

## BRIEFS

### UNHCR, Donors Reps Visit Camps

Chief of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nepal Daisy Dell, accompanied by chief donor representatives toured the Bhutanese refugee camps in Jhapa and Morang districts on May 20.

The team visited Goldhap, Beldangi and Sanischare camps to collect latest information on situation on exiled Bhutanese and see ongoing process of resettlement.

The team also learnt about the assistance the exiled Bhutanese have been receiving, including their problems. The team members also asked them to wait for a lasting solution of the two decade long crisis.

Dell told exiled Bhutanese that they were free to choose the opportunities presented to them – resettlement or repatriation.

High ranking officials of UN World Food Program, UNFPA, International Labor Organization, IOM and OHCHR were members of the visiting team.

### SAARC Summit

Bhutan is all set to host South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in 2010. This is the first time Bhutan will host the summit since the regional body formed in 1985.

In the past, this country denied hosting the summit on grounds that it does not have adequate physical infrastructure to host such big gathering. The country had received opportunities for three times in the past.

The upcoming summit is being proposed for April 28 and 29 to be held in Thimphu but is yet to get finalized.

Bhutan received this chance after Maldives denied hosting the summit citing global recession and tourist season of the country. The summit was proposed for this November in Male.

Prime Ministry Jigmi Thinley expressed hope that this opportunity will help improve Bhutan's relation with neighboring country under new political get up.

## Resettled Bhutanese attacked in Denver



From left, Yadav Rizal, Mani Dahal and Pasupati Khanal talk about the black eye and cuts inflicted on Rizal in one of four known attacks on refugees from Bhutan in the metro area. (Photo source: Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

Denver, May 20: The resettled Bhutanese here are passing sleepless nights due to increasing attacks on the in the recent days.

"Before leaving the refugee camp, I was thinking: We have problems. . . I'll feel safe in the United States. Now my feeling has changed. I'm not safe in the United States," said Yadav Rizal, 39, who was robbed of \$250, beaten and dragged behind a liquor store in northeast Denver.

Due to the attacks, he has to change his apartment, again becoming refugee in America. His family shifted to a new place on Tuesday.

Denver and Aurora police are investigating three crimes. This was the fourth instance of attack on the Bhutanese. After the May 8 robbery, Rizal was unconscious for five hours in a hospital. Seven stitches closed a gash over his blackened right eye. His head and neck still ache today, he said.

The latest attack began when a big man followed him when he got off the bus at the end of a 90-minute commute from a mountain casino where he works. "He said: 'Give me five dollars'"

Rizal refused, thinking "that's hard-earned money," After the man hit him, Rizal threw \$40 from his pocket. Another man joined the assault. After they dragged him, he felt them taking his wallet and a pack that carried

a certificate of appreciation from his employer.

Also on May 13, Rohit Khanal was assaulted in an attempted robbery on East Colfax Avenue at Billings Street — another case that police are investigating.

Similarly, Shiva Bhattarai, 31, was also hassled by three men on May 13 when he got off the bus after work.

The attacks aggravate a difficult situation for resettled Bhutanese. The government grants them only \$450 a month for eight months to resettle, forcing most to live in rougher areas where police and caseworkers say street crime is more frequent.

Since most resettled Bhutanese work for long hours, it is always late when they get back to home.

"Our promise is not just to bring them here," said Paul Stein, Colorado's refugee coordinator, who is planning emergency meetings with the Bhutan immigrants to help them improve their personal safety. "Our promise is to help them integrate. We have to do a better job."

### Importing Teachers from Canada

Thimphu, May 05: Bhutan, which once said it has more population that country can sustain, has now begun importing workers from foreign countries. Though thousands of Indians still work in various Bhutanese offices and unskilled sector, Bhutan will not import people from western countries for teaching.

It would be early to comment whether Bhutan will be able to retain its cultural identity without being eroded since it had said it faced such threats from some section of Bhutanese citizenry itself.

Bhutanese students will soon see teachers from Canada teaching mathematics, science or English, arrangement made through Bhutan-Canada Foundation, which was launched on May 3.

The foundation said it will send certified teachers from Canada to take over the job in Bhutan where teacher shortage has affected education system.

The Toronto-based not-for-profit organization, the foundation seeks to continue and promote greater cooperation between the two countries and tap non-traditional sources of support from Canadian corporations, institutions and foundations.

The foundation will also arrange scholarships for Bhutanese in Canadian schools and universities and explore avenues for health professionals to contribute to the health sector in the country.

Official Canadian assistance to Bhutan was withdrawn in December 2008. Seeing decreasing support from the Canadian government, king met with Chairman and founder of Blyth Education in Canada, Graham David Blyth and sought his assistance to rebuild bilateral relations.

The foundation is headed by Nancy Strickland, a Canadian national, who has over 20 years' experience working in the education sector in Bhutan.

### Alarms Ring of Glacial Floods



Thimphu, May 01: Last year, when environmentalists gathered in Thimphu, they had warned of outburst and flood out of glacial lakes in Bhutan, which has begun to show hints now.

One early morning in late April, the burst of Gortho lake in Tshojo glacial and swelling of Gortho river, a tributary of Phochu, panicked hundreds of people in Punakha and Wangduephodrang. Though, the smaller flood did little destruction, it has warned for possible greater disaster from the bursting of the glacial lakes due to global warming.

The government officials had to asked people along the Punatsangchu and Phochu River move to higher and safer grounds. Schools and offices also remained closed for the day.

King, Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley, the Home Minister and the Chief Operations Officer of the RBA Batoo Tshering, the Chief of Police and armed forces rushed to the scene.

According to studies burst of natural wall separating Thorthormi and Raptstreng lakes would pour over 53 million cubic meters of water down the valleys of Punakha, Wangduephodrang, Tsirang and Dagana.

To be better prepared, government plans to set up automatic sirens in the villages down Lunana area in Punakha.

## An Orientation Class on Bhutanese Life

Texas, May 19: Resettled Bhutanese youth in Forth Worth, America gave two hours orientation classes to Catholic charities case workers and staffs on May 14 at the initiation of the Catholic Charities.

Four Bhutanese youths Hari Adhikari, Gopal Adhikari, Ram

Acharya and Indra Adhikari gave the orientation. Hari Adhikari coordinated the training, Ram Acharya demonstrated 'Bakhu' to the participants.

The orientation intended to share information about exiled Bhutanese to the resettling agency staffs which

focused on background of the issue, requirements of the refugees, problem and solution.

The youths also share politics of Bhutan, situation in the camp, FAQ of refugee before resettlement, festival of Bhutanese people with the American staffs.

## Anniversary Fete in Adelaide



Adelaide, May 13: Resettled Bhutanese celebrated first anniversary of their arrival in Australia. About three hundred Bhutanese gathered at Olympic House at Franklin street to mark the day, showcasing their food, culture, dance and singing.

Of 7 hundred Bhutanese resettled in Australia, 3 hundred have made Adelaide their homes. They have started fresh lives in Adelaide, New South Wales, Victoria, Tamania and Darwin. Premier Mike Rann said

that he was impressed by the remarkable quality and commitment shown by Bhutanese refugees. Inaugurating the anniversary function, he said he was looking forward to know more about Bhutanese people. "The story of Australia is the story of migrant. I am myself a migrant."

Greg Kelly, state Director at the Department of Immigration and Citizenship appreciated the communities' contribution in Victorian Bushfire early this year.

## BASCO's Introductory Eve

April 30: Newly formed Bhutanese Community Support Organization in America (BASCO) organized a live musical program in Alameda, California on April 26 with songs and dances were presented by Bhutanese local artists.

Around three hundred Bhutanese living in three different cities –Oakland, San Jose and Sacramento, California attended the

program along with Nepalese, Indian and other locals.

Chaired by Dick Chhetri, it was the first musical program organized by Bhutanese in SF Bay area.

Director and founder of Lao Family Community Chao Sen, Sewa International US chapter president Gautam Desai and representatives from IRC were invited as guest of the program.

Speaking on the occasion, Chao remembered his part days when he was a refugee, fled from Laos, some 30 years ago and assured to help exiled Bhutanese in Bay area. He said transitional difficulties were same as today when he came to US.

Bhutanese Dzongkha dance was also presented. Guest artists from San Jose and Sacramento had present their songs and dances.

*Glimpses of cultural performances by resettled Bhutanese abroad*



## Woman Dies in Hospital

Beldangi-II, April 29: Chali Maya Mishra, 28, of Beldangi-II camp, sector F/2, Hut number 92, died of repeated operations first at Damak-based hospital of Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA) Nepal followed by another operation at BP Koirala Memorial Hospital, Dharan.

The Project Director for Primary Health Care for Bhutanese Refugees, Dr. Nirmal Rimal confirmed the death of Mishra at Dharan on April 27, a week after she was operated in AMDA-Hospital at Kharkhare.

According to her husband Khagendra, Chali Maya was admitted in AMDA-Hospital on April 21, and was rushed to Dharan the next day for another operation when she complained of continuous bleeding even hours after the operation.

According to the family source, Dr. Kishore Singh Shrestha was involved in the surgical operation.

The infant is medically healthy, said doctors at AMDA-Nepal.

"I was told by doctors at Dharan that my wife had little

chance of survival", lamented Khagendra adding, "The doctors suspected gross negligence in AMDA-Hospital."

The fact is not confirmed, said Dr. Rimal. "We have formed an investigation team for the case."

A five-member-team of medical experts has been formed that comprises Dr. Rajendra Shrestha, Dr. Shyam Budathoki and Bishnu Mainali from AMDA Birtamod, and Dr. Bhampa Rai and Dr. Beda Nidhi Khatiwada from the Bhutanese community.

We are very serious on this case since a young lady has lost her life, said Dr. Rimal. "We will investigate the case very seriously and find out what has gone wrong."

"Chali Maya received regular follow-ups from our team, six times during her pregnancy," Dr. Rimal told Bhutan News Service.

28-year-old Khagendra, who is just left with the baby, has appealed to the concerned authority including the UNHCR to independently probe into the matter and compensate for the loss.

## First Bhutanese Consultation in Australia, BCA Announced

Melbourne, April 28: The Bhutanese community resettled in two states of Victoria and New South Wales, Australia held their first consultation gathering at Mirambeena Community Centre, Albury on April 23.

The consultation saw senior Australian officers as participants including Stepan Kerkyasharian, Chairperson, Community Relations Commission (CRC), NSW, George Lekakis, Chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and Jose Alvarez, State Director, DIAC Victoria.

Representatives from more than 18 agencies at local, state, regional and federal government level, community organisations, educational institutions and services provider along with the Bhutanese community members also joined the consultation gathering.

Parsuram Sharma-Luitl from Melbourne provided the brief history about Bhutan, the main cause of refugee origin

George Lekakis said the community issues will be discussed with the relevant government agencies to address as per the community's need.

Stepan Kerkyasharian, Chairperson CRC said that people need not fear to follow their culture and traditions, and practices religion freely in Australia.

Jose Alvarez, State Director Victoria said that Australian government work closely with UNHCR to while considering resettling refugees in Australia. The priority will be given equally between the protracted refugees' issues like Bhutanese refugees, and war and internal conflict created refugees in many countries.

On the occasion, the gathering of Bhutanese announced the formation of Bhutanese Community in Australia (BCA) and launched its first issue of newsletter "SPECTRUM – First Bhutanese Community Newsletter in Australia. Similarly, first Bhutanese website in Australia was launched: <http://bhutanaus.atbhost.net>.

## OL Writes to Govet on Unconstitutional CDG

Thimphu, May 20: President of People's Democratic Party, who is also the opposition leader in National Assembly, Tshering Tobgay filed a complaint at the Ministry of Finance opposing the government decision on constituency development grant (CDG).

Tobgay in his complaint said the CDG is unconstitutional and thus decided to take up the issue with the government.

He claimed the grant would increase monetary and political corruption and could be used for election campaigns in the next general elections.

Approved in April by the council of ministers, the Finance Ministry is busy preparing mechanisms for the funds to start reaching the hands of lawmakers.

The decision was taken against the decision of the National Council in January, saying the distribution of money was faulty and unconstitutional. The issue has been forwarded to King.

Tobgay said development activities could be derailed when government gives priority to distributing money to MPs rather than the local bodies.

However, the government moved ahead with the CDG saying National Assembly has approved it. The ruling party DPT has 45 seats in the assembly out of 47.

Earlier, he had floated the idea that the upcoming National Assembly must discuss the issue elaborately and the government has to prove its legality.

## 26 Bhutanese Interrogated for Voting in Indian Polls

Phuentsholing, May 05: Bhutan authorities arrested 26 Bhutanese citizens on allegations that they cast their votes in neighboring cities in India.

They were arrested on April 30 and May 1 while returning from India but were released after interrogation. The authorities have not proven whether they had cast their votes or were just clamped allegations.

The arrested people were reported to be residents of Samtse and Chhukha districts.

However, reports also say that these people bear citizenship from both the countries though Bhutanese laws do not permit such conditions.

## First Internet Radio

Thimphu, May 19, 2009: One of the private radio stations in Thimphu join hands with a Swiss to start a 24 hour live streaming online.

The country's first streaming internet radio station, www.cafebhutan.com, is webcasting from the capital and is available for broadband internet users only.

The station, opened by a visiting Swiss consultant, Hans J Keller, and run in conjunction with private FM Radio Valley, webcasts Buddhist teachings and Bhutanese music to anyone connected to broadband internet, government mouth piece Kuensel said.

According to its press release, the internet radio station "will be the first to promote Bhutan's culture and many of the causes associated with its spiritual roots and sense of human justice and dignity." The station aims to achieve this by webcasting programs, ranging from Buddhist teachings by prominent rinpoches and scholars, to featuring visiting tourists on talk shows.

Keller, who founded the station, said that, since there was no such stations in Bhutan, the time was right to establish one. "It's a public service to Bhutan," he said. Its target audience will mostly be Bhutanese and people interested in Bhutan who reside abroad.

## Journalists Awarded

Thimphu, May 05: Despite indirect censorship on media, the elected government for the first time arranged for media awards to various journalists as gesture to inspire for better journalism on Sunday.

Kuensel's reporter Phuntsho Choden won award

for best investigative reporting award. Though the budding media industry and journalism beginners are yet to get better at reporting beat and soft news, it is unclear on what basis the government categorized

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## AG's Plans

Thimphu, May 06: Office of the Attorney General plans to present its proposal during the upcoming parliament session to increase the salary and perks of the constitutional position holder.

According to sources at the AG office, the draft proposal has suggested better perks and facilities, besides salary than civil servants get.

Chief and members of the election commission, attorney general, auditor general, chief and members of the pay commission, chief and members of the anti corruption commission, chief justice (though not yet appointed) among others would be treated differently than other government officials.

Currently, the constitutional position holders get salary, perks and facilities equal to Executive level 1 position holders in the bureaucracy.

## Meat Ban is in Force: BAFRA

Thimphu, May 21: Within few months the government announced to lift ban on sales of meat during holy Buddhist months, Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA) said the ban would continue.

A notice issued by BAFRA on Thursday said, "This is to bring to the notice of the general public that slaughter of animals, import and sale of meat is prohibited from May 24, 2009 to June 22, 2009 coinciding with the fourth month of the Bhutanese calendar in accordance with the section 16.5 of the Chapter VII-Fresh Meat Hygiene and Inspection of the Livestock Act of Bhutan 2001."

According to the notice, Regulatory and Quarantine Inspectors of BAFRA in uniform with identification will be placed at various entry points, check posts, towns and other appropriate location throughout the country for monitoring of the 'illegal activities'.

BAFRA warned that defaulters will be dealt as per the penalties prescribed under the chapter VII of the Livestock Rules and Regulation of Bhutan 2008.

The issue of lifting ban was discussed extensively and approved by the National Assembly while the National Council stood against it. The Monk Body also opposed the decision.



An unhygienic meat shop in Thimphu

## Royal office for media

Thimphu, May 01: Bhutanese media will have some ease now on getting itinerary of the royal entourage or other activities that royal family will be carrying out, thanks to creation of Royal

Office for Media. The new office formally announced on Thursday will serve as the official media liaison for King and the royal family members. Called Gyalpoi Dapoen Yigtsang in national language,

the office led by Dorji Wangchuk will help better media coverage of the royal events and enhance public relations. Media rarely get information where king and royal family members visit.

## Kuensel is Daily Now, But Not Exactly

Thimphu, April 28, 2009: On the even of international press freedom day, the government owned Kuensel started publishing as daily newspaper, the country's second daily.

On April 28 issue, the government mouth piece wrote: This is the first issue of the Kuensel daily. Kuensel is evolving from the biweekly to a daily to cater to the growing needs of [our] readers for prompt and timely information.

However, the newspaper, as it says, is not exactly a daily newspaper since it takes weekend holiday on Sunday. It hits stands only between Monday and Saturday – six days a week.

The paper killed its Nepali (Lhotsampa) version and promoted 12-page English and Dzongkha editions combined in a single issue.

The paper will have an 18-page weekend edition on Saturday, which will include a 'special magazine' called K2 or Kuensel 2 – in full color – to meet the demands of the young readers. The magazine will replace its earlier City Bytes section. But the magazine will be available only in Thimphu, Paro, and Phuentsholing.



## EDITORIAL

**Resettlement in Australia**

*The resettlement process for Australia has been turning out to be bit frustrating. The reasons behind are simple; the process consumes lengthier time, many individual's process forwarded to the Australian authorities have not yet been proceeded, there are ample instances of families split (some of the members are already being resettled where as the process for the remaining family members hasn't yet begun), there are no any authorities concerned stationed in Nepal that clarifies about the status of the file of individual processing for resettlement in Australia, even the UNHCR and International Organization for Migration (IOM) are unaware of the status of file.*

*In some of the cases, the degree of frustration has risen-up in such a way that the remaining family members in camps have shown their deep concern over the possibilities of rejoining with their remaining family members already resettled in Australia.*

*The pathetic situation of Ram Chandra and Yasoda Guragai of Beldangi II, Sector I-1, Hut No 39 is one of the better illustrations of this fact. We can get ample cases like that of Ram Chandra. Many people in camps, whose process is underway for Australia, have gone more than one time medical check-ups, each after six months, but yet their process is not speeded-up. Many whose medical clearances have been made are yet to board the flight.*

*It is the UNHCR that makes the decision regarding if any individual or family is to be resettled in Australia. For many cases, it's reportedly learnt that the UNHCR shows no concern, or is less informed on the status of the file of the exiled Bhutanese processing for resettlement in Australia. This trend should no more be continued. Inquiry centers, for information on resettlement in Australia, should be established near the refugee camps so that the victims' sense of frustration would be relieved to some extent, if not fully.*

*There is also a need that the concerned authorities make a field visit inside camps and access on the status of exiled Bhutanese processing for resettlement in Australia. Isn't it getting late?*

**Opinion & column****State of 'Democracy' in Bhutan**

*By Dr D. N. S. Dhakal*

Singye Wangchuk as the architect of the constitution and the polity in Bhutan. This remark came while addressing the joint session of the first so called elected parliament in Thimphu on May 17, 2008.

Bhutan did not have any political parties operating legally within the country until a year before the date of so called democratic election. Political events unfolded in Bhutan surprised everyone. The fourth king Jigme Singye Wangchuk abdicated the throne on December 9, 2006 in favor of his eldest son Jigme Khesar Namgayal Wangchuk. PDP, headed by Sangey Needup Dorji, maternal uncle of the

**DPT is more royalist than PDP, allocating key portfolios of the party among the former, senior civil servants who were thick and thin with the formulation and implementation of racist policy of 1990s in Bhutan**

present king, was founded on March 24, 2007. The party's vision statement states that its goal is to transform Bhutan into a democratic polity as envisioned by the fourth king Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

DPT, the party today in power, was established on July 25, 2007. This party is headed by the current Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley whose matrimonial relationship in the royal household is well known. Other lesser known political parties, namely APP and BPUP were formed but they were quickly dismantled and merged with DPT. The DPT claims to represent the common people as it is headed by a Sarchop, and its cadre is drawn cutting across the Bhutanese society. But in practice DPT is more royalist than PDP, allocating key portfolios of the party among the former, senior civil servants who were thick and thin with the formulation and implementation of racist policy of 1990s in Bhutan. The party's stated goal is to realize the noble dream of the fourth king Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

Both PDP and DPT entered the election trail that was first ever permitted in the Kingdom of Bhutan. The Indian Election Commission was invited to help Bhutan's fledgling Election Commission to conduct the first adult franchise election in all the 20 dzongkhags. The election was conducted in phases and no incidence of violence was reported.

Mock elections were held to teach people on how to cast ballots. Primary elections were held to eliminate minor

parties or individuals contesting the election. The DPT swept the election winning 45 out of 47 seats in the National Assembly. The DPT had fielded nine Lhotsampa candidates in South Bhutan. All of them won the election capturing nearly 19 percent of the total seats in the National Assembly. The PDP too had fielded Lhotsampa candidates but none of them could secure a victory. In the National Council two candidates from the Lhotsampa community were elected: Justin Gurung from Tsirang Dzongkhag and Dr Mani Kumar Rai from Samtse Dzongkhag. The king did not nominate a Lhotsampa in the National Council.

It seems the whole election exercise was premeditated, orchestrated with regards to who should win, how many candidates would be fielded from the Lhotsampa community, and who among the Lhotsampas would get tickets for contesting the election. In the earlier National Assembly 16 seats were given to Lhotsampa in the house of 151. In northern, eastern and central Bhutan one national assembly member represented one block whereas in southern Bhutan a representative represented four blocks at the minimum. In addition, Drukpa Khagyu church was allocated seat in the National Assembly. The same recognition was not there for Hindu religion to which the overwhelming majority of the Lhotsampa population belongs.

This constitution is definitely an improvement for the Lhotsampa community although it contains subtle mechanism to discriminate the Lhotsampa community in the delineation of the constituencies. For example, Gasa Dzongkhag had 1,743 registered voters in 2008 election but it got two constituencies for the National Assembly and one for National Council. Whereas Samtse Dzongkhag had 39,320 registered voters and it got four constituencies for the National Assembly and one for National Council. There is a clear distinction in seat delineation for South, East, West and Central Bhutan. In this election, roughly one candidate represented 10,000 voters in southern Bhutan, 6,000 voters in eastern Bhutan, 5,000 voters in western Bhutan and 4,000 voters in central Bhutan in the National Assembly. As per the government report, the total registered voters were 400,626 individuals; of which the south had 1185849 individuals, representing nearly 30 percent of the total eligible voters. Their representation in the National Assembly remained at 19 percent.

The new political dispensation seems to make effort to take the Lhotsampa population into confidence. The DPT has appointed Yanku Tshering as Sherpa Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Thakur Singh Powdyal as Minister of Education, and Nandalal Rai as Minister of Information and Communication. Earlier Om Pradhan was the only person who had reached the rank of a cabinet minister from the Lhotsampa community.

# Remembering the Past, Venturing For the Future

By B. M. Dhakal

A significant number of Bhutanese have been resettled in Louisville of Kentucky and a few in Lexington. The number is on the rise. After the process of resettlement gained new momentum, and the camp-dwellers finding no other good options to make a better living, have decided to make a journey to far-off lands where IOM takes them. Often, it is not their personal choice. Along the educated lot of new generation, came those elderly people at their proximal limit of ages. The elderly citizens have gone through many waxes and wanes in their lives. Some of them faintly remember the tides of time that have swept them though woeful and blissful moments of life. The following account is the glimpses of their past life and a tender hope for their future generations.

Bhanu Bhakta Pokhrel is now 67 years, resettled in Louisville two months ago. He with his wife live with their son and daughter in-law in an apartment rented for them by catholic charities. The Pokhrel family lived in Beldangi II extension camp for 17 odd years yearning to be repatriated. Their fourth son Bishnu, started in grade one at Marigold Academy in camp and have gone through bachelor's second year, before departing to US. Bhanu Bhakta's four of five sons are resettled in Louisville, expecting the fifth son to arrive in two months' time.

The Pokhrel couple feels that 17 years in camp yielded nothing except for the

education of their children and grand children. Health facilities provided in camp, of course, helped to control high maternal, children and infant death. But they say, it was undergoing gradual degradation.

Bhanu Bhakta was born in Gwang, Daragaon of Surey gewog of Bhutan. At the age of 18 he was forcefully recruited to police, and got training in Gelegphug and Sarbhag lasting for six months. In youthful days of Bhanu Bhakta, he saw some development taking place in his village. He participated in the development process like the construction of schools, roads and bridges, irrigation canals, basic health units as and when required. Bhanu Bakta went for the voluntary labor force in construction of Surey-Shemgang-Tongsa road and in the course of three months he worked in places like Chaple Deorali, Tabagaon, Manas, Dakpai. The government of Bhutan used to pay the laborers with a meager amount of Nu 2.50 equivalent to Indian currency and nothing extra logistic support. It was during such contribution of labor force, he lost one of his dear sons in Bumthang.

His first child was enrolled in public managed school in Gwang which was run by the sole effort of villagers to pay the teacher. Later he studied in Norbuling Primary school, few hours walk from present Gelephu.

Life was supposedly moving to a brighter side for Pokhrel family in Danabari, had there been no repressive acts by government casting spell on

them. In 1990 the mass uprising in southern and central Bhutan, by no means, left the family untouched. It was the horrifying moment for Bhanu Bhakta when he faced nightly errands of police and army searched and raided his house, took his wife to police custody, and arrested the eldest of his son from a relative's house while bathing.

As for all the people of Gelegphug, Bhanu Bhakta and his wife listened to the king in 1991 at a mass gathering, who appealed to the people not to leave the country in fear of persecution or subversion. But in the following months, it was hard for them to resist not leaving the country for no reason except their peaceful protest of government's unjustifiable acts.

For Bhanu Bhakta, the government of Nepal did not play a fair game while engaging itself in unproductive bilateral process with the Bhutanese side. Instead of sending to overseas countries, Nepal could have provided citizenship rights to the Bhutanese and help integrate.

Tara Nidhi and Chandra Ghimirey, the couple in their 70s, live with their two younger sons Leela and Laxmi. Tara Nidhi was a small boy when he was taken to Bhutan by his family, that migrated from eastern hills of Nepal and settled in Pataley of Chirang district. He owned a sufficient area of crop land and orchard to make the family self sufficient. The family also owned a two storied concrete house in Damphu, an administrative center of Chirang district.

Tara participated in the development process of Bhutan in his early days. He worked as a voluntary laborer during construction of Phuntsholing-Thimphu highway at several places, one of the first highway constructed to connect interior Bhutan with the southern boarder and India. Besides, he participated in all the local development process like the construction of Damphu Junior High school, road from Chirang to Dagana district.

Tara Nidhi agrees that there was no direct form of coercion inflicted by the government to the family, but was denied the access to education, basic health and of course, the civil rights.

Though Tara Nidhi does not feel so much bad about coming to a new land at this age, he is little disturbed by the fact of improbability to continue the usual rituals of Hinduism to be followed after death. The cosmic life after death is determined by the 'Karma' accomplished in the physical life, according to the Hindu doctrines. However, the couple takes the satisfaction in wishing their children's progress and a better life in the future.

Dikura Dhakal is 77 now. She came to Louisville in March 2009 along with her two grand children to join the rest of the family which settled here back in September 2008. Khudunabari, where she lived for 17 years, seemed like a home for her. She did not like to come to the way of her grand children's decision to resettle in US, though it was not necessary for her. And it took almost seven months for her to join the family.

Dikura was born in Goshi block of Dagana district in 1932 and married at the age of seven. By the time she reached the age of 24, her husband was taken away to eternal path leaving behind her with two children below five and

the other a growing fetus. Life was all a struggle for her, left alone by the destiny to fight all odds and stumbling blocks ahead. Separated from her in-laws at the tender age and turbulent times of being a widow, she made brave decisions to migrate to lower foothills, buy five acres of land at about three-thousand rupees and start a new life.

Dikura never got chance to learn read and write but has a good memory of many Sanskrit verses she heard from her husband and still reciting them with fluency. Though she was not asked to go for the labor force far away, she indeed participated in the local development of village, like carrying raw materials of construction, maintenance of feeder roads, irrigation channels etc.

Dikura had listened to many district officials who imposed their verbal decrees pretending them to be the order of king, but she understood little of them.

In the post 1990 period, the family was put into different categories of citizenship status by the census team. There was a 'verbal law' announced by the district administrators that people falling under F4 and F5 must pay an amount of Nu.4,000 to 5,000 annually if they continued to live in Bhutan. There was no school and basic health in the villages. Many villagers in Samrang decided to leave the country fearing even more repressive measures by the government. Dikura's family was no exception, though she was categorized as F1 citizen.

Dikura has her elder son and a daughter left behind in Bhutan whom she likes to meet at least once a year. But that has become almost impossible for her age now. She wishes everything goes to correct path of progress for her grandchildren both in US and home country.

The resettled Bhutanese of America have been undergoing different experiences and mixed views in a community with an assorted culture. The United States of America is a vast country with multicultural diversity. Yet unity irrespective to race, color, language or caste is the base of the strong nation. Patriotism is the distinguished attribute of Americans. They are also courteous, sincere and helpful. Every resettled Bhutanese are esteemed to find them in such a beautiful country. The people are really excited to start their lives anew and fresh. The Bhutanese are glad to adopt the inspiring habits of Americans. Without doubt everyone can explore themselves in this big community with lots of freedom but with caution. However, individual responsibilities and obligations should never be kicked off wherever one goes. Enjoying freedom after knowing its limits is wise. Little knowledge can be dangerous.

## For and Preservation of Culture

By Dhaka Ram Timsina

*Nepali speaking Bhutanese must keep their culture live even in odd circumstance*

A lhotsam show during national day celebration 2008 in Thimphu

The life back in Bhutan was unimaginable- full of hardships and a lot of mental unrest. The policy adopted by the government of Bhutan to seclude the ethnic Nepalis was inestimable. Hence, the eviction of a good number of people became inevitable. What followed in the refugee camps could hardly be expressed in words. Nonetheless, this miserable situation never shattered the exiled Bhutanese. Because the people were very often dancing in their own cultural tunes, there was always a sense of oneness and unity. They were always united by the cultural awareness.

Incredible but true. The resettled folks have been so much engrossed in the western

culture, norms and values that they have already begun to give up their Nepalpan. If not completely forgotten, the Nepali culture incorporated in the resettled people is in jeopardy. The people are in the threshold of loosing it. How can they forget their revolt against tyrannical Wangchuk dynasty to preserve their culture? The cultural spirit should always be raised up. Time has come for everyone to either hold on the culture that has been protected so far or to adopt a new one.

I often ponder over something that never gets erased from my mind. Can we the Bhutanese-Nepalis forget the 'Ashirbaads' of our elders? 'Tika and Jamara' of Dashain, the national festival, and 'Deusi-Bhaili' performed in dipawali are still buzzing in our ears. How wise is it to replace

Gunduk-dheedo by sandwich and Pizzas?

Should not we take steps towards preserving and protecting our cultural and traditional values before they fade out? I have always felt the need of cultural identity. As a fact, the culture should be passed to the next generation to save our identity from getting extinct. When nobody was able to snatch our culture in the past, how shrewd it shall be to have it sold for nothing at the time when we have freedom of mind? Interestingly, we have already lost our middle name. Can we at least save our first and last name? Barack Obama, the president of United States of America is Barack Hussain Obama. He has started to use his middle name.

Although we need to act according to the preset situation, I feel the Nepali

culture does not allow its follower to engage in kissing and hugging publicly. It is unfortunate that people are found imitating others without considering its pros and cons. A need of a strong Bhutanese community in America has been always felt. Has anyone realized what its base would be? We are not in bulk but are still in crystal form. So, let's do something to save these crystals from being dissolved. A need for Bhutanese-Nepalis to unite is indispensable at least for the preservation and promotion of our cultural values, which are the only platform of our identities. Everyone should try to adjust because 'survival of fittest' is a fact but adjustment does not mean giving off everything and acquiring completely new personality. It is better keeping aside nasty ideologies and hold on firmly on what helps us to preserve our identity. The importance of anything is valued when it is lost. Let's not loose our spirit.

# Our Achievements

We are happy to share here that a story exclusively on 'The Bhutan Reporter' was published in America-based international famed magazine

Besides, we have conducted a number of workshops and trainings intended to inculcate skills of journalism among the exile Bhutanese youngsters

of Bhutan, but operating from exile.

From October 2004, we started publishing monthly newspaper The Bhutan

important source of information to those who have interest on Bhutan and Bhutanese refugee issue.

In February 2007, APFA started radio program in one of the local FM stations in Kathmandu . To note, general public in Kathmandu, at that time, hardly knew who Bhutanese refugees are and what the cause of eviction from Bhutan in 1990 is. Two years of efforts has given us good results not only educating Kathmandu residents of our cause but also letting the world listen the radio programs online which are available on both our site: apfanews.com, bhutannewsservice.com

Presence of Nepalese Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan , Nepal Chief of the UNHCR Daisy Dell and several other senior human rights activists on the celebration of Saranarhi Sarokar's first anniversary in February 2008 reflects the influences generated by the APFA activities.

In November 2007, APFA extended its radio program to Jhapa where refugees can listen . After five months (three months funded by LWF), the radio program in Jhapa was closed down as sponsor cited lack of fund. The radio program in Kathmandu continues to this day. For a few months since December 2007, the radio program was also aired through CJMC community radio in Kathmandu .

In November 2008, APFA brought out an exclusive report on Gross National Happiness, much talked philosophy propagated by the fourth king of Bhutan Jigme Singye Wangchuk, pointing out its failure to address the grievances of the people .

Only last month (April 2009) we have published an exclusive report on one year of



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Presence of Nepalese Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan, Nepal Chief of the UNHCR Daisy Dell and several other senior human rights activists on the celebration of Saranarhi Sarokar's first anniversary in February 2008 reflects the influences generated by the APFA activities.

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'GLOBAL JOURNALIST' in October 2007 .

In early 2006, we translated and published the draft constitution of Bhutan and circulated to Bhutanese community and Nepali experts with the aim to inform them of the kind of constitution made by Bhutanese regime. The Nepali version of the constitution was published again after the king promulgated the constitution on July 18. The soft copy of the translation can be downloaded from our site .

Since our first anniversary, we have been continuously publishing the annual press freedom report that incorporates all events and development related to media industry despite the fact that it is very small. We are the only team monitoring and publishing annual media report on Bhutan.

We also proudly say, we were able to publish successive reports on situation of press freedom in Bhutan in the annual press freedom report of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) since 2005-06 , . For obvious reasons, the IFJ denied including our part in its annual report last year for obvious reasons while this year, we were able to include it again.

every year. We have also compiled a booklet on basic concepts of journalism and journalistic ethics and distributed to our reporters as guidelines for them.

APFA initiated a joint effort for press freedom and called on two other media organizations working for press freedom in Bhutan and operating in exile. Thus a conference was held in eastern Nepal making a historic declaration vowing to expedite fight for press freedom. The first media conference adopted 'Declaration Dé Exile'. The declaration also accepted the APFA proposal to accept Bhutan News Service as the common and first news agency

Reporter, which still is continuously published despite hurdles and hardships of fund during its course. In the same month, a three-day training was organised in Beldangi camp inviting two young people from each camp, on basics of journalism. Thus the team was expanded, with enthusiastic response from the youngsters.

In September 2005, second training was organised for the young reporters to enhance their skills on news writing. APFA core team and some local journalists facilitated the training.

In May 2006 APFA started its online apfanews.com that has now become the most





democratic practice in Bhutan. The report not only is critical of the government's failure to incite democratic culture in Bhutanese society but also appreciates some of its initiatives towards ending absolute rule.

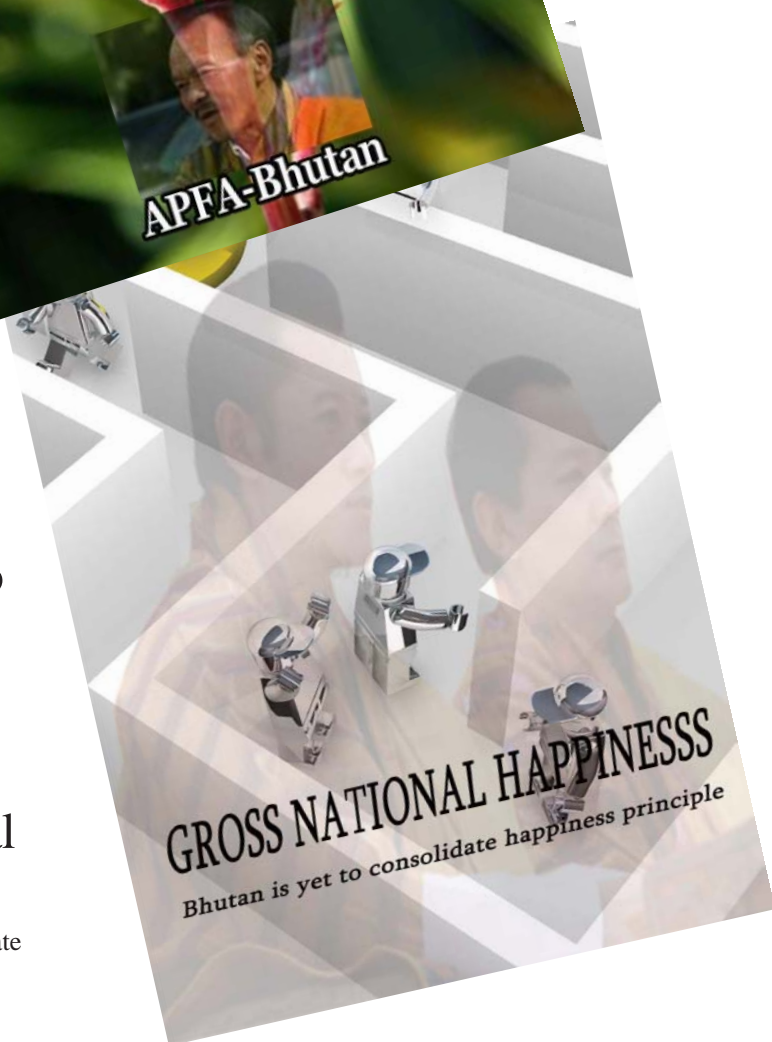
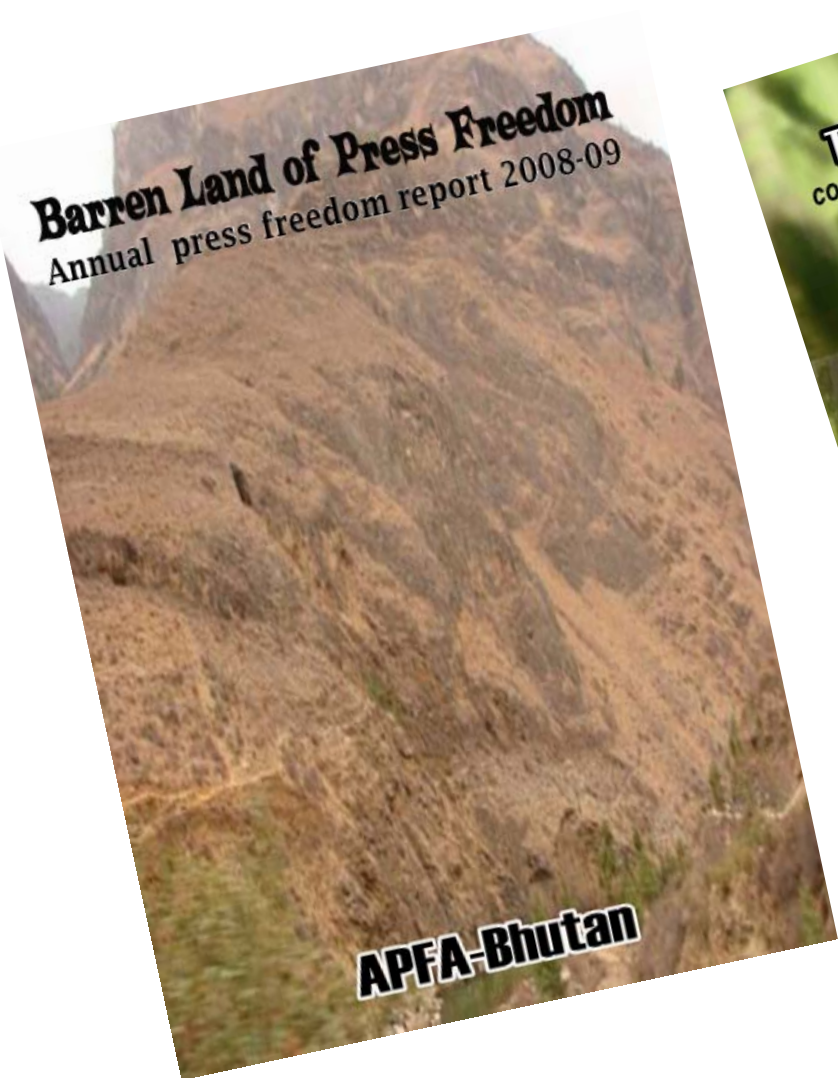
In March 2008, APFA raised more than NRs 700,000 (in cash and kind) through lobby in Kathmandu and Bhutanese community in western countries to support the fire victims of Goldhap camp. The inferno had burnt the whole camp displacing more than 10,000 refugees. Most of the support was distributed to the refugees through Caritas Nepal while some through camp management committee.

In November 2007, APFA raised over NRs 200,000 from

Kathmandu to support fire victims in Beldangi I camp where the fire hazard had displaced over 35 families. The support was distributed cash.

In 2007 and 2008, APFA supported six patients of various illness collect donations get their treatment in Kathmandu hospitals at discount rate or free of cost.

In course of the activities, journalists working with APFA faced several threats – even death threats – for being journalist. The communist groups among the refugee community especially targeted our reporters Ichha Poudel, Arjun Pradhan and Jiten Subba who had to remain hiding for several days due to death threats.



# Our Latest Publications Don't Miss to Read

**Barren Land of  
Press Freedom**

Annual Press Freedom Report  
2008-09

**Toreffy of  
Democratic Values**

Commenting on budding  
democracy of Bhutan

**Gross National  
Happiness**

Bhutan is yet to consolidate  
happiness principle

By T. P. Mishra, D.  
Horn and B. Peterson

## Will they rejoin their sons?

In the case you ever visit the Bhutanese refugee camp in Jhapa district, Nepal at Beldangi II, Sector I-1, Hut No 39, the first question you will be asked is whether you are the one who will take them to see their sons.

The aged couple, Ram Chandra Guragai, 73, and Yasoda, 69, are living on the good will of their neighbors. Simple and essential tasks such as fetching water from the nearby tap and preparing meals are no longer possible for them most of the time. People age all over the world, and in Bhutanese refugee society the elderly are usually cared for by the families of their children. For Ram Chandra and Yasoda, however, this care is a dream, as their family is about 10,000 miles away.

Two years ago the Guragai family started the resettlement process. As a family they faced the violent mass exodus from Bhutan. As a family they endured 18 years of struggle and poverty in the refugee camps of south-eastern Nepal. And as a family they dreamed of a new beginning when they were offered the chance to seek resettlement to a third country. This dream has proven to be elusive, however, as the family has been scattered around the world, leaving the two elders behind.

Six months ago their eldest son left for Australia. The youngest son left four months ago, also to Australia. Two married daughters have already left for the USA, and the only remaining support, one of their daughters who is also no longer living with them as she is also married, is scheduled to leave for Canada in the next few days.

"We can't understand why we are left in the camp," says Ram Chandra, his wife reading



When asked whether his family is supporting them, Ram Chandra replies "So far we have received at least 15,000 Nepalese rupees [approx. 200 \$], but we now know that money is nothing. Our situation is worsening day by day, while we still cannot do anything".

The entire process of resettlement was initiated with the intention of reducing the suffering of the exiled Bhutanese. After the mass exodus from Bhutan and 18 unfruitful years in refugee camps, the ordeal of the Australian bureaucracy is another hurdle for this displaced people.

When asked to comment on whether there was any role of his office in this delay, the chief of the International Organization for Migration in Damak, David Derthick, says "We only do the medical exams and handle booking requests by the DIAC".

his lips as she is hard of hearing. The aged couple fears that they might not see their family again. "We might die without seeing our sons", Ram Chandra adds, sadly lowering his gaze, unable to change the whims of the Australian authorities. After filing paperwork declaring their interest for resettlement, numerous interviews and two medical exams, they finally received the clearance needed for resettlement one year ago, but still they have not been given a departure date. They sit and wait while they wither away, unable to care for themselves.

According to Ram Chandra, his sons, worrying in Australia, tried to appeal to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to be reunited with their parents at the earliest, but were briskly sent away, told not to come again.

An estimated 108,000 people from southern Bhutan are bunched in seven refugee camps in two of the eastern districts of Nepal under UNHCR supervision. Displaced from their homes due to racial violence and oppression in the early 1990's, so far not a single refugee has been able to return to their previous homeland.

With repatriation not feasible under the current circumstances, in 2006 they were offered the possibility of resettling in seven different countries (USA, Australia, Denmark, Canada, New Zealand, The Netherlands and Norway). Due to the conditions in the camps, which provide little prospects for the future, more than 65,000 have already declared their interest in being resettled.

Australia alone has committed to accepting at least

5000 refugees, probable relief for many. 720 individuals have so far been resettled there. However, the case of Ram Chandra and Yasoda, along with many others, indicates that this process needs to be handled delicately; there is much to be done on part of the authorities in order to improve the process.

Especially when dealing with an issue as delicate as the relocation of families already traumatized by an extensive refugee experience, agencies and governments need to be sure they properly assess and ensure the needs of all individuals are met during the resettlement process. Failure to do so increases the trauma and stress of people who have already suffered enormous amounts of both through their lengthy ordeal as refugees.

A 90-year old from the same camp, Dhanapati Poudyel, was taken to Australia on May 17, 2009. "My grandfather is finally being resettled, with a doctor accompanying him", his grandson says, "Although the process of settlement took nearly two years from its beginning and was a bit frustrating for us". The refugees deserve to be treated with this respect and attention to their needs. Leaving vulnerable people in the camps and long and stressful resettlement processes are woes that cannot be placed on their shoulders.

But yet the question arises: will the Guragai couple be able to join their sons soon? Or will the wait take even longer?

(D. Horn is Austrian Freelancer and B. Peterson works with Green Left Weekly, Australia)

## Samdrup Jongkhar Faces Water Woes

Samdrup Jongkhar, May 05: The residents of the Samdrup Jongkhar have begun to fall ill due to contaminated water either supplied by the government or using local water resources as water supply hits the city.

Of late, the residents have complained about vomiting, headache and stomach ache at the local clinics and hospitals. The number of people visiting health posts with such complaints is continuing as summer approaches.

The municipality has been facing water shortage since

2004 and the government has not taken any steps to improve the situation. The beginning of the construction of Eastern Highway has further disrupted the water supply system.

Municipal officers say water shortage is due to increasing population of the city. People have begun to use motors to pump water from the supplied pipes, however, electricity supply is not regular.

In previous years, the residents were supplied water thrice a day which has now been reduced to once a day.

## Journalists Awarded

reports as investigative reporting.

Choden's reporting on the short supply and poor quality of school textbooks was termed the best investigative reporting.

Kuensel won three more awards: The Dark Side of Night Hunting, a feature by Tashi Dema, recognized as the most prominent social issue and Tenzin Dorji was given the best photographer.

For opinion pieces, all three papers (since Bhutan today daily was not included in the contest) were awarded. Kuensel's deputy editor Kencho Wangdi's Making Our Religion Relevant, Bhutan Times' sub-editor Mitra Raj's First Breach, and Bhutan Observer's reporter Needrup Zangpo's Demolish the Wall.

Observer's Dzongkha editorial team won the best Dzongkha edition of the year beside its cartoonist Chimmi R Namgyel receiving best newspaper cartoon award for Zero Tolerance.

Bhutan Times got three more awards, including the Best Newspaper design. Its editor Gopilal Acharya was awarded for best business report for his article, Heartbreak House. Karma Singye Dorji from the same paper, who happened to be one of the three judges, received best political report for his article One Year of Democracy.

Radio Valley (RV)'s Suja Show, by Ugyen Wangmo, was declared the most entertaining program while Mang Ghi Damkha or Music on Demand's Pema Wangchuk was the best radio host of the year.

Two other radio stations, Centennial Radio and Kuzoo FM knocked out of the scene.

Government owned Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) took three: Dawa as the best TV anchor and Damcho Wangchuk as most informative radio program for his coverage of the police-youth partnership program. And Neten Dorjee's documentary on King Jigme Wangchuk was awarded the best television program of the year.

Temzing Lamsang, who was more critical of the government policies and corruptions in public offices, was given not a single award despite his few well written articles. Two other judges were secretary of the ministry of information and communications and former Kuensel editor Kinley Dorji Kay Kirby Dorji, a former journalist with Los Angeles Times.

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