from below the jagged ridge crest.

What is this mountain's real name? How tall is it? An attempt to answer these two simple questions invited a lot of confusion. Only the mountain's appearance, and its location between Tamakosi/Bhotekosi's tributary Chyadu Khola, and the Tibetan town of Dram/Khasa was certain. Tourist brochures and panoramas -- including *Himal's* own panorama- and all maps published in India starting with the 1934 "1-inch-to-8-miles" map, label a mountain called Chhoba Bamare, with varying heights of 5946m, 5960m, or 5970m.

The 1:50,000 Lapchi Kang map by Austrian cartographer Erwin Schneider contains one peak called Chaduk Bhir, height 5933m, and one peak north of the Chyadu Khola named Jobo

Bamare, height 5927m. The Apa map published by Nelles in Munich retains Schneider's names and heights. But it also labels Pamari/Lapchi Kang's northern end peak as Chhoba Bamare, height 5971m. The 2042 B.S. Dolakha district map by HMG's Topographical Survey Branch, and most of the maps subsequently published in Nepal do not label any of the above mountains. They only name one mountain: Chomo Pamari, height 6109m, located 28 degrees 03'26" north, 86 degrees 05'23" east, near the range's northern end.

Compared to the higher Himalayan ranges, very little information is available about Pamari/Lapchi Kang. The range follows the Sino-Nepali border in areas that had been made off limits to other nationals by the Panchayat government. Its peaks are not open for mountaineering, though already in 1955 Tom Weir, in his book *East of Kathmandu*, promised that it could offer some of the world's best rock climbing.

Two detailed 'restricted circulation' maps at Nepal's Topographical Survey Branch finally brought together some pieces of the puzzle. Though here too, the Nepali map labelled only Chomo Pamari, 6109m, and the Indian map labelled only Chhoba Bamare, 5946m, both maps showed all peaks in

the Pamari/Lapchi Kang: there are about ten mountains above 5000 meters in the range. Most tourist maps seem to have picked only a few of these peaks.

With photos from various angles, a ruler, and several maps, we can establish as a fact that both Schneider's Chaduk Bhir and the Indian maps' and Nepali tourist brochures' Chhoba Bamare are indeed our "Needle." Why Nepali cartographers labelled only Chomo Pamari, 6109 meters, is not clear. A mountain of that height does exist, it might have that name. But it also seems plausible that they could have tried to find the "Needle" and using pictures and descriptions of Chhoba Bamare appearing higher than its neighbors, they might have sought the tallest peak in the range and slightly adjusted the spelling.

If any of you readers have more information about the peaks of the Pamari/Lapchi Kang range, *Himal* would be glad to hear from you. To me, Arnico Panday, information on Choba Bamare is

of personal interest, because I lived and travelled in Sindhupalchok and Dolakha district as a child and have been watching Choba Bamare's rock peak longer than that of any other mountain.

I will now be leaving Nepal and *Himal* magazine to attend college in the United States. Writing this column has been a great learning experience, and I would like to thank everyone at *Himal*, as well as Ms. Elizabeth Hawley and Dr. Harka Gurung for their help with this "Know Your Himal" column. The magazine hopes to continue the column and asks interested people to submit articles that will illuminate interesting aspects

of the Himalaya. Though initially begun as a description of individual peaks, the idea behind the column has evolved into the wider goal of spreading the excitement about mountains to *Himal's* mostly Himalayan readership. ▽



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Mustang Bhot, geographically and ethnically Tibetan, has been sequestered from the rest of Nepal by the Himalayan range, and, till recently, from the rest of the world by the policy of restriction. Manjushree Thapa took the first of two trips there in 1990. **MUSTANG BHOT IN FRAGMENTS** is the account of her trips, and the story of a Nepali woman confronting schisms in the community she visits, in her country, and in her own identity.

### MUSTANG BHOT IN FRAGMENTS

Manjushree Thapa



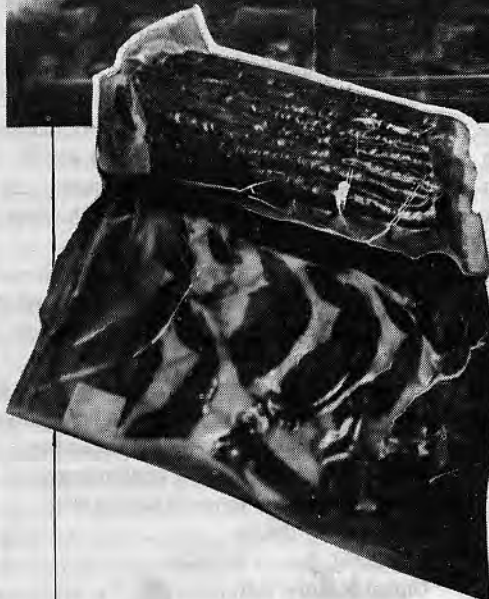
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# Abominably Yours,

We don't know whether the World Bank had anything to do with it, but Nepal has just raised mountaineering tariffs for its Himalayan peaks. The new rates are supposed to more accurately reflect the laws of supply and demand in an age when Himalayan peaks have to compete for attention with other summits like K-2, G-7, UNCED, NAM, CSCE and SAARC.

The United Nations started it all by declaring what before was merely the duration of the Earth's revolutions around the sun The International Year of This or The International Year for That. Not satisfied with the annual cycle, the bureaucrats of Turtle Bay started blocking off entire decades for subjects like Water, Sanitation and Women. These special Years and Decades started overlapping so much that when our honourable ministers got up to give speeches they lost track of whether they were launching a National Awareness Campaign for the International Goitre Prevention Decade or inaugurating a Mid-Term Planning Workshop for the International Half-Century on Conservation of Cultural Heritage.

And why should only goody-goody motherhood subjects deserve Years and Decades. If there can be an International Year of Peace when the two Super-Powers had their fingers on the fire button, 1991 could have been the International Year of Breakup, and 1992 the Year of Secession. Different regions could celebrate different Years, on the same year. While the Sahel can start ordering posters for 1993 as the Year of the Great Drought, for example, the Japanese and Norwegians can together start hiring media consultants to celebrate 1993 as the Year of Freedom to Pursue the Minke Whale.

Now, an undeclared Decade of the Summits is upon us. It began with the Children's Summit in New York two years ago. World leaders had barely descended from the Earth Summit when they plunged into preparations for next year's Population Summit and a Human Rights Summit the year after. At this rate, kings, presidents and prime ministers will do nothing but summit-hop from one peak to another for their entire terms in office.

There is no shortage of subjects for summitry. Island nations threatened by sea level rise could form a cabal and roll up their trousers regularly to meet amidst swirling seawater. If global warming progresses at present rates, the presidents of the Seychelles, Maldives and Vanuatu (with the Mayor of Chittagong attending as observer) would have to organise The First Underwater Summit.

In these uncertain political times, there is always danger that a head of state will be overthrown while he is summitting. A way around their fear of flying would be to organise gatherings of their wives instead, as the IFAD did last year in Geneva. There could be a technical hitch with the husbands of female heads of state, but a more serious problem in future could involve leaders with multiple wives — a four-member delegation from the sister Himalayan kingdom could, for instance, play havoc with conference seating arrangements. But as the Geneva First Lady Summit showed, wives are a hitherto untapped source of influence over government policy. Some political analysts believe that a summit between Barbara Bush and Mrs Saddam Hussein could have averted the Gulf War, or perhaps a meeting before that between Mrs. Hussein and the Mrs. Emir of Kuwait.

And what about a Summit of Despots, where former and present tyrants, dictators, autocrats and oligarchs meet in harshly-lit basements of Ministries of Interior of member states on a rotational basis. Exchanging notes will be the Great Leader Kim Il Sung accompanied by Beloved Leader Kim Jong Il, General Stroessner from Paraguay and Chile's Augusto Pinochet. Idi Amin, would fly in from his prolonged sabbatical in Saudi Arabia. Manuel Noriega, on special leave from Sing

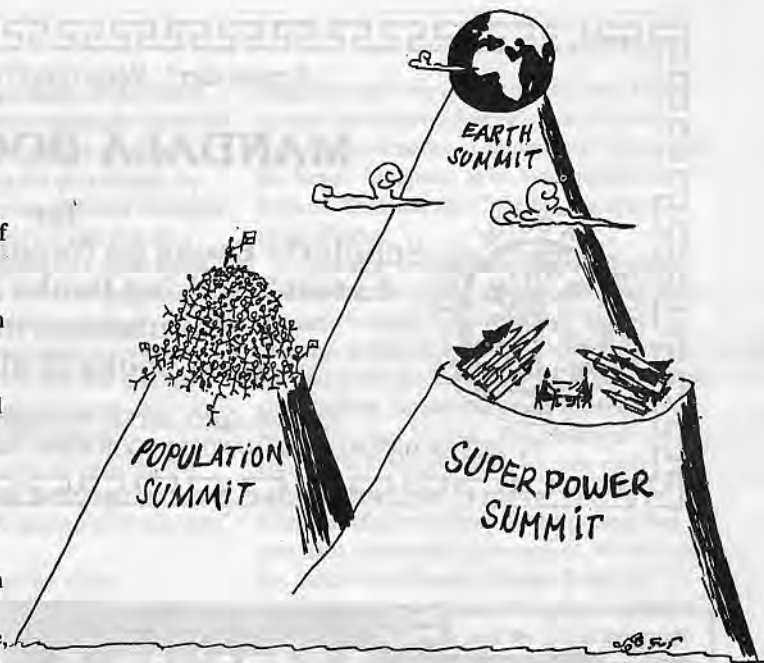
Sing, would present discussion papers. Myanmar's Gen Ne Win would give the Keynote Address, while the Concluding Remarks could be reserved for Mobutu Sese Seko.

A Consultative Meeting of National Chauvinists would prepare for an annual Summit of Bigots of All Colours in Sarajevo to discuss the methodologies to be used to pulverise minorities. There will be field trips to observe Serbian artillery bombard apartment blocks and to interview snipers as they bring down old Bosnian ladies returning with the grocery.

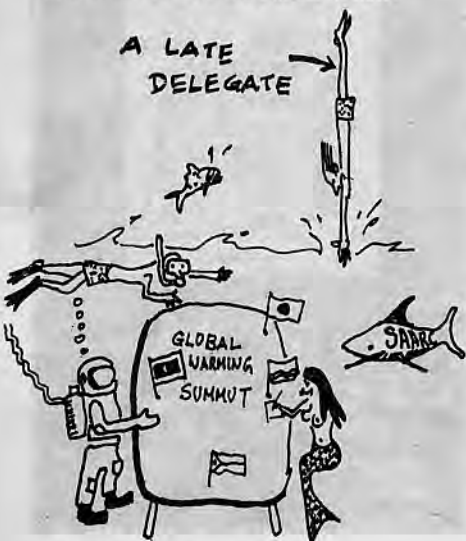
The bigots would divide into two working sessions. One for Majority Chauvinists would be chaired by Bosnian Serbs and attended by Mwalimu Premadasa, the Lion of Lanka, Son of the Soil Mahathir and perhaps Boris the Yeltsin, but he has yet to confirm. The Minority Chauvinists would bring together the Polynesian generals from Fiji, the Druk delegate and a Hutu chieftain from Rwanda.

A side attraction at the Sarajevo Summit would be a Roundtable on Invasions in which the Han delegate would present a paper on takeover techniques in high plateaus, the Indonesian would speak of doing the same for small island enclaves. S. Hussein would give a slide presentation on how to clean up tiny desert states and suffer the consequences.

All possible Summits having been exhausted by the year 2000, the United Nations will have to start all over again making second ascents on the same summits. See you in Yaounde in 2012 for Earth Summit III.



A LATE DELEGATE





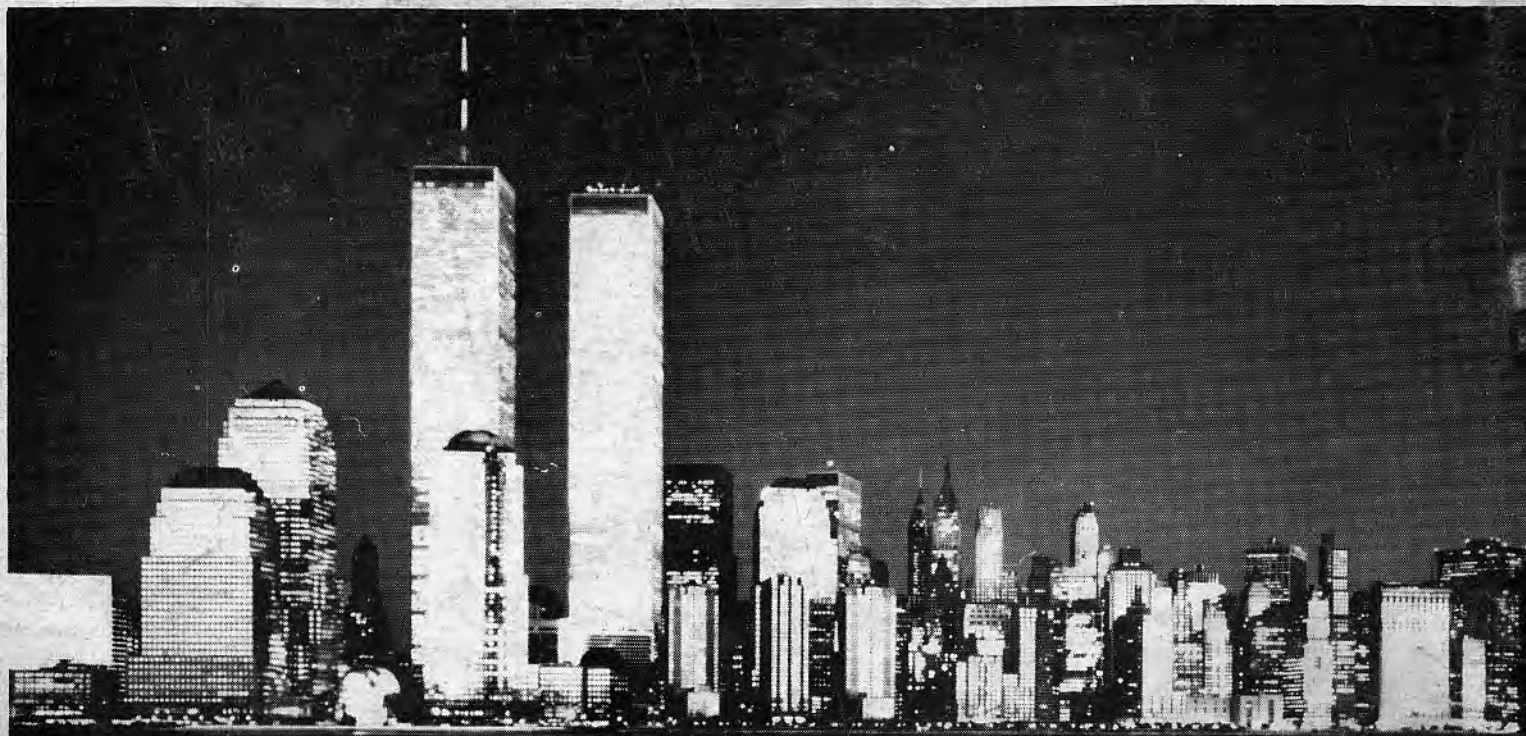
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