

HIGHLIGHTS

SAFMA in Bhutan

Bhutan chapter of the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) has been formally announced on August 05 with 12 member executive national committee.

This is the first instance of the government-fed journalists making their links with international press freedom body. This has opened doors for democratization of media sector in the country.

The Chief Justice Sonam Tobgay, government officials and journalists attended the launch function. BNS

303,650 Voters

Election Commission has said by end of this month some 304,000 of the 400,626 eligible voters have registered to vote for the National Council (NC) elections in December.

The commission has released the first draft Electoral Roll and asked the voters to file their complaints or registration if otherwise mentioned in the draft.

ECB says Trashigang dzongkhag has the highest number with 33977 registered voters. It has 45,915 eligible voters. Gasar dzongkhag with an eligible voter population of 2083 has the lowest number of registered voters with 1536 registered voters. BNS

New FM

Kuzoo FM, the first private radio station in the country has launched separate channels for Dzongkha and English program listeners on Monday.

Listeners can hear all Dzongkha music and other programs from FM 104 MHz while the FM 105 MHz broadcast all programs in English. Both the stations operate 24 hours daily. BNS

Indian PM Hints Positive Signals

NDF, INSAF welcome Singh's gesture

**Bhutan News Service
New Delhi, August 21**

Nearly two decades after the eviction of the Bhutanese citizens, Indian Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh has said that India will work with Nepal and all concerned parties to resolve the crisis.

"India will work with all parties, especially Nepal, in order to improve the state of exiled Bhutanese and find a solution that will ensure their dignity and well-being," Singh said in a response to a letter written by Indian lawmaker Ram Gopal Yadav.

Yadav, a socialist leader, had asked Indian government to lead a tripartite initiative to facilitate a dignified repatriation of more than 100,000 exiled Bhutanese.

This is the first time that any Indian prime minister has

expressed serious concern over the issue in written form.

Stating that the government is trying to find a common consensus with all parties in regard to human values, Singh said that India is encouraging both countries- Nepal and Bhutan- to come up with suitable solutions through peaceful negotiations so that the diplomatic relations between the two neighbors are not affected.

Meanwhile, Bhutanese organizations in exile including the National Democratic Front (NDF), the Bhutan Solidarity and Indian National Social Action Forum (INSAF) welcomed Singh's gesture.

"This is a positive step from the Indian side," the

Secretary of Advocacy and Foreign Department of NDF

Narad Adhikari said. "If India implements what it said, it will create history," he added.

INSAF has decided to form a five-member delegation of senior Indian social activists to lobby with Nepalese government officials and major political parties on September 4 for talks with India. The delegation comprises social activist Medha Patekar, senior Socialist leader Surendra Mohan and journalist Kuldeep Nayer, Dewaprat Biswas of Nayer Block and Dr Sunilam.

The delegation will meet Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, foreign minister Sahana Pradhan, UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and Maoist Chairman Prachanda and hand over Dr Singh's letter that would "form a basis for talks".



Basnet Passed Away at 59

**Bhutan News Service
Kathmandu, August 18**

President of Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) R. B. Basnet passed away at the age of 59 at 2:45 a.m. on August 18 while undergoing treatment at Bir Hospital, Kathmandu in critical situation. Basnet had been facing the problem at urinary system



and stomach since a few years.

He was admitted to hospital on August 8. The Nepalese government had turned deaf to repeated request to provide financial support for his treatment. Leaving his job as the managing director of the state trading corporation, Basnet had established BNDP to fight for democracy, human rights and suppression on the southern Bhutanese in the country.

In 1992, the Bhutanese authority had held several rounds

of talks with Nepalese ministers trying to extradite him like Tek Nath Rizal, who was then extradited by authoritarian Nepalese government. However, then newly formed democratic government of Nepal denied his extradition saying lack of extradition treaty between the two countries. His extradition was discussed several times during the 70th and 71st session of the National Assembly.

A number of organizations in exile and individuals inside Bhutan have expressed grief at the demise of Basnet. APFA-Bhutan and TWMN-Bhutan Chapter have expressed deep condolences over Basnet's death. "Refugees in exile have lost one of their historic leaders" a joint press release by them said.

Basnet was survived by his wife and three daughters.

No Foreign Invitees for Coronation Celebrations

**Bhutan News Service
Thimphu, September 03**

The Royal government has said no international dignities will be invited to attend the coronation ceremony of the fifth Druk Gyalpo next year.

In a somber function will be organised in Chamlimithang ground, the ground that has the historical stories of Ugen Wangchuk's victory over his opponents leading to the establishment of monarchy in the kingdom, in Thimphu where the nationals will attend in mass. Earlier, the government had planned to invite dignitaries from at least 25 countries. Even then, monarchies in Japan, England and Thailand along with India have shown interest to participate the function.

The coronation celebration of fourth Druk Gyalpo was organized in lavish style which was represented by large number of the heads of states, representatives of foreign missions and international organizations, personal guests of the royal family and media persons from around the globe.

Instead, the royal government plans to celebrate the coronation of new king with smaller function in all 20 districts.

The National Steering Committee for Coronation and Centenary Celebrations (NSCCCC) has been established to ensure that all ministries, Dratshang and armed forces take part in the celebrations in their own way.



It's Not We, but the Regime Who Gains

As the violence continue to trigger the life in camps, the local administration of Nepal in Jhapa district had arrested five people on charges of their involvement in the incident. The issue is directly or indirectly associated with the incident in May when the then camp secretary of Beldangi II Hari Bangaley was severely beaten and two exiled Bhutanese youths lost their life.

The case had differently occurred in the same camp this month. The issue was the decision of the camp committee of Beldangi II camp to permit Pingala Dhital to attend a seminar in Thailand. Dhital has been living in Kathmandu for the last few years. Though Dhital failed to attend the function due to the denial of Nepalese home

ministry to issue her travel documents, the security situation back in the camps continue to derail.

News Analysis

The Nepalese administration has not clarified whether the arrested people had hand in the incident. Arrest of Subash

Acharya, who was a member of the probe committee for May incident, has raised suspicion over the real intention of the local administration. The probe committee has not yet publicized the report of the May incident.

The arrested people have been released on bail yet the cases against them have been filed at the local court. The 'refugees' having zero income have been

enforced to pay the bail of Rs 5,100 each.

The administration did not appear the arrested people before the court, as provisioned by the laws of Nepal. They were kept in custody and released without any reason. This is a form of intimidation and mental torture given to the exiled Bhutanese.

If they had been the culprits having hands behind the Beldangi

Positive Gesture

For several years, media had been the matter of fear for Druk regime. As democratization continues to get leaps, yet suspicious to its sincerity, media has come to be the better measure here. As a fourth organ of a state, informally referred as, media's role for democratic transition in Bhutan is important.

The first leap had been the permission for establishment of private media – print and radio. Additionally, establishment of South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) – Bhutan chapter has signaled a good gesture for protecting the right to information and right to speech and expression of the Bhutanese people. While this is a welcome initiation, the performance of the organization and its adherence to the principles of democracy and human rights are to be measures by its activities in the days to come. Descending from an autocratic regime, the media activists in the country has long been indoctrinated for loyalty to royalty. Like the difficulties faced by the regime to transform its governance system, changing the perspectives in journalists in Bhutan is not an easy task.

The government has not been sincere to press freedom and right to opinion. Media ethically are critical of the government and this is indigestible for the royal government. The blockage of bhutantimes.com and bhutandaily.com has amply proofed this. And the newly established organization remained silent to the government decision to stop viewing the two sites.

Establishing organizations and beginning of the publishing or radio houses is not enough to express the commitments to democracy. How these media are manipulated actually measures the height of democracy. The SAFMA headquarters should keep cautious look at its Thimphu chapter whether the practices comply with the basic journalistic ethics and principles of the organization.

To sum up, we hope, SAFMA will make a progressive change.

Hero Departs, Legacy Remains

Man is mortal but his contribution to society and his commitment for the cause make him immortal. R B Basnet has been immortalized due to his unflinching commitment to democracy, human rights, justice and equality for him as well as his countrymen.

The dedication of Late Ran Bahadur Basnet for democracy and justice in Bhutan is much above appreciations in words. His decision to quit the high-profile government job to fight against injustice, inequality and suppression against his fellow people amply reflects his loyalty to the values he cherished throughout his life.

Born on June 21, 1948 in Damphu of Tshirang district in southern Bhutan, he joined the government service in 1972 soon after he completed his university studies from New Zealand. His early education was completed in Scottish Mission in Kalimpong, India. Thanks to his nature of hard work, sincerity and compliance with the law of the land, he rose to occupy the positions of Managing Director of the State Trading Corporation and director of the Druk government's budget department, among others, in a short span of time.

He also served as Deputy Secretary of the National Planning Commission, Director of the Department of Revenue and Customs and Director of Department of Posts, Telegraph and Wireless. He was one of the architects behind the fifth and sixth five-year plans of that Himalayan kingdom.

Death of Basnet, last fortnight (on August 18), is an immeasurable loss to democratic struggle of Bhutan. "His absence will be severely felt (by the entire movement)," said President of Druk National Congress (DNC) Rongthong Kuenley Dorji.

Leaders in exile recall the bygone days during which Basnet ably led the struggle through peaceful ways with clear conscience. "He was steadfast in his principles and advised me to always remain committed towards the peaceful movement," Dorji recalls. Basnet is deeply appreciated for the cause he espoused while committing himself to non-violence as the best means to change societies.

As a senior bureaucrat, he was close to former Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuck and was contemporary to President of Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) Jigme Y. Thinley, spokesperson of the DPT Khandu Wangchuk and president of People's Democratic Party (PDP) Sangye Ngedup.

During the tension in 1990 after Tek Nath Rizal submitted a petition to the King asking revision of the census in southern Bhutan designed to evict Lhotsampas, Basnet opted the path to reconciliation. However, his efforts in collaboration with people like B. P. Bhandari and Om Pradhan, failed to yield any fruits. Both Bhandari and Pradhan later sided with the royal regime to suppress southern Bhutanese over the years. His



reconciliation efforts were dubbed as his "plots of terrorism" and he was forced to leave the country.

"The Bhutanese people will always remember him as true son of Bhutan who made great sacrifices for a noble cause," said S. K. Pradhan, a Bhutanese refugee and human rights leader.

"When I was working as a radio journalist in Bhutan during the time of the regime's absurd approach to form unity through hatred, I came to understand from their expression that they could not find any evidence of Basnet's misgivings to tarnish him negatively. Such was his quality of administration that eventually made him as a proponent of (Bhutanese) democracy movement," recalled Nanda Gautam, who worked with the state-run Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) for years.

"As founding president of Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) he had

been working tirelessly for amicable, peaceful resolution of Bhutan's political problems and the Bhutanese refugee problem since the establishment of the party on February 7, 1992," said his colleague and Secretary of the BNDP Dr DNS Dhakal.

Though it might take some time to fill the vacuum left behind by his untimely demise in the party and in the Bhutanese refugee community, BNDP has pledged to work tirelessly to fulfill his dream as reflected in the founding policy statements of the party.

Refugee leaders recall the admiration that Basnet received from his colleagues in the civil service and King Jigme Singye Wangchuk himself while in the government service. He was close to people from Ngalong and Sarchop communities as well as with the Lhotsampas.

"Late Basnet was perhaps the most important and beloved leader of the Bhutanese people and his loss is a huge blow to the democracy loving people of Bhutan. His mission will remain unfulfilled until human rights and democracy take root in Bhutan and the Bhutanese people of Nepali ethnicity are able to return to their homeland with dignity and honor," said Narayan Kattel, a Bhutanese refugee leader. "For his great contributions, he will, no doubt, be considered a national hero as future generations will get to fully appreciate his sacrifice for our democracy, social well being, individual liberty and happiness," he added.

Basnet breathed his last on August 18 in Bir Hospital, Kathmandu while undergoing treatment for liver and urine related ailments. Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, Finance Minister Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, vice president of Nepali Congress Shushil Koirala, NC leaders Mahesh Acharya, Chakra Prasad Bastola and others paid their tribute to the late leader. Basnet was cremated at the banks of Mai River in Jhapa the following day.

Very few people may be able to fight for the cause as Basnet did. Yet his legacy among the Bhutanese people will continue to inspire thousands of young men and women to continue their fight for peace and democracy back home. Let his departed soul rest in peace.

Durable Solution: India Has the Role

By Shanti Chhetri

After 17 years of deaf ear, the leftists in the ruling alliance, not to ignore a few democrats, have listened to what the exiled Bhutanese said, that they were suppressed and tortured in Bhutan, their right to live has been curtailed. While Nepal, the host country of the exiled Bhutanese, was not up to the snuff for internationalizing the issue, Indian senior minister called it an international problem.

At least, not to boast much, this is major gain on part of the leaders in exile yet they are far from achieving to what they deemed earlier for equality and dignified return. The Indian government continued to linger to discuss the issue on pretexts of presidential election. When it is over now, it has pushed aside the matter. It would not be otherwise to state that it has finally come to the India's responsibility to find home for the exiled Bhutanese.

Nepal had earlier prepared to send a delegation to Thimphu for a last round of dialogue. However, change in government has overshadowed the plan. Bhutan's signal to stop any kind of bilateral talks with Nepal has also put an end to Bhutan-Nepal talks, at least for this time. Indian authorities see it beneficial for them to tell Bhutan repatriate its citizens than allowing the evicted Bhutanese resettle in the United States. It was general experience that refugee resettlement in the western countries has precedence set

in motion the germination of rebellion groups.

US has offered its land to resettle over 60,000 of these exiled Bhutanese repeatedly stating that Bhutan failed to repatriate its citizens and there is a bleak hope it would do so in future. However, there have been no records that US asked the Bhutanese government, formally, to take back its people. This has certainly disheartened some of the enthusiasts who want to get back to their country, while cherished others.

Bhutan cannot escape from the Indian guidance, in the changed context as well where it moves to a democratic system. For centuries, the Druk regime has remained under strict discipline of India, in both internal and external matters, and as the demand for justice and equality appears in the Bhutanese society, India cannot remain a mere spectator to this.

The leadership in exile has finished a round trip to India formally approaching various leaders in opposition and the ruling alliance. Even though they received assurances from the party leaders of their helping hand in favor of repatriation, failure of the leaders to approach the government ministers and the officials would take some time to materialize the assurances.

The fact that India should have realized by now is that communist ideology that attracted the suppressed people in Bhutan is because of its ignorance to pressure the Druk regime to reign justice. The US has come to

the rescue of Indian democrats for communist-free Bhutan. Unfortunately, it is already late, for both India and the US. Now the only option left for India is to finalize the issue at the earliest possible lessening attraction of the people to rebellion groups.

Still, the Indian communists have come forward to lend hand democracy in Bhutan and the democrats failed to do so. This would help build negative perspective throughout this region that justice would not be delivered if support is sought with Indian democrats.

Hopes are still alive. The ruling alliance leaders have shown their interests and pressure on union government is increasing for a 'just solution' of the crisis. This is for protecting the democratic image of India and lessening tension in the region that will directly affect it.

The US might begin the resettlement program soon; some of the exiled Bhutanese will be resettled. Along with this process, the process of repatriation must be begun. The need of security has been always felt. The Nepalese government has stated that it shall provide security to initiate and expedite the process of resettlement. This is very likely to provoke those exiled Bhutanese waiting to have a dignified return to their country. Instead, Nepal, in coordination with UNHCR should maintain peace in the camps, seeking the help of the leaders in exile. Thus is the way, all the exiled Bhutanese—either willing to get repatriated or resettled—shall be free to ponder over the matter.

From Regime

DPT Chooses Thinley its President

**Bhutan News Service
Thimphu, August 15**

Not unexpected as politics unfolds, the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) elected Jigmi Yeshe Thinley to the position of party president.

Over 350 aspirants of the party gathered during a meeting held in Thimphu on August 15 voted against zero for Thinley, who has been influential to the changing politics of the country.

Upon elected as the president of the party, Thinley assured the party cadres of making the party a unique of all to practically implement the notion of Gross National Happiness and vision of the king.

However, the party has not elected any other officials including general secretary, central committee or district committee or sectoral committees. As election approaches near, the party is expected to finalise its candidates, even though the parties are facing short of the candidatures in all constituencies.



The meeting of the party is expected to continue the next day as well to train the candidates and finalise the party manifesto, discuss strategies for the upcoming elections, national policies and issues that party would make its agenda during the polls.

The party has also filed its application at the election commission for registration as legal political group of the country. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), led by King's uncle Sangey Ngedup had submitted its application on August 6.

Private Air Service on the Cards

**Bhutan News Service
Thimphu, August 22**

In a mountainous country, flight service would be a better alternative of transportation than land transport, despite being costly for a poor country like Bhutan. Yet, interests have spelled out to start a private air service.

Yangphel Tours and Treks and the managing director of Bhutan Tourism Corporation Limited (BTCL) have submitted a letter of intent to the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) to start domestic air services in the country. "We have submitted our letter of intent to the government with a proposal for a small airline which can fly throughout the country especially in the east," Karma Lotey, the managing director of Yangphel said.

BTCL Managing Director Yeshey Norbu said the plan is just in maid if air service would be

viable between Paro and Bumthang.

They are looking at small, 9-8 seater, safe aircrafts like Pilletus PC 12, Cescna and beach aircrafts, to match the country's topography.

In the mean time, the Department of Civil Aviation has said the final assessment for construction of an international airport in Naya Basti in Gelephu has reached the final stage.

The Indian government has pledge support for construction of the airport. A team of aviation engineers from India will make field inspection before formally approving the area for the airport.

The government has already installed meteorological observatory equipment to collect data on weather, temperature and wind direction at the site.

Congress (I) Leader Defends Autocracy in Bhutan

**Bhutan News Service
Kathmandu, September 03**

While the central government of India has termed the issue of exiled Bhutanese in Nepal as the international problem, a leader of Indian Congress, the prime supporter of the autocratic regime of Bhutan, said the issue was bilateral.

Speaking to journalists on Monday in Nepalese capital Kathmandu, Dr Abhishek Manu Singhvi, the spokesperson of the Congress (I), said the problem was of Nepal and Bhutan.

He, however, denied that Indian government shouldn't play any role in finding solution of the problem though he did not explain what role India can play in this regard. He said the two countries should engage in finding solution of the problem and that India should not interfere into it if the two countries agree bilaterally.

He asked both the Nepalese and Bhutanese government to initiate dialogues to find early and amicable solution of the protracted crisis.

Earlier, in a letter by Indian prime minister Man Mohan Singh had assured the chief of the Bhutan Solidarity Dr Sunilam that Indian government would work in close coordination with the Nepalese authority to find solution of the problem.

On the other hand All India Forward Bloc, a leftwing nationalist party in India, has officially asked the Indian government to play a vital role in resolving the Bhutan issue.

The Central Committee meeting concluded recently all the political parties of India to discuss the issue seriously and come forward with a common opinion.

This is the first time any political party in India has passed a resolution on Bhutan problem.

"The political parties of India should also discuss this seriously and make solidarity effort to settle the genuine refugee problem politically in their motherland," the statement said.

Exile Voice

Nepal Decides IOM Membership

**Bhutan News Service
Kathmandu, August 22**

The government of Nepal has decided to obtain the membership of the International Organisation of Migration on August 22 that paved way for the third country resettlement of the exiled Bhutanese.

The process of the resettlement had been hanged due to delay in Nepal's government deciding to take the membership. IOM has been chosen by the US government to take over the management of translocating the exiled Bhutanese from Nepal to US, which the US plans to begin by early next year.

Armed Police for Camp Security

**Bhutan News Service
Beldangi, August 14**

The local administrations in Jhapa and Morang districts have said they would dispatch Armed Police Force (APF) for security in the camps.

The decision has been taken at the wake of a series of violent incidents and approaching date for US government to begin the process of resettlement of the exiled Bhutanese.

The decision was taken at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Chief District Officer of Jhapa Jaya Mukunda Khanal confirmed the move, saying they were making arrangements for security at the camps.

Each camp will have at least 25 APF personnel and will be dispatched once the UNHCR completes the construction of shelter for them.

Construction of security camps, funded by the UNHCR, has already begun.

Condolences



We are very much Saddened with the sudden demise of our beloved leader R. B. Basnet

He was a veteran freedom fighter in the Bhutanese movement for democracy. He had contributed to the society in different capacities. He and his great contribution to the society shall be always remembered by the entire Bhutanese people. We all pray for the peace of his soul in heaven and his grace and care in abundance will live in our hearts forever. We also pray god to give power to the aggrieved family members to sail with the situation. We, the ones, who have always worked together in the past for a common goal, extend our solidarity to share sorrow along with the family members. We extend our prayers for the peace of his departed soul.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Rajan Giri | Jagir Man Lama | Khem R Mogar |
| Mamta Giri/Rai | Phal Man rai | Jit R Mogar |
| DM Pappu Giri | Deoki Lama/Yogi | Lok R Mogar |
| Padam Giri | Esh Bdr Mogar | Nijesh Lama |
| Parshangsha Rai | Nira Giri | Rita Giri/Thapa |

Feature

The Story Tells the Truth

By Vidhyapati Mishra

Nepti Lamhu Sherpa was born in 1986 in Dagana district, one of the most remote districts in Bhutan. Her father died in Bhutan when she was just four. A year after the death of her father, she had to leave Bhutan with her mother and grandma.

When she reached Maidhar in 1992, where Bhutanese refugees were given shelter in early 90s, she was very sad when she witnessed sick, thin, diseased Bhutanese nationals who arrived there earlier. "We came from a cold place in Bhutan. I felt terrible heat as we

stayed in a bamboo hut built in sea-shore of Mai River", she lamented.

When her family was sifted to Beldangi camp she was quite happy. Beldangi camp is moderately colder than Maidhar. She started her schooling from Pancha-oti English School, a school managed for refugee students. She was happy to have her books and copies donated by UNHCR.

Nepti was trapped into another tragedy when her mother eloped with a stranger. Her mother stays some where in India and she

has no ideas of exact location "I saw her 6 years ago when she visited me", told she. Now Nepti stays with her grandma. Her grandma, Thang Singh Sherpa is 83 years old. She has low vision and audibility.

Nepti has to do everything for herself and dearest grandma. "It is not an easy task to run a family. I have no one to assist my survival", she said with her eyes full of tears. She hardly manages time to her studies. However, she is a committed girl. She was forced to repeat her classes in grades seven and eight. When asked about the reason of her failure, she

said nothing but trickled tears down her cheeks. "I am my own father or mother." Certainly that was her reality or reason of having repeated her classes.

Nepti reads in grade nine in Pancha-oti English School. She goes to school at 8:15am and gets back to her hut at 3:00pm. She weaves cap or works in cottage industry of wool run around the camps during her holidays to earn her livelihood. She even sells ration to buy clothes for grandma and her school uniform.

One of her teachers, Ram Dahal commented that she is very laborious and hardworking in her

class. She often goes lost when she makes a recall of her lovely and caring parents. She is worried about her future. "I have no one to support for my studies after I pass grade ten" she told. She has very much missed her parental care. She wishes that her mother soon pays a visit to her.

Life in a camp where dreams diminish gradually. Photo: BNS



“Resettlement Has Already Begun” Its Not We...

contd from page 1

Abraham ABRAHAM, the country representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nepal has repeatedly talked of opening the doors for third country settlement of the exiled Bhutanese as prospects for repatriation has almost closed. Having worked in a number of countries for nearly three decades to repatriate and resettle refugees, Abraham currently he is active in finding out solution for exiled Bhutanese who were evicted some 17 years ago and taking asylum in Ichha Poudyel and Vidhyapati Mishra of Bhutan News Service (BNS) resettlement and other on the contemporary issues. Excerpts:

Is it right that UNCHR stresses on resettlement over other options?

All the time voluntary repatriation has been considered as the best solution. We like that to happen. But when it doesn't happen, we look for other alternatives as well. Resettlement door is actually open and that of repatriation is almost closed.

Majority of exiled Bhutanese and the Nepal government emphasis repatriation, but you say doors of repatriation have closed. Isn't it against their sentiment?

By bilateral talks no single refugee has been able to go back. They (refugees) have waited enough, for seventeen years. They cannot wait another seventeen years for the same.

Some exiled Bhutanese and their leaders accuse UNHCR of mobilizing a few to advocate for resettlement.

As far as we are concerned, we do not support any one whether it is Hari Bangaley or any body else (to advocate on resettlement). Refugees have right to choose options independently.

Presently camps are in quagmire. One cannot talk about resettlement due to fear of intimidation by the pro-repatriation faction. In such a situation, how can the process go ahead?

When we talk of security of a refugee, primary responsibility lies in the hands of government housing them. UNHCR will try its best within its mandate to help them. It is sad that refugees can not talk about resettlement in camps. It is certainly not a democratic practice. Every

refugee has right to know what is going on about resettlement or any other options.

How UNHCR is working to clarify people about resettlement?

We work with the government of Nepal to inform refugees about resettlement. Outright, we haven't worked out for any solution. We look for the comprehensive solution of the problem, not just one solution. We have to look into option which is practical one. Repatriation does not seem anywhere near. We still have to wait for talks. Local integration is not an issue as it has not come into table. Can we do resettlement? Yes, because many countries have offered it.

Is UNHCR helping those who claim to have displaced due to insecurity after Beldangi incidence?

It is sad that people are displaced from camp. It is something that should be addressed by the government of Nepal and UNHCR will work accordingly.

Can you tell us when will resettlement actually begin?

Actually, resettlement has already begun when Nepalese government agreed it as an alternative solution. But we have not started the practical ground work. This requires a lot of preparations. For example, even for US program, there is lot to be done to take refugees and make them adapt to a new place.

Which other countries have offered to resettle exiled Bhutanese and in what number?

Not all members of core group are accepting refugees. It (core group) tries to find out ways they can help refugees. Well, US has offered some 60,000 but it is ready to accept all who are interested. Canada has offered 5,000 and others will announce the number of refugees they can accommodate according to their policy. When it comes to resettlement, it is not a number issue because whoever wants to be resettled, will be resettled.

There has been scuffle in the camp regarding resettlement. Hasn't it conveyed negative message to countries willing to resettle them?

You are making an offer and you do not have to break it. Also all 106,000 may not go. Those countries spending 18 million US dollars annually are

requesting refugees to come and stay in their countries on humanitarian ground. Children in camps should get education. Most importantly resettlement does not preclude their right to return to Bhutan. It is always there.

Some exiled Bhutanese, especially elderly who may not accept resettlement and repatriation may not take place. Will camps be continued in that situation?

Certainly. Till we get funding from international community camps will continue for which I am very positive.

There is fast cut in aid provided. Doesn't it look like a strategy to force them opt for resettlement?

This is wrong. Let me emphasize that no one will be forced to make any decision. I have not taken any steps to cut aid. In fact, this year the UNHCR's budget for them has been increased by US\$ 1 million in health and nutrition sectors. So, why talk of cutting aid when it has not yet happened?

Nepalese media reported some exiled Bhutanese obtained Nepalese citizenship. What measures would you apply to check them during resettlement? Will they be eligible for resettlement?

We are not the ones to make resettlement decision. If any one in camps has obtained Nepalese citizenship, he is not a refugee. So, he will not qualify for resettlement. Countries resettling them (refugees) have their own criteria to strictly check them out.



How have you evaluated Long March?

Unfortunately, one refugee got killed and it is not acceptable to the UNHCR. Here, we like to make it clear that while you have right to return, all must be careful in not jeopardizing the life of refugees - especially of women and children.

Health of exiled Bhutanese is deteriorating and many cases of denial of referral are reported. What's the reason?

First, I do not agree that there is denial of treatment. We have very strong health program in camps. In fact, it is the best sector we have supported. But UNHCR has very important policy that no tertiary referral will take place; if it is a terminal case i.e. if a patient is sure to die in few days or weeks. We have specific guidelines as to whom we can help and to what extent. UNHCR has to support 10 million refugees and over 13 million IDPs around the world. So we may not be able to meet all the expectations of refugees regarding their health and there we have to draw an absolute line and say 'No more'.

CODOLENCES



We are very sad to know the untimely death of R. B. Basnet, President of BNDP. We express our heartfelt condolences to Basnet.

Bhutanese citizens in exile have lost one of their historic leaders. He was much committed towards struggle for establishment of democracy in Bhutan.

His dedication, devotion and contribution to our community will always be remembered.

We share equal pain in this unbearable circumstance. We pray that his departed soul rest in peace in heaven.

APFA-Bhutan
TWMN-Bhutan

incident, the administration should have taken stern action. Such action might help improve the security situation in the camps and enforcement of laws in the camps might become effective. In any form, culprits must not be given freed. It is the responsibility of the administration to find out the real persons involved in the incident and then proceed with legal action against them. At a time, countries willing resettle the exiled Bhutanese and the UNHCR are showing concern on deteriorating security condition, legal action against the culprits would help promote the rule of law and discourage such incidents in the future.

The recent incident when the camp secretary of Beldangi II and extension camps were beaten seems not a planned one. The harsh reaction from Manarath Khanal, camp secretary of Beldangi II extension towards the youths seeking explanation why Dhital was permitted to attend the seminar, engulfed the situation into worse. In addition, the way youths acted while trying to get explanation from the camp secretaries also worrisome. Their way looked humiliating and disrespect towards the leader they chose to head the camp management.

This week, a Nepalese weekly Samay stated exiled Bhutanese began fight to finish among themselves. Thus, it is the matter of concern. All those responsible for the incident should realize that their behavior has favored only the Druk regime who desires let we finish. Our objective for repatriation, establishment of democracy, human rights and rule of law in Bhutan must not divert otherwise due to such incidents. It is utmost important that Bhutanese intelligence also has hand in it. Avoid it.

Above all, the cause of the incident was the result of the two-decade long frustrated life in the camps without any future. In this sense, the host country, India, Bhutan and the international community must take responsibility for all that happened. It must be realized that if the crisis is further delayed, the situation would become even worse. The only solution is the settle the protracted issue at the earliest.

It is the unity that we need at this time, the harmony and the sense of love and respect to each other. The internal conflict can only benefit the Druk regime against whom we have been fighting for the last two decades or more. The youngsters must restrain of their ire and help create peaceful environment in the society, let not the children and olderlies suffer from their act.

Published by: I. P. Adhikari (APFA-Bhutan) for BMS (With partial support from Rajen Giri, USA), Chief Editor: Kazi Gautam, Editor: Thakur P. Mishra
Mailing Address: GPO 8975, EPC 2377, Ktm Nepal, Email: editbr@yahoo.co.uk, URL: http://www.apfanews.com

Beldangi I: Dilip Rai, Ganga Bishwa; **Beldangi II:** Tek Nath Mishra, Pabi Rai, Bhim Kattel; **Beldangi III:** Tara Man Khanal; **Goldhap:** Tika Ram Adhikari; **Timai:** Khem Adhikari; **Khudunabari:** Tri Bikram Adhikari; **Sanishare:** Yadav Neupane, Ravi Chandra Dhungana, Hira Lal Adhikari; **Damak:** Ratna Khadka, Jeetan Subba; **Birtamod:** Kedar Niraula, Puspa Lal Adhikari; **Bhadrapur:** Shanti Ram Adhikari; **Itahari/Biratnagar:** Devi Charan Pokhrel, Nanda Lal Bhandari; **Bhutan:** Binod Sanyashi, Sangey Oendray; **India:** Ganga Adhikari