

King Made His Parties

Bhutan News Service Thimphu, March 24

After the repeated calls by the Chief Election Commissioner Kunzang Wangdi for formation of the political parties and register for 2008 elections, two parties have been announced on March 24.

Four of the currently serving Royal Advisory Councilors and 73 National Assembly members announced they would enter the party politics in the new and changed political context of Bhutan. Tshering Tobgay, who had resigned from the civil service just before to enter the party

politics, has been nominated as the acting coordinator of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

However, the man behind the formation of this party is royal advisor Sangay Ngedup who is serving as Agriculture Minister in current cabinet. His party has completed most of the initial works.

Tobgay said the party has already identified potential candidates in all the constituencies to contest in the upcoming elections.

PDP said it is working on finalize its political charter,

manifestos, and holding consultation with the people in the dzongkhags, gewogs, and

Employment and Labour and Internal audit of the Royal Insurance of Bhutan. The other one is Bhutan People United Party (BPUP) whose chief Sigay Nidup is current royal advisor.



Sigay



Junior Jigme



Sangay

chiwogs for expansion of the party networks.

Tobgay was the former head of then Department of

However, the party said it would announce its president only after the registration of the party with the election

commission.

There was another attempt made by 17 university graduates for party formation which they had named Drukuyul United Peaceful Party but was dissolved without getting formal shape.

Meanwhile Rongthok Kuenley Dorji, President of Druk National Congress (Delhi) in an e-mail interview expressed his deep concern towards Bhutan's mockery.

(Detail of the email interview is in the last page)

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Delineation Commission Fixes Constituencies at 47

The Delineation commission has finalized the draft of the constituencies for election to National Assembly on 47 seats on March 26. The commission held several rounds of discussion with district leaders.

The election commission accepted the report forwarded by the delineation commission. Massive changes have been made on re-grouping of the gewogs. But appeals from Chukha, Dagana, Mongar, Paro, Samdrup Jongkhar, Sarpang, Trashigang, Trashi Yangtse and Wangdue Phodrang dzongkhags for more seats in the NA has been ignored.

The commission said new delineation ensures no division of gewogs to two constituencies. In the mean time, the EC has called on the people to vote in the mocking voting scheduled for April and May as part of preparing for formal democratic elections to be held next year.

HIGHLIGHTS

RUB has 1,320 seats

Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) has announced that only 1,320 persons will get admission for higher studies within Bhutan this year.

Out of this, the Sherubtse College will take 406. Students the College of Science and Technology will take in 93 students. Many students who were qualified for higher studies were not able to join the university due to limited seats available. The selection interview started on March 21 at the Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School. *BNS*

New Mobile Service Provider

Tashi Group, a commercial group which won an auction for the second national cellular license last year, is planning the formal award of its concession later this month.

Tashi says it is forming a new division - Tashi Infocomm Ltd - to handle its cellular activities, with 25 percent of the new arm being floated publicly.

Tashi is seeking finance from a consortium of banks to fund its network rollout. *BNS*

Rice talks of exile issue

US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice said she would update the latest developments on issue of exiled Bhutanese to the American law makers.

"I recognize the problem of the Bhutanese not being able to go back and obviously not wanting to stay in a refugee camp, but I will get an update for you (the member who asked the question) on where we are on that issue," Rice said.

Bhutan News Service Kathmandu, March

A high level European Union delegation visited Bhutan from March 15 to discuss bilateral issues and repatriation of exiled Bhutanese.

The nine-member delegation discussed the issue of human rights violation continuing in Bhutan for years, further

Leaders in exile met Gill on March 23 and discussed the latest development in camps and repatriation.

According to BMSC delegates, they urged support and solidarity of EU for democracy in Bhutan and repatriation process of the exiled Bhutanese. Tek Nath Rizal and Balam Poudel met Gill and discussed various issues of people in exile.

Ratan Gajmere of AHURA

Bhutan also met Gill. Gajmere told the BNS that he strongly sought the attention of EU towards extending its support for opening all possible options. He quoted Gill as saying that the recent US offer of third country resettlement is an opportunity. "I also made Gill aware that the EU should help for promoting people's right to return home for those who are going to opt for the option of third country resettlement", he said. *BNS*



Head of delegates, Neena Gill

deteriorating in the recent years, the resettlement process of the exiled Bhutanese and on other bilateral issues. The delegation was led by Neena Gill, a member

India wakes up to exert pressure to stakeholders

New Delhi, March 31: Pressure from the Indian political leaders to the central government of India for resolution of the issue of exiled Bhutanese is getting momentum.

On Saturday, March 31, more than a dozen noted Indian leaders, including those of the ruling Congress (I) urged the central government to play the role of facilitator for their dignified repatriation.

On the eve of the 14th summit of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to be held here in New Delhi, Indian political leaders and other social organizations have asked the External Affairs Minister of India Pranab Mukherjee to take

initiatives to help repatriate exiled Bhutanese.

They handed over a letter in the afternoon to Mukherjee in which they have urged him to lead tripartite talks between Bhutan, Nepal and India to resolve the over one-and-a-half decade long issue.

They have also warned of starting a series of protest programs including Satyagraha against the Indian government if the central government of India failed to consider the problem.

The letter written after a meeting of Bhutan Solidarity under the convenorship of Madhya Pradesh legislative member Dr Sunilam has alleged that over 100,000 encamped Bhutanese have failed to return to their



Activist Medha Pathkar

homeland due to India.

The Solidarity has also decided to unite all political parties and social organizations in India for the cause of exiled Bhutanese. "We request you to organize

tripartite talks between Bhutan, Nepal and India to help repatriate [exiled] Bhutanese to their homes with safety and dignity," reads the letter.

The Solidarity has urged the Indian government to allow Bhutanese to pass through Indian territory without any hindrance, if the India cannot resolve the problem. The Solidarity members, in the letter, have said that it was an irony on the part of India, which claims to be the best democracy in the world, remaining mute at a time when both political parties and social organizations working in the field of refugees in Nepal are demanding Indian intervention.

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EU Delegation Visits Bhutan, Nepal

of European Parliament. The delegation arrive Kathmandu on March 21 and discussed the issue of exiled Bhutanese with Nepalese ministers and Bhutanese leaders in exile.

In Kathmandu, Gill said Bhutan was ready to start dialogue with Nepal from the point it stopped and finalize the issue of exiled Bhutanese.



Bhutanese delegates with head of EU mission, Neena Gill (second from the left) in Kathmandu.

Editorial.....

Party and Democracy

Finally, the royal government began the process of democratization, still suspicious, with the announcement of parties recently.

This is positive with regard to the process of democratization of the government and let the people rule themselves. People have raised this issue around 17 years ago and the regime said demand for democracy was against the interest of the land and the king.

No matter, the king has realized the importance of democracy and human rights of its citizens for all around development of the country in 21st century.

Two parties have been announced by now but both are dominated by the people who worked for years with king. This indicates king wants the political power remain within his reach.

This is absolutely wrong for a democracy to mature. People should be given their sovereign powers and the royal family should remain out of political circle. The government should be given freedom of decision and implementation.

The regime, should by now, have to admit its mistake to tell the political parties in early 1990 as terrorist groups and allow their presence in Bhutanese politics, going to be opened by 2008. The Bhutan government should allow the organizations in exile to operate inside the country if democracy is to blossom.

Party formation and holding elections is not only the means to measure the level of democratic practices. All the citizens should be guaranteed their rights, including the right to return of the exiled Bhutanese, who have first raised the issue of human rights and democracy.

The government must abolish its policy of ethnic discrimination and ensure that recently formed parties adequately gives places for southern, eastern and minority communities. This is the only means to avoid any confrontation in Bhutan in future.

THE party politics in Bhutan is all in get set go but with the relatives and supporters joining and announcing the party formation. This way or that, the power struggle in Bhutan would remain within the palace circle.

All in all politicizing, the agenda of democratization is heading to nowhere out of palace. King's advisor Sigay Dorji announced Bhutan People's United Party while the uncle formed People's Democratic Party. As many as four royal advisors have announced resigning from their position to join politics, which in any seems to be motivated by the king.

The BPUP said its present coordinator is Tshering Tobgay, who resigned from the government server as director, to join politics going to be open by next year. However, the mastermind, as the people gossip but truly, agriculture minister Sangay Ngedup would probably lead the party by the time it is being registered at the election commission to polls next year. To off-shed the allegations of being the

king's party, the circumstance might compel the party to choose another leader, although personal ascendancy of Ngedup is never to be wipe out. He would remain back the curtain of controlling authority of the party.

The Bhutanese draft constitution makes provisions for two rounds of election for forming the National Assembly. All existing parties would be allowed to contest the preliminary round while the top two will be contesting the second round of voting who will then become ruling and opposition parties in the 47-member legislature, downsized from initial plan of 75.

So far, there has no possibility for another party to come up with. This would make the provision of preliminary round of voting meaningless. Hopefully, the king thought for a place to the parties formed as early as 1990 and operating in exile. Country's election commission said the country needs at least three parties. Reports earlier said, young graduates attempted the formation

of yet another party, but in no avail.

The king led Bhutan's democracy politics is heading with murmuring criticism and appreciation. The way it enthrals the world community through gross national happiness and cautious move towards democratisation is appreciable but its anarchic steps taken during early 1990 that expelled over 100,000 citizens and continued human rights violations then after has still been drawing criticism from around the world. Yet another fact that Bhutan being appreciated is that demands of the people raised since 1990 for open democracy and human rights has gradually been stored in the country. To see without touching the refugee issue, the process is good. However, the failure of the Bhutan royals to accept that demand of the people for democratic changes in Bhutan was unavoidable and now it has to go through such changes. Have the changes begun in 1990, the democratic practices in Bhutan would have matured by this time. Now Bhutan would have to go

through yet another turmoil of a decade or more.

The way political development is taking place in Bhutan is sure to bring division in the royal family. King himself has divided his allies into two groups to fight for power. Hopefully, he would not have forgotten that each side would be disheartened if he acted in favour of other. In one way, the king would have planned for active monarchy by the time parties fail to maintain political stability. Even then, it is unlikely that political stability would be maintained in this Himalayan kingdom without allowing the political parties to get matured in democratic practices.

The political party act and the draft constitution's spirit for inclusion of all sides in the political party determines the future of recently formed parties. But still uncertainty rubble the politics of Bhutan without actually delivering people their sovereign powers.

Bhutanese rulers might have considered the fact that dragging democracy dies in days.

Read & Tell

Lord Pashupatinath! Help us

YOU are Lord, yet again, out of deep pain and frustration I am prostrating before you for your kind perusal, intervention and blessings.

Lord! although you seem to apparently lay dead and powerless besides the grieving Bagmati, your overwhelming power of imparting eventual justice (at your discretion though) primarily to the children of the lesser gods are amongst few evident.

Let me shed some light to the obvious areas of your favor. First, by your seemingly transcendental 'chakra', at last you have been able to inject excess of courage and strength to your people who eventually overthrew the ambitious mortal believed to be your equal — King Gyanendra.

Second, you lay your divine hands on the once 'fiery and rock — solid' Maoists who gradually melted and finally made to succumb to hue and cry of the general Nepali mass. Strangely

enough, raising millions of eyebrows and delivering morals to the entire world, they have stored their lethal weapons under UN supervision. Of late, they have sincerely joined the interim government too. Interestingly, their 'killing' hands are expected to be transformed into 'godly' weapons of rendering voice and justice to the voiceless, the helpless.

Third, Lord! by your grace and auspices, a new Nepal is propounded against the widespread blossoms of *loktastra* in all walks of life. Really, your long-victimised mass is now heaving a huge sigh of relief with victory abounding and filling all the crevasses, ruptures and craters of all the Nepali hearts.

However, I still reserve to question you're helping and forgiving hands. Despite bestowing your divine hands by timely rescuing your people from the likelihood of being snared into a seemingly never-ending cycle of

uncertainties lay here a note of dissent for your apparent unfairness and apathy in delivering a plausible and timely hearing to a section of believers who have been, in the guise of Bhutanese refugees, grappling under the grip of cumulative pain, destitution and hopelessness for the last 17 years.

Lord! we believe and have been believing your impartial eyes be set on the entire humans lending your long-felt priority to those with lesser gods but alas, till date, no any proverbial light is seen on our part and further, no any substantial ground is prepared to timely tackle our problems. Above all, we have been harboring hopes that some day our burgeoning conundrums would certainly find an outlet along with the new *loktastrik* sunshine in Nepal. But of late, instead of gracing any foreseeable light, we seem to be fated to further drown in another flood of conspiracy even at the advent of new Nepal. Only our lifeline — the so-called last and

decisive bilateral talks between the two Himalayan nations has not yet been fixed and we are, by and by, literally eaten by an "invisible" disease of oblivions and uncertainties.

Your Lord, for how long can we afford to keep on cooling our heels in such 'icy' floors, congested population and smoky huts? Can't you instill a common sense and endow with strength to your concerned 'messengers and angels' to believe that refugees are humans and they too deserve a humane living? Are refugees still fated and destined to reel for some more years under the same rhetoric of 'repatriation'?

Lastly, your Lord, please make the concerned authorities and stakeholders feel the very vibes and jerks of having to boil under such sub human conditions for 17 years. Also enlighten them with the feasibility of unlocking all possible options to our stalemate.

□ By: R.N. Bista

Readers' Column

FM Program

It's an impressive achievement that APFA – Bhutan has been airing an FM program, related to exiled Bhutanese issue, from one of the stations in Kathmandu.

Actually, APFA's leading role in promoting media freedom for Bhutan democracy is praiseworthy. I think the very program is leaving a large section of its listeners from listening to it at Jhapa and Morang.

We are enthusiastic to hear such programs with coordination from APFA – Bhutan from local FMs stationed near the camps.

APFA should urgently coordinate for it.
Kumar Chapagai, Birtamode

Pathri incident

I was quite impressed to read the editorial writing of March issue, 'Pathri incident'. The way TBR has been presenting itself to help advocate during emergency time is noteworthy.

Actually, the March editorial itself proves that TBR was scrutinizing the pathri incident from the near point. TBR has clearly demanded for the compensation to the bereaved family of Lt. Gopal Khadka and to those hurt during the scuffle.

However, no any initiatives have been taken by concerned authorities. TBR! take further measures to help garner support to all victims of pathri incident.
Suk Man, Sanischare

Ration for TBR

We were very sad to read a circular that TBR would not be continued!

Situation press in Bhutan is really horrible. In absence of powerful and independent media houses in Bhutan people are forced to lead a life of 16th century.

In exile we are atleast happy to read news and we have freedom of speech and expression. There are a few papers that try to share news

in the community. The role played by TBR and Bhutan Jagaran is praise-worthy.

TBR is being published from Kathmandu where around 2000 Bhutanese youths make a good income. In the circular it was mentioned by BMS that cost of publication is around Rs 2000. So why don't they contribute one rupee to survive TBR. It is the moral responsibility of every Bhutanese to try not to stop the paper that has a greater influence in national and international arena.

We want all papers in exile to be continued. If our seniors are not in position to help survive TBR, we are ready to contribute the ration that we get in camps.

XII Students, Siddhartha BHSS

Interview

Caritas Will Remain Until the Problem is Solved- Fr. Verkey

Field Director of Caritas Nepal, Fr. Verkey talked to Vidhyapati Mishra of BNS regarding refugee education programs.

Excerpts:

Who have been funding you for education programs in camps?

Caritas Nepal took over the responsibility of secondary education in 1994. Our total budget in 2005/06 was Rs. 17.5 million. Our major funding agencies are Caritas Germany, Caritas Australia, Caritas Japan and Italian Bishop Conference. The conference has been funding our program for the last three years. This year, it won't. The other organization helping us for class XI and XII studies is Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). This is the major donor to our higher secondary education. Last year, caritas distributed Rs 14 million to 4,500 students for their higher secondary education. Each student received Rs 3000. This year as well, some 4,200 students will get the support in the same rate. Our last year main donors were Jesuit Conference for South Asia, JRS USA, Peace and Development Foundation, Canada and Catholic Relief Service, USA. For this academic year, JRS USA has given some commitments but we have not received any commitments of support from others.

Caritas Nepal is the implementing partner of the UNHCR for formal education in the camps. UNHCR funds for education from pre-primary to class VIII. For 2005-06 session, we had a total budget of Rs 33.5 million. For 2007-08, our budget is around Rs 39 million. Caritas Nepal will add from its side, Rs 15 million in this for secondary education. From this year, new program will start: vocation training for the exiled Bhutanese youths. I hope, the project will be continued in the years to come as we have received words.

What are the reasons behind the down-falling academic performance?

There are some reasons regarding negligence on academic

performance. The main reason is lack of motivation in children. There should be some opportunities for them ahead. For years living in the camp, they see that their future is going through a dark tunnel. So, they do not concentrate on their studies. Along with that good teachers are leaving our education system. This will certainly hamper the education because it takes time to make replacements. Sometimes, four to five teachers change in a year to teach a class.

The UNHCR has stopped distribution of kerosene which it was giving since the camps set up. Students who used to wake up at around 5 in the morning now has no meaning to wake up before 7 a.m. in winter season. Similarly in the evening, it becomes dark by 5 p.m. and there are no facilities for reading. This puts obstacles in studies of the children. To cope up with the problem, Caritas has changed its school timetable to make them comfortable. But this is not the absolute solution.

Can you state some statistics of academic performances?

This year, 3,129 students have appeared board examination of grade VIII. Same number of students had appeared the examination last year out of which 94 percent succeeded. More than 2,200 students sat for SLC examination and 72 percent of them passed in the previous session. This year, 2,288 students are appearing SLC examination. I hope around 75 to 80 percent of the children will pass both grade VIII and SLC examinations.

There are some 33, 200 students and more than 1200 volunteer teachers in the camp schools. What we should keep in mind is that the qualification of our teachers is grade XII. Those who passed grade XII has to teach in class IX and X. We don't have such a big budget to hire qualified teachers from outside.

What is the reason for high drop outs?

The total students' enrollment for academic year 2005/06 was 33,200. Two percent of this is a large number in absolute figure.



But it must be kept in mind that Bhutanese Refugee Education Program is regarded as one of the best education systems among all refugee education programs around the world. So we do not have a large number of drop-outs. We just have an average drop out rate of 2.2. It is impossible that 100 percent students continue their studies in horrible social situations in camps.

What would improve the academic performance in camps?

We have adequately debated on ways to improve the education of the children. We have initiated different programs to motivate them to their studies. Through workshop, training and seminars, we have been trying to make teachers more qualified and skillful. To inculcate interest in students for studies, we have introduced the block education system since a few years. Every block exam will carry credits.

We are trying to help the teachers for their studies or provide them training if they have served at least for five years. This is a part of our attempt to attract the teachers. I hope some teachers will go for

B. Ed studies and attending teacher training this year as well. The administration cannot control the large number of students. So support from parents, community is necessary for making improvements in the academic performance.

How long will the Caritas support BREP?

Caritas is with exiled Bhutanese since 1992. I hope the solution of this issue would be found out one day. So, until these people remain in camps, we don't want to leave them. What we should make clear is that our donor agencies have been asking us what progress is being made towards solving the problem. They say they are tired of donating. As such we don't have any commitments whether we would be receiving support in the next year from those donors we are getting support now.

How do you see the future of the Bhutanese students in exile?

Taking consideration of the present situation, I hope their future is very bleak. Caritas can help up to class XII education. The support Caritas has been providing is insufficient. Rs 3000

is not enough to pay the yearly fees to their colleges. A student needs around Rs 15-20,000 per year.

Today, the exiled Bhutanese students don't have this much of money. To get admission in colleges, the students have to borrow money from their neighbours or relatives. I know, today's interest rate is 5 percent per annum. How would these students get this much of money to repay the loans? I also know that they have no legal permission to work outside. Even if they work, they do not get equal wage as the locals get. Thus, in the days to come, they would face further difficulties to continue the studies. That is why, Bhutan and Nepal governments, who have been responsible for determining the future of these over 100,000 exiled Bhutanese, should make faster decisions on this issue. Bring light to their future and help them get opportunity to build their life.

Why Dzongkha and Bhutanese history and geography have been included in BREP curriculum?

In the initial days when we introduced Dzongkha in the camp education, we hoped that they would be returning to their country at the earliest possible. The elder ones know Dzongkha, at least to understand or even to speak. When these children return to their country, they would also be able to speak their national language. Along with that we teach them Bhutanese culture, history, geography, because the exiled Bhutanese say repatriation is only the option they think that would guarantee their future. So, if repatriation is the only solution of the crisis, we need to teach Dzongkha to our children.

Why do you give stress on extra curriculum activities?

This is because the children cannot concentrate on studies for a whole day. That is why there should be co-curricular activities. To avoid them involve in anti-social activities, such activities are necessary. But due to lack of adequate budget, we have not been able to perform as we wished.

People's SAARC solidarity

The leaders from SAARC nations have expressed solidarity to the struggle of the exiled Bhutanese for establishment democracy and human rights in Bhutan.

In their Kathmandu Declaration announced in the Nepalese capital on March 25, they stated that South Asia would extend their support to the struggle of the exiled Bhutanese for justice, peace and equality.

The three-day conference called People's SAARC also called on the governments of the region to address the needs of the people and bring programs to suit the needs.

Addressing the declaration announcement function, general secretary of Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), DNS Dhakal said the upcoming SAARC summit must include the issue of exiled Bhutanese in its agenda for discussion.

FROM REGIME

Civil Servants Promoted

Bhutan News Service
Thimphu, March 16

The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) has promoted 45 senior government officials in executive and specialist category. They are first to be promoted under the position classification system.

The RCSC received promotion proposals for 351 civil servants for July 2006 and January this year. Of this, applications of only 235 civil servants including 45 at the executive and specialist level were approved.

At secretary level, four officials have been promoted to executive EX1 level. Eleven officials received the position of director generals and 30 have been promoted to the director positions.

The four officials who have been promoted to executive I level are the cabinet secretary, Sherub Tenzin, the secretary of the ministry of information and communications, Tashi Phuntsog the vice chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan, Zangley Dukpa and the education secretary, Pema Thinley.

EXILE VOICE

Journalism Award Announced

TBR Correspondent
Beldangi-II, March

A meeting of the central committee member of Bhutan Press Union (BPU), on March 26, has nominated T. P. Mishra, editor of Bhutan News Service (BNS) as the winner of 'Year Journalism Award 2006'.

According to a press release issued by its general secretary last Thursday, Mishra also the president of Bhutan Chapter of Third World Media Network (TWMN), central committee member of APFA - Bhutan and the correspondent of Media Helping Media (MHM), United Kingdom based online

platform for journalists, is nominated for the award for his valuable contribution at regional, national and international level for Bhutan media freedom. "His advocacy for dignified return of exiled Bhutanese to their original homeland through various media is appreciable", the release reads.

The BPU will award Mishra along with cash prize and a merit certificate amidst a special function on April 13 at Sanischare camp, coinciding its fifth anniversary.

Meanwhile, the BPU will also award its chief advisor, Kapil Muni Dahal for his deep commitment in media sectors while in Bhutan.

Int'l Coverage on Bhutanese Issues

Bhutan's Search for Gross National Happiness

In a world that measures a country's prowess on its gross domestic product (GDP), you have to marvel at a nation with the spunk and spirit to rate itself on its GNH - Gross National Happiness.

That's Bhutan for you, a small Shangri-La of just 634,000 citizens and some 40,000 expatriates. Indeed, the challenge of moving into the new world of the 21st century while retaining its past is at the core of contemporary Bhutan. Writes Chopra about the current King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's efforts in her book, *Bhutan: A Certain Modernity*: "Over the past 30 years he has opened the doors to his kingdom in slow, barely perceptible, motion. The visionary monarch has chosen not to engage with the hurly burly of modern mediocrity; instead he strides joyfully towards creating a new genre of modern society - a society that matures gently because it remains rooted in its faith, identity and culture. The last independent Himalayan Buddhist kingdom, Bhutan has inadvertently given itself an enormous responsibility: to prove to the world that its citizens' emotional well-being is the cornerstone of a prosperous society."

While almost every country is well represented in the immigrant mix in the U.S., Bhutan has virtually no presence

By: Lavina Melwani

in America, and its inhabitants aren't a part of the teeming, swirling immigrant mass in New York or California, where citizens of every nation seem to be trying to find a toehold. Indeed, there are no Bhutanese businesses or restaurants in New York. A Tibetan restaurant "Tibetan Kitchen" in Manhattan where some dishes are close to Bhutanese cuisine is the closest you can come to capturing a whiff of the country.

Bhutan does not have an embassy or consulate in the United States. It's highest official representative Ambassador Daw Penjo, permanent representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations, says: "We do not have a large Bhutanese community living in the U.S. Apart from the mission staff and others working for various international organizations including the United Nations, the Bhutanese in the U.S. are mostly students studying in various educational institutions."

As there are no major universities in Bhutan, many students who can afford it come to America to study, but then head back home. One them is Yangchen Wangchuk, who is from the royal family and spent five years at the University of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. She is all set to leave for home, with a degree in systems engineering.

Education is the biggest draw for Bhutanese who venture out of their country and interestingly enough, crown prince Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk graduated from the Cushing Academy and the Wheaton College. He went on to complete his masters at Magdalen College, Oxford University. The current king is abdicating in favor of his son, the crown prince, who will be introducing parliamentary democracy and elections, gingerly taking Bhutan into the modern world.

In our harried world, who wouldn't like to take a time out in Bhutan? The official Bhutan website notes, "For the traveler in quest for peace, tranquility, inspiration and enchantment Bhutan is the perfect answer. Here amidst monasteries, fluttering prayer flags, friendly people, pristine scenery, running streams, green valleys, lakes and awe inspiring architecture the traveler wakes up to a deep and pleasant realization that his inward journey has been as much valuable as his outward trip."

But perhaps far tellingly at a time when global warming and environmental chaos are an inconvenient truth, the website goes on to note: "The Bhutanese traditional reverence for nature has delivered the country into the third millennium with its environment - both natural and popular - still richly intact."

King Made.....

Meanwhile Rongthok Kuenley Dorji, President of Druk National Congress (Delhi) in an e-mail interview expressed his deep concern towards Bhutan's mockery.

What is your stand regarding announcement of parties in Bhutan?

It was not surprising because we knew their plan. Even the draft constitution is amended to suit their whims, like dropping NA members from 75 to 47. King is in meeting spree, issuing decrees. It seems that he too is engaged in leaving no stone unturned for a government of royalist to establish.

What would be your new strategies?

We await the institution of constitutional monarchy in year 2008.

Will your party be recognised?

The endorsement of general Bhutanese public is far superior to the present regime. After 2008 our party will get public recognition. Our party members are not limited to Nepal and India, but large numbers are working inside Bhutan.

Are these new parties democratic?

They can never be. Their agenda is to retain the 100-year-old monarchy prerogatives intact. It

is a ploy towards establishing a 'new' government under autocratic monarchy set up. This won't be different than of present regime. A party formed by Sharchopa, Naglong and Lhotshampa communities after 2008 will have credentials of being democratic parties worthy of participating in the general election.

Are politicians inside Bhutan acting well?

In fifteen years struggle for the establishment of democracy in Bhutan, some Bhutanese have sacrificed their life and majority people have suffered the state brutality. Many Bhutanese people are harshly incarcerated in range of fifteen to twenty years. More than a hundred political prisoners are still in prison. Finally when the democracy is about to be instituted, the present chimis action is disheartening.

Even in the capacity of being chimis, they were more of co-conspirator in colluding in suppression of people's voice. When the opportunity has arrived for atonement, they are unlikely to use it. In fact, these Chimis have well illustrated their ignorance on democratic rights and showed the complete lack of reasoning faculty.

They are indeed like a bunch of "Java Tokas"- a group of oxen who by nature need someone to goad them on.

Indian wakes....

Famous Indian social activist Medha Pathkar had handed over the letter to Minister Mukherjee. She told that she would continue fighting for the cause of exiled Bhutanese in the days to come.

"Either hold tripartite talks or give exiled Bhutanese a route to return to their homes," said Sunilam, coordinator of the Bhutanese Solidarity.

Those exerting pressure on the Indian government include former lawmaker and socialist leader Surendra Mohan, former minister

Satya Prakash Malviya, Janata Dal (United) general secretary Arun Kumar, Yadav Reddy of Congress (I), Uttar Pradesh president of Nationalist Congress Party Ramesh Dixit, Swami Agnibesh, Gautam Noulakha and Ajit Jha of Socialist Jana Parishad.

Pathkar informed that preparations are underway to organize a demonstration on exiled Bhutanese, coinciding with the arrivals of the heads of the states of all SAARC countries in New Delhi.

Refugees Around US

Iraqi Refugees prepared to fly to US

The United States is prepared to increase significantly the number of Iraqi refugees it admits as the civil unrest in Iraq drives a greater number of people from their homes.

Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration Ellen Sauerbrey told reporters at a Washington briefing March 23 that previous reports about the United States accepting an additional 7,000 Iraqi refugees in the coming months are inaccurate. She said this figure simply reflects the number of U.S. referrals the UNHCR feels it realistically can expect to make in the coming months.

"UNHCR, which has the international mandate, if you will, to do the protection and make referrals for resettlement has indicated ... that they had the capacity to be able to register, identify the vulnerabilities and make referrals of about 20,000, and that they anticipated that they would refer 7,000 to the U.S. resettlement program," she said. Sauerbrey emphasized that there is no cap on the number of Iraqi refugees the United States is willing to resettle. The only limit is set by the presidential

determination that identifies the total number of refugees the United States will accept from around the world in any given year. In 2007, that number stands at 70,000.

The assistant secretary said the United States will be accepting referrals from places other than the UNHCR as well. These include referrals from U.S. embassies and nongovernmental organizations working in the region. However, the United States will not accept resettlement requests at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad for security reasons. Sauerbrey explained that the resettlement program is designed for vulnerable individuals and said that if people are truly in danger in Iraq, they would be ill-advised to remain in the country while their applications are processed.

Sauerbrey said there are 10 categories of vulnerability the United States will consider in making its determination of whether an applicant is in need of resettlement. Some of the key categories are single women with children and no financial resources, unaccompanied children with no family, elderly people, individuals with extensive medical needs, certain ethnic and religious

minorities, and people who are endangered because of their association with the United States and the multinational forces.

Sauerbrey said the U.S. Department of Homeland Security is working to devise a program that would expedite the issuance of family reunification visas for Iraqis who already have family living in the United States. This would be an effort separate from the refugee resettlement program and would increase the total number of Iraqis the United States could admit. She said that there are currently 1,500 to 2,000 Iraqi refugees being processed for admission to the United States.

The assistant secretary emphasized that resettlement is not a practical solution for the vast majority of Iraqi refugees now living in countries of first asylum, such as Jordan and Syria. She praised those countries for their generosity in assisting the displaced Iraqis and said the international community must step forward to help them deal with the strain on their political, social and security systems. An April 17-18 donors' conference in Geneva will address this issue.

Source: USINFO

Congratulations!

The Third World Media Network (TWMN), an independent, international, non-profit organization of the working journalists from the least developed countries (LDCs) likes to congratulate **Mr. T. P. Mishra**, the President of our Bhutan Committee for being nominated for 'Year Journalism Award 2006'

Sohel Manzur

Central President

TWMN, Dhaka Bangladesh

Congratulations!

Media Helping Media (MHM) congratulates **Mr. T. P. Mishra**, MHM Correspondent for winning 'Year Journalism Award 2006'. Well done Mishra.

David Brewer

Chief Editor

<http://www.mediahelpingmedia.org>

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