

# THE BHUTAN

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## Web portal to connect Bhutanese souls

The country's first online radio in exile has started streaming from 10 a.m. from October 16.

Launched with an aim of connecting the Bhutanese worldwide, radiobhutanonline.com now has Saranartha Sarokar, and some other segments including programs in Dzongkha will be added in near future.

Ichha Poudel, editor of the portal stated that the online radio, which is owned by Bhutan Media Society (BMS), is a joint initiative of journalists associated with BMS, APFA-Bhutan and Bhutan News Service.

"It is a new begin to inform the Bhutanese citizens through online radio programs," said Poudel.

Meanwhile, BMS started airing Saranartha Sarokar from Ganatantra FM, Dharan from the same day. Now, the exclusive weekly radio programs produced and aired from Kathmandu reach all camps, eastern Nepal and India-Bhutan border via Ganatantra FM. These programs can be listened to every Sunday at 7:30 p.m. from 95.1 MHz.

## Book about Bhutan as largest in records

Measuring more than 5 x 7 feet and weighing in at 133 pounds, Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Kingdom has been certified by Guinness World Records as the largest published book in the world.

The life-size portraits of people and the panoramas convey some of the staggering sweep of the mountains and the ancient architecture in Bhutan, the last intact Himalayan kingdom.

The book's creator, Michael Hawley of MIT, challenged Acme Bookbinding of Charlestown, Mass, the world's oldest book bindery. "Every page in this book is a masterpiece," notes Paul Parisi, president of Acme.

The book features 112 pages of spectacular images and showcases the variety of digital, photographic and printing techniques that Hawley used.

Copies may be bought for a mere \$30,000.

## Media Infringement Reflected Editor and reporters walk out BT

■ I.P Adhikari

Kathmandu, Oct 23

Citing interference by the management, the editor and the half of the entire reporters of the Bhutan's first private newspaper, 'Bhutan Times' (BT) tendered resignation yesterday.

The resignation signed jointly by the editor Gopilal Acharya, the chief reporter and five other reporters was turned into the management, publicizing the notice into effect immediately as dated.

The resignation letter seems clear enough to reveal the management's persistent anti-ethical pressure to screw-up the journalists' pens and mouth piece the public media for the interest of an individual or a limited group.

Acharya, in his resignation said that to protect the independent journalism in Bhutan and keep up the professional values and principles of journalists primarily caused him and his newsroom staff to end up resigning.

Wangcha Sangey, the CEO and newly appointed chairman of BT alleged the resigning staff to have been plotting the conspiracy to bankrupt the company. He further said that the BT has no alternative to comply with their decision as they themselves terminated their three years old trained services wherefrom they earned their livelihood. "I requested them

that the freedom of speech being very important, you can even slur the ministry if it's wrong, but not Bhutan as a nation. We shouldn't be prompting personal agenda", said Sangey.

He also disclosed the written commitment given by the reporters to work towards accomplishing the company's goal following a management-editorial meeting that week. Responding a reporter's question on the probable court case follow up, the CEO stated that he would not choose to waste his time dwelling on the legitimacies.

Needup Zangpo, the editor of "The Bhutan Observer" affirmed the certainty of the Bhutanese media scenario being crippled with the walk-off of these journalists.



Editor of BT, Gopilal Acharya

## IFJ alarmed by mass resignation

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has said it is alarmed to learn the mass resignation of journalists from the Bhutan Times, after sharp disagreements on editorial process and content with a newly appointed chief executive.

"The IFJ wishes the Bhutan Times well and would greatly appreciate any strategy that helps it overcome its current financial difficulties and establish it as a viable news platform working in the public interest," IFJ Asia-Pacific Director

Jacqueline Park said.

"No successful newspaper can be run by assaulting the professional morale of journalists and questioning the basic premises on which they conduct their daily tasks."

Similarly, Association of Press Freedom Activists (APFA) Bhutan has also expressed its concern regarding mass resignation of the journalists. It called on the management to ensure no intervention into the editorial room and return the journalists to their job.



## CEC writes to govt to revoke CDG

■ TBR Correspondent

Thimphu, Oct 23

The chief election commissioner of Bhutan has written to the prime minister asking the government to revoke CDG Constituency Development Grant (CDG). Commissioner wrote at a time when National Assembly members has prepared plans and projects for the CDG.

In the letter he sent earlier this month to Jigmi Y Thinley, the chief election commissioner, Kunzang Wangdi, said that the CDG will compromise the conduct of free and fair elections. Wangdi has commented that he was hopeful of receiving positive response from the government.

The chief election commissioner also raised the objection in a special presentation made during the international democracy conference in Paro recently. "The total amount of Nu 2m per constituency per year is a substantial amount and would definitely influ-

ence the outcome of future elections," Wangdi said. He further said that spending Nu 2m per year

by the sitting MP in his or her constituency can be construed as conducting an election campaign. The CEC also mentioned that members of NA ex-

ercising total control over the approval process in the disbursement of state funds for special projects in their constituencies would constitute an office of profit in violation of laws.

The opposition leader Tshering Tobgay, who also got a copy of the letter said, "The ECB in its letter has said that CDG would compromise their constitutional duty to conduct free and fair elections, that it is an office of profit, can be construed as campaigning, undermines local government and is an infringement on executive authority."



## "We are here to help you"

RAP tries to assist refugees to access to different facilities or directly provide many services that will enable them to become self-sufficient. We offer ESOL classes to adults, job development services, help with getting connected to the Health Care System. Mixed in with that, we assist with cultural orientation and helping to provide a framework in which newly arrived people can start to understand their new home.



Full interview in page 3

## Myths and reality behind BT affairs

The first private news paper Bhutan Times was forced to go for outsourcing to ensure its regular publication after a group of seven journalists, including its editor, resigned abruptly on October 22 afternoon saying management had undue interference on editorial issues.

The problem began shortly after enthronement of Wangcha Sangey as the new executive chief of the company already reeling under heavy debts. The resignation did bring some contrasting reactions from locals and global viewers. While onus to speak reality behind the incidence lies with the players, outsiders can only play with what has been said and seen physically.

In its editorial in the first issue after the mass resignation, the weekly indirectly blamed the journalists for failing to do their part on protecting democracy that is taking root very recently.

It is strange that private media was commissioned by the Fourth King to protect and promote democracy. Yet, the darker and more scarier side of democracy is also filtering in from the side of the media itself. It has been the dream of every Bhutanese to present a democracy that is as unique as its origin from the throne. A democracy that reflects and is hinged on our development aspirations of Gross National Happiness. This was stirred and shaken with the solidarity march which emanated mostly from people in the media.

The speakers who dared not to speak anything about democracy till some years back, alleging it to be a political form that destroys national harmony, now links everything with democracy. The editorial failed to mention how the management played role in protecting democracy while imposing its interest on editorial team. Media plays its role in democracy only when it is let to work independently, especially, letting the editorial team to decide what to write and what not. Management can suggest, not impose.

The ethnic discrimination continues to pass through Bhutanese mind despite reshuffle in the political system and adopting democracy. According to disgruntled journalists, the CEO warned the editor to realize this 'social standing', indirectly hinting this 'Nepali-origin editor to be a citizen of lesser status. In many occasion, the ruling community people term people of Nepali-origin to be migrant or from Nepal. The sore reached its peak in 1990 and is still not healed.

This group, who worked as voice of the people, became voiceless when they stepped out of the paper. None of the newspapers supported their cause of working for editorial independence. The first daily, in fact the only daily, Bhutan Today even challenged these journalists of trying to kill Bhutan Times and take up job in a new newspaper. Business Bhutan, the weekly magazine also supported the management of Bhutan Times. The way papers presented themselves has clearly paved a highway for the management to impose their interests in other media outlets as well in future. This is darker side of the free media in new democracy.

The new management of the paper showed its cruelty at the first show. From the day Sangey entered the company as CEO, he supposedly cut down tea budget for the reporters. According to him, it was necessary step to cut unnecessary expenses to bring down the losses company has been incurring. On the other side he, as chief of the board of directors of the company, increased his salary. While former CEO was given Nu 60,000 a month, this new CEO will take Nu 110,000 per month as salary. Will cost cutting measures like slashing tea budget cover this expense for CEO? The attempt of the new CEO to protect his step is questionable when it comes to relieving the company from debts. And possibly, the new CEO might have already chosen other reporters who can work in lesser budget under his command.

Right after the resignation, the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) wrote the CEO to submit the list of new journalists working with the paper with their credentials. It was a regular duty for BICMA as prescribed by law. The new CEO hired team from K4 Media, another private media company planning for a new monthly magazine shortly, to bring out the new issue of the weekly paper. The outgoing of the seven reporters and entry of K4 Media people within a few minutes time seems to be a drama already planned in advance. In other sense, Sangey had already contacted the K4 Media group to take up the job when reporters are likely to go out under force..

# Threats, Impunity and Protection

The headlines in our newspaper and news sites these days are dominantly on the threats and murders in the camps. Despite having protection cell at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the security surveillance of the police, threats inside camps are on rise, and thus refugees are pushed to comply with the criminals. Those refugees and their leaders, who often spread unwanted rumours to oppose resettlement by relating every untoward incidence to it, have the mud wet. They have high time to fish the laymen with the resettlement hook in this troubled water.

However, we should go steps back to our journey into the quest of freedom and regret honestly for the impunity we have always carried along.

## Threats

While working for the newspaper and radio, I have come across different refugee fellows who requested me to publish their news of being intimidated so that the concerned authority would accelerate their resettlement process. To verify the truth behind this request is not an easy task for one working voluntarily despite his busy schedule. Public are less cooperative in digging the truth out as the Bhutanese community do not have a good knowledge of the strength of a media. The gravity and nature of threats in camps are to be accessed independently using common sense.

Not all threats can be genuine; some are artificial while some are even invited. In absence of an effective mechanism to probe into them, refugees have good excuses to make, to easily fool the concerned authority making it believe that they are insecure. For example, the authenticity of the posters without letter heads should be given a double thought. There can be two possibilities- either those, whose names are listed on it, themselves prepared and pasted at night or the communist groups which often camouflage themselves with animal names like Leopard, Cobra or Black Cat are attempting to create havocs in camps to discourage resettlement.

Earlier, similar posters had appeared in the refugee camps which warned a few individuals, particularly those whose roles are well known. Some of them were resettled in the western countries with a priority while others are still in the refugee camps with no harm faced so far.

Unfortunately, those who have easy access to the high level officials of the UNHCR and Nepal government get protection but laymen are left in the fire of a violence. Those groups or parties which warn refugees with posters at nights must not be given serious concern and comply promptly with their warnings because this act can encourage them to continue their night business to terrorize people. They can hunt only the people, not their thoughts. People living in a democratic country should freely exercise their democratic rights.

I feel, warning someone to take his life away should be considered at par with a murder charge and victim be well compensated for his possible trauma that may develop as a result. It is a sheer violation of his human rights and the act is punishable under the domestic and the international laws.

## Impunity

We have witnessed a numerous murders in the past from Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) during the pro-democratic peaceful demonstrations and in custody afterwards. Cadres of Bhutan People's Party (BPP) which was formed by the Bhutanese who fled the country before 1990 also killed dozens of citizens at Garganda in India inhumanly. Even no survey is conducted to keep the records of the loss of lives in both of these circumstances. This has definitely given continuity to the impunity in which two latest editions are seen, inside Bhutan and in exile. K.B Khadka is one of the many Bhutanese who was killed in a Bhutanese refugee camp. Kipchu Namgyel, who played main role to suppress 1990 demonstrations, killing and disappearing hundreds of demonstrators, is promoted to the supreme post of the police in Bhutan. He was earlier rewarded by promoting from captain of the Crime Branch to the Major General for killing civilians.

There have been gang fights and even murders since the establishment of a refugee camp in Nepal. Tracing the beginning episode of this series of threats and murder in camps it takes me as back as the murder of Surya Subba in 1993. Since then, many refugees have lost their lives in the land where they had come to save it. This is because no proper investigation is carried out for each of these events and criminals are not punished as per the existing laws. The inefficiency of the government of Nepal to maintain a law and order in the camp has led to the several cases of impunity.

The criminal gangs, underground political parties and some refugees with strong muscles have taken the law of the land in hand to terrorise people. Sadly, this is also a result of the

rampant lawlessness in Nepal.

People had fled Bhutan to escape prosecution. Violence of any kind cannot be justified inside a refugee camp. It's the place to wait for the wounds of the body and soul to heal. It's the place to reunite and plan a way to fight the autocracy their brothers and sisters facing inside Bhutan.

## Protection

One of the mandates of the UNHCR is to protect the refugees who are vulnerable and likely to lose life if their dire needs are not responded. International protection is a far cry for the Bhutanese refugees due partly to the political fluidity in Nepal and poor

knowledge of the UNHCR and the national staffs on the human rights of a refugee.

Its service to them would not go effectively unless the staffers are given enough orientation to deal with the sentiment of a refugee. I have witnessed many cases in which a refugee visiting UNHCR office at Damak in Nepal is verbally abused at the gate. In one occasion, I had even requested a guard at this gate to vacate his post so that another one deserving it, not because of a bribery and nepotism but due to a hard work and sincerity, would serve refugees better. Some of the national staffs working here look down at a refugees due to their status.

If a refugee is warned of death, the first place he would seek protection is the UNHCR office near his camp. And, a protection officer is there to hear the story, note his head in sympathy and has his own story to tell, 'We are unsafe too.' It was a local Nepalese community who sheltered and fed the refugees from Bhutan once they poured in. Unfortunately, these kind-hearted and more responsible people can hardly have any access to a post in these agencies where staffs are often paid salaries at an international scale. Quite a large number of employees working for a refugee project like World Food Program and Lutheran World Federation are not only corrupt but also mistreating refugees in one way or the other. Despite having furnished enough evidences of an irregularity by these officials no one is known to have been prosecuted.

Be it processing a non-refugee in a refugee quota for resettlement or irregularity during re-registration process of the left out refugees, defaulters are even not shackled from their job, let alone probing and punishing them. And, these elements proved to be another menace for those who had collected the courage of evidence and truth to outcry this irregularity. One of the evidences of such menace is the abduction of the then secretary of Beldangi I camp, C.L Thapa by the henchmen of Jaya Narayan Mandal, a national staff who was then a supervisor of Refugee Co-ordination Unit at Chandragadi. Thapa was abducted and threatened to kill simply because he had opposed Mandal's act of sexually abusing refugee girls. This is also an example where refugees are harassed by the person who is supposed to protect them.

This has definitely given continuity to the impunity in which two latest editions are seen, inside Bhutan and in exile. K.B Khadka is one of the many Bhutanese who was killed in a Bhutanese refugee camp.

The next place where refugee would seek protection is the police station near respective camps. And, police are often not reliable especially when a threat comes from a high level government officials. Some refugees and locals who are involved in forgeries inside camp are the first to welcome a new squad of police, who come to substitute old one, with nuts and beer. Some police personnel stationed for the security of a camp are busy teasing refugee girls on the street.

With the current mindset of the concerned authority, refugees will not be protected against threats. Security gates in camps do not help much until it is realized by the concerned ones that refugees are very sensitive individuals who need humanly treatment.

(Writer can be reached at mero.ichha@gmail.com for comments)

## BITTER REALITY



Ichha Poudyel

## “We are here to help you”

Stephanie Horton, a program facilitator at Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) under City School District in Syracuse has two decades' experience working closely with different refugee groups. Her interest in languages led her to a place in Albany, the capital city of New York, called the International Center in early January, 1990.

Initially, she worked as a job developer to assist the refugees finding employment. As her interest put her further towards the service of the refugees, she moved to Syracuse. In Syracuse, she worked at the agency now known as Inter Faith Works for a couple of years and in the meantime worked on her teacher certification as an English as a Second Language (ESOL) teacher. Eventually in 1992, she started as a teacher with the School District. When Bob Huss, former program facilitator of RAP retired, she took his place. Horton talked to **Kazi Gautam** of BNS about the assistance they have been providing to the refugees and the challenges that refugees have to face in a new country.

Excerpts:

### How does RAP assist resettled folks?

RAP tries to assist refugees to access to different facilities or directly provide many services that will enable them to become self-sufficient. We offer ESOL classes to adults, job development services, help with getting connected to the Health Care System. Mixed in with that, we assist with cultural orientation and helping to provide a framework in which newly arrived people can start to understand their new home. Thanks to the Refugee School Impact Grant that we share with Catholic Charities, a wing of United States' Conference of Catholic Bishop that has been helping refugees get resettled, we are able to help by providing cultural orientation to K-12 students and their families and to help register the kids in school and provide support services to the kids, families and schools.

We also try to help refugees indirectly by educating the community at large and advocating for the refugee population. Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (BRIA) provides us with funding to assist those who have been in the country for five years or less. Some people need assistance for a shorter amount of time and some people are needier and will seek our help for up to five years and beyond. In the current economy, it has become increasingly difficult to continue to assist people who have been here a long time, but everyone does their best to either help or find someone outside the program to help them. The program started in 1978 as a temporary answer to the influx of Vietnamese refugees. It was clear that these folks needed support and when money became available for the program, the School District applied it.

### Does it work in collaboration with any other agencies?

We collaborate closely with Catholic Charities and InterFaith Works on a daily basis. We collaborate with many agencies in the community and I see it as absolutely essential to our continued success that we reach out to agencies and organizations

within the community.

### Did you find any differences among the refugee groups?

There are too many to list here. That is one of the greatest parts about working for RAP to learn about all the different groups.

### How do you evaluate the Bhutanese refugees' progresses in terms of learning



### English?

The Bhutanese have been a unique group to work with as many have come with English skills. The young people have just taken off and I have noticed that some of the older folks have learned a lot as well. I think that one of the greatest strengths the Bhutanese community has is a strong sense of unity, which provides for a strong support for its members.

### What could be the greatest challenge to the Bhutanese refugees?

Hard to say, maybe having patience. This is such a hard time and there are not enough jobs, classes are full-along with other resources being in short supply. I think in the long run this community will be tremendously successful, but this beginning period is difficult.

### What about the aged people getting assimilated?

Not sure if they have been assimilating. I think that resettling in another country is the most challenging for the elderly. They are at a linguistic disadvantage, may not be able to work, may have health problems, etc. They are forced to rely upon the younger generations much more than they might have been at home and I think that makes for a difficult situation for them. I hope that they would be able to become somewhat assimilated but that it is a longer and bumpier road for them.

### Number of refugees getting resettled have been rising. Do you think you can provide good services to them?

I think it is impossible to provide the same level of services to the people who are coming now as compared to years ago. More people are arriving and the funding, staff and other resources have not changed (actually despite the rise in arrivals, the money has decreased a bit).

This is a source of frustration for many of us who sincerely want to help because there are only so little hours in the day and with this many things don't get done. One of the most wonderful things about the Bhutanese community is that I see many people helping each other.

That is a major strength that helps both the community and programs like ours. What we really need is a pile of money and double the staff that we have.

तपाईं हाम्रो रेडियो कार्यक्रम  
(शरणार्थी सरोकार अव पूवाञ्चलबाट पनि)

गणतन्त्र FM 95.1 MHZ मा  
प्रत्येक आइतवार साँझ ७ :३० बजे

मानवता लुटिएको एउटा कथा  
रेडियो कार्यक्रम शरणार्थी सरोकार

## From The Corner

### Message from Denmark

Santa B. Rai from Denmark expresses his feelings to all the Bhutanese friends through this site:-

Hi, this is me Santa B.rai from Vesthimmerland-Denmark. Before, I used to live at Khudunabari camp. If I have to talk about my mother land, I am from Samchi district, Changbari Block and Kadu Village of Bhutan. I came Nepal when I was child enough in 1993. I gave SLC from Sunrise Academy school of K/ bari and I completed my I.A from Mechi campus -Bhadrapur and I was working at AMDA-Nepal in the health centre of K/ bari before I came here.

I start my message with the popular thought –“Sad to depart happy to meet” which I say it as an old version. However, now I say that “Sad to depart, how to meet” which I call as remix version.

I am happy to get this site. Firstly, I want to say happy Deepawali to my family who are currently living in the refugee huts of Nepal and to my friends Chandra, brother Lachhu, Bimal, Subash, Buddha, Umesh, Chhabi, Ram, Deep, Pinki, Suku, Jyothi, Surja, sisters- Kabita, Meera, Beena, Chandra, Parmila, Urmilla and specially to my one and only best friend Shiva Chamling.

Presently, I am starting my new life in Denmark. Here I am living with Danish family and we are four in number -a father of two twins son of age 12 and me.

Denmark is beautiful country with no any big mountains and it surrounded by ocean

### Where do you see the Bhutanese refugees in ten years from now?

In 10 years, I see a well-established, strong community with many successful members. I imagine Bhutanese owned businesses (including one or two restaurants) and most members living as productive, happy citizens.

### What are the future plans of RAP?

To try and continue and improve the services we offer, to reach out more to the Syracuse community to help us with our mission and also to collaborate more with the ethnic communities we have served and continue to serve. Collaboration is the surest way that we will continue and thrive.

### Any message for those who are planning



from all the sides. It lies below Norway and above Germany and it is too much cold country. The neighboring country of Denmark are Norway, Germany, London and Netherlands but interesting thing is that this country is not in touch any one of above country because it is in the middle of the ocean. A surprising thing of Denmark is that it has a mountain with 154 m height. It is the highest mountain in Denmark. Isn't it surprising? And another point is Denmark is three times smaller than Nepal.

The people of Denmark speak either Danish or English. Most of them speak Danish because it is their mother language. The one who knows English can do better here because every people of Denmark knows English. You know the one who knows English can take no time to learn Danish because the two languages are most similar. For examples- te=tea, ris=rice, salt=salt, etc.

Friends, let us be in touch. For now, I end my writing.

BYE

Unedited texts from  
[FriendsOfBhutan.blogspot.com/](http://FriendsOfBhutan.blogspot.com/)



### for resettlement?

Yes, you should not worry about a new world. However, you got to learn some English, have some basic knowledge of computer if possible. We are here to help you get settled.

## Deepening democracy: paradoxical Paro conference

Bhutan hosted the three day international conference on "Deepening and Sustaining democracy" (12-14 Oct), jointly organized by the Center for Bhutan studies and UNDP. It should be a matter of pride for the government of Bhutan to hold such magnanimous conference with a bit of experience on democracy. But for the SAARC region it is quite a surprise. UNDP's regional director for Asia-pacific, Ajay Chhibber and Bhutan's Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley should have shared even greater happiness to have realized their idea conceived far-off in New York a year back.

Certainly enough, Bhutan is not a champion of democracy which is gifted by the palace to politicians-turned-bureaucrats to try. Another cautious step to transition, Bhutanese democracy is a top-down approach carefully planned and handled by the former royalists who pretended and advocated democracy to be an ill form of governance, at least in Bhutan. Although the conference aimed to initiate sufficient dialogue on the models and components of democracy; failures and success of democracy in the region, it did so very little for the Bhutanese people themselves.

### Bhutanese model of democracy

Lessons are learned through experience, and it is true for building up of democratic culture. It is appreciating that Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley talked of taking challenges by the government to inculcate democratic values and culture in Bhutanese society starting at zero level. The exercise of power by an elected government, functioning of a bicameral parliamentary system and independence of judiciary is integral to fostering of democracy. Bhutanese democracy clearly lacks the independence of judiciary whereby the king continues to act as the highest court of appeal sans Supreme Court and appellate courts.

The onus for protection and guidance of the constitution is vested upon the king, which is essentially against the core value of vibrant democracy. In case of any constitutional hindrances, the interpretation of the constitution remains void without the independent judiciary.

The participatory approach of democracy is simply limited to the voting of representatives to the parliament that excluded hundreds of people from their voting rights in first ever general election. The Bhutanese people were not given the free choice of candidates to represent them because of the pre-determined candidates of the two parties. The village units or gewogs are poorly equipped and virtually powerless in strengthening the grass-root democracy. As used to be, the gewog heads are merely the implementing agents of the government orders (often termed as royal decree) with very little or no say in the official decision. Prime Minister Thinley put a high regard to the fourth king for his "persuasiveness and sacrifice" to allow democracy but not the struggle of people, evidently keeping aside the fact of historical people's movement for democracy. Thus Jigmi is hinting at Bhutanese democracy without participatory approach or undermining the value of electoral process that enhances people's capacity to make decision.

The local government act is passed with no complete framework of the grass-root democracy. The election of townships and municipalities to constitute a local government is in the air. However, with



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no proper training and empowerment of local heads, it would be another excuse for the Thinley government to blow trumpet that the people are not of full capacity for democratic exercise. For the democracy to take root, the grass-root democracy should be strengthened which requires empowering and educating local leaders with democratic norms and practices in the first place.

If anyone in the government takes the decentralization of 1980s to be the predecessor of present local government act, it would not be for the democracy the government stands. Contrary to what Jigmi Thinley says, the country did not have a set of law-abiding legal instruments, no administrative system that could be held accountable and no such special institutional arrangements which could lead to democracy. All that was in place was a chain of commands in administration without actual debate and discourse (it was not permitted to the lower-level officials to reply the higher-level officials) on any important matters of public interest. It was one way flow of information and the local heads simply implemented the "commands".

Scholars might be misguided to think that Bhutanese people participated in democracy through electoral process. The two parties allowed to contest in the election came to the people with few wayward election agenda, rather not to inform about the constitution, civic rights, political transition and nothing about democracy for the people. So the people once again voted for the individuals just as they used to do for the National Assembly election of absolute monarchy. In his inaugural address to the conference, PM Thinley pointed out that people fail to understand the power and value of vote and so the responsibility that comes along with power. But with such non-instinctive and sweeping collection of vote, how responsible will the prime minister be towards Bhutanese people in and outside of the country?

### Multiparty and pluralism

Multiparty is not accepted in the Bhutanese parliamentary system. Of the two parties allowed to contest in the election, one DPT is declared as having a landslide victory over the other (with only two seats). Thus Bhutanese parliament has a very weak opposition that cannot sufficiently play role to maintain check and balance in the democracy. Pluralism of the society and its intellect was long forbidden in the name of preserving unique culture, following the introduction of 'One Nation, One People' policy and compulsion to follow Driglam Namzha. With the mainstream culture of not recognizing the diversity of people's language, culture, religion and ethnicity, there exists inherent fear in the public to express differently. Consequent to this, the parliament is formed with a bi-party system, eliminating the prospect of emerging pluralism in the polity. But one can expect some dire situations. As Nepalese political leader Dr. Narayan Khadka puts in his address to the conference, the unsatisfied and unrecognized can find other outlets to

assert their participation which could be volatile, an example of Nepal. A number of small ethnic communities such as Doya, Khengpa, Brokpa besides the Lhotshampas that live in interior Bhutan are still marginalized. Pluralism not necessarily means multiparty, but a variety of intellectual inputs, free expression of public opinions, initiation of debates and dialogues among all stakeholders to make participatory democracy. A brain-child of fourth king, the DPT government led by Jigmi Thinley, a long time royal representative still fears the pluralistic society. He seems to be much pessimistic about capacity building to empower the various section of Bhutanese populace. If the government is committed to nurture grass-root democracy with established values and culture, it must initiate the practice of maximizing the participation of smaller communities in the decision-making process while acknowledging their diversity and safeguarding their freedom. It is not just organizing a conference and deliberating democracy with no basic practice.

The parties are again regional, though formation of such regional parties was discouraged. Socially and economically they are in poor shape. The social network of the parties to connect people is too feeble. The heads of party face a critical shortage of fund to spend in carrying out party activities and the opposition party is already in debt. It is not a green signal to favor multiparty pluralism.

Ushering of multiparty democracy in Bhutan is continually advocated by the parties in exile. Not better-off, the exile parties are making efforts to find a better option to the ongoing political development in the country. They deserve to be included in the present political framework, at least to serve as a strong opposition.

### Significance of Paro conference: Realize it

The conference is of paramount importance to share experiences on the failure and success of democracy, framing an appropriate model of democracy particularly in context of Bhutan. The conference, in its truest substance, is the ideal opportunity for evolving democracies to pocket in a host of lessons and develop vision towards a more inclusive democracy. So the Bhutanese politicians need to reconsider the transition for inclusiveness if the goals of GNH have to realize.

The conference is not just about discussing philosophical underpinnings of democracy, but also a way to hammer out suitable tools for its constant refinement and renovation. Accountability, transparency, rule of law, freedom of speech and expression, equality in delivery of justice are some facets of good governance that form the basis for deepening democracy. The DPT government of Bhutan has been facing several setbacks in proving itself accountable and responsible, quite far from good governance. The conference could be best capitalized by the policy makers and the government office-holders to explore pragmatic measures towards attaining good governance already in place in the region. Realization of the shared experiences at the conference in context of Bhutan is to lay the foundation stone of people's democracy which in turn will be the harbinger of freedom for all exiles to participate in the development of Bhutan days ahead.

## Bhutan's future in democracy

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A year after Bhutan entered into party politics with a fabricated form of democratic system, it has organized the first conference talking democracy in Asia sphere.

For decades, Bhutan resisted democracy in the name of preserving culture and religious unity. In many instances, Bhutan said it cannot tolerate religious and cultural diversity, which is fundamentally an opposed idea to the basic theory and principles of democracy.

Recent debate on democracy is an irony in itself that Bhutan talks of strengthening democracy in Asia when it itself has no democratic culture and practice. But in other corner, it is a symbolic positivism for Bhutan to strengthen its democratic culture that is taking root very recently and is immature enough.

Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley in a meeting with two German scholars in Thimphu recently admitted that Bhutan has not encompassed a complete democratic structure even after transforming from absolute monarchy to parliamentary politics. The partial change in the form of government was a result of the continued efforts being made from exile, with support and solidarity from international community, for the last two decades and more. Had there been no forces operating from exile (Bhutanese taking asylum in Nepal and India), Bhutan would not have budged an inch for democratization. And thus is the need Bhutan correctly consolidates different views from various ethnic groups, being a multi-ethnic country, for the progress of democracy.

Bhutan has a history of crushing democratic voices. The calls for freedom and democratic system in early 1950s and early 1990s were mercilessly subdued yet this country has finally lost its battle to resisting establishment of democratic government and allowing multi party politics. The widening scope of democracy after the fall of Berlin wall and end of communist USSR was sure to invade this tiny kingdom as well. Had Bhutan taken its step to promote people's participation in governance earlier, it would have benefited better.

Demands for human rights and democracy in early 1990s were termed acts of treason and those supporting the idea were tagged 'anti nationals'. Two decades later, the government has realized its mistake for not letting democracy flourish on time but haven't corrected them. Now, it is time that Bhutan shifts its mindset from terrorism to humanitarianism. Bhutan no more can remain incognito to its misrule era.

The security forces and the bureaucracy was given absolute power to adapt any means to torture, discriminate, harass, threaten and mistreat southern Bhutanese. The imposed practice of the civil and army officers including those of the bureaucracy take the privilege offered by the village heads in accordance to the local imposed traditions prevailing in the country.

Today, Bhutan has changed its politics and the world is looking at it closely. At par with this, Bhutan needs to change its policies to fit democracy. The bureaucracy and security along with political leadership require intensive intuition on democratic values and human rights.

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