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Highlight

WFP Security Guard Shot

An unidentified group shot a security guard of World Food Programme (WFP) on January 22 at around 4.20 pm during his duty hour in Beldangi-II extension camp.

According to District Superintendent of Police Raj Kumar Lamichane, Nepali citizen Lok Bahadur Limbu, 59, sustained critical injury due to the bullet.

He was sent to BP Koirala hospital in Dharan for treatment.

Police arrested three including the camp secretary of Beldangi-II extension Ghanapati Adhikari in connection to the shooting. They were released later after interrogation.

Police have intensified their patrol and beefed up the security inside the camps after the incident.

In recent days, threats and attacks by unknown groups have become regular in the camps despite stationing police posts. *BNS*

YOB Polls Adjourn

Bhutan News Service Birtamode, January 29

A central committee meeting of the Bhutan People's Party-affiliated Youth Organization of Bhutan (YOB) has decided to adjourn the scheduled polls until February 25.

President of BPP Balaram Poudel informed BNS that the party approved the decision to hold the election on February 25.

Vice President of the party Jagirman Lama said there is no reason to withhold the election when majority of the central committee members were willing for the election.

Poudel further informed that Rajan Giri, Devendra Gautam and Tika Ram Rai have so far filed their candidacy for the post of president of the youth wing.

Bombs Rock 'Happy Nation', MLM, URFB Own Responsibility

Bhutan News Service Jaigaon, January 20

The Himalayan kingdom has noticed series of explosions that rocked within a couple of weeks from January 20 until February 3 including the capital city, Thimphu.

Communist Party of Bhutan (CPB-MLM) led by Birat has owned up responsibility to the explosion that took place in Samtse district on February 3 while the January 20 attack was claimed by a newly existed United Revolutionary Front of Bhutan.

RBA Found Militant Camp

Bhutan News Service Jaigaon, January 27

A watch team of Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) swapped fire with a militant group in Dhanessey of Tsirang district on January 16, said RBA spokesperson.

RBA claimed that the group had come from camps of the exile Bhutanese in Nepal and

was affiliated with Bhutan Tiger Force.

RBA also reported that its patrol arrested Dal Bahadur Tamang on January 19, affiliated with the militant group.

Army report said that Boli Bhawan was leading the team of militants who managed to enter Bhutan via Assam border.

Central Committee Member of the party who identified himself as 'John' over a telephone conversation with

Bhutan News Service (BNS) from undisclosed location quoted a press release issued on February 4 by Birat, gen-

eral secretary of CPB-MLM, as saying that the party has begun launching 'armed rural class struggle' inside Bhutan to establish people's government.

John further informed the BNS that the party would launch program in three phases that include resettlement of Bhutanese people occupying the land and properties used by evictees of early 1990s, taking physical action against those spying against their democratic struggle, and deconstruction of government infrastructures in rural areas of

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Indian Lawmakers Denied Entry to Nepal

Bhutan News Service Kakarvitta, January 19

Sima Surakshya Bal (SSB) of India barred a delegation of Indian lawmakers from entering Nepal to visit camps where the exiled Bhutanese have been living under UNHCR protection.

Convener of Bhutan Solidarity and Indo-Bhutan Friendship Society Mohan Tamang, who is coordinating the event, informed Bhutan News Service that the SSB personnel have stopped the delegation comprising Debrata Biswas, general secretary of Forward Bloc who arrived at Bagdogra airport via Indian Airlines at 11:35 am. Forward Bloc is part of the ruling UPA government in India.

Tamang further quoted the officials at Indian local authorities as saying that the delegation was stopped at Panitanki, Indo-Nepal border, in accordance with Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code.

Indian parliamentarian Biswas has been playing important role in mobilizing other parliamentarians in

Delhi to accelerate the repatriation process of the exiled Bhutanese.

Biswas in a press conference in West Bengal after the incident said "India, Nepal and Bhutan should jointly solve the



problem of the Bhutanese in exile." He said that he would take up the issue as a challenge in the parliament. He also said that India, being the immediate neighbor has inevitable role to play to resolve the problem peacefully for which he was in a mission.

Heten Burman, Deep Sarkar, Ritish Bhatacarya and Anand Swarup Verma were prominent leaders in the team. Indian force also barred Nepali media persons to attend the press meet. Several organizations condemned the India's undemocratic act.

'No Education for Lhotsampas'

Tri Vikram Adhikari Khudunabari, January 23

Two Bhutanese students (names withheld) studying inside Bhutan have stated that students from Nepali-ethnic community are denied opportunities to pursue their higher education despite their high score and better performances in examination.

The two girl students who have recently visited camps of the exiled Bhutanese in Nepal have reported the annual fee in the school is at least Nu 20,000.

They claimed that students from Nepali-ethnic community are not given chance to join the country's one of the best col-

leges, Kanglung College, after grade XII. "The seats are limited for Nepali-ethnic community students at this college in comparison to other ethnic groups", they added.

They are strictly monitored on any talks on 'refugee issue' and if found discussing on it, the administration slaps either jail term or face physical punishment, they said. They also said that majority of Bhutanese from Nepali-ethnic community, who were denied the issuance of ID cards and No Objection Certificate, were barred voting in recent election. "Even our families were among those barred from casting vote", they added.

NC Elections Completed

Bhutan News Service Thimphu, January 31

The election of 20 people's representatives to the National Council concluded on January 29 in the five remaining dzongkhags.

The election was held on Thimphu, Haa, Tashiyangtse, Lhuentse and Gasa.

There were no contesting candidates in Gasa, Lhuentse and Haa, the people voted for yes or no to one candidate in each of these districts.

The National Council, which will act as a house of review will have 25 members, with the King appointing five persons to the council.

Editorial

No Violence Please!

Finally, Bhutanese soil is likely to see violence targeted at establishing 'democracy' in the country following the launching of 'Armed Rural Class Struggle' by Birat-led Communist Party of Bhutan (CPB-MLM) with a blast in Samtse on February 3. Not to an exception, peaceful country-the 'Last Shangri-la' began noticing the commencement of violence predicted by many after the regime absconded from delivering solution, through peaceful means, as demanded by suppressed pro-democracy Bhutanese since the last two decades.

MLM rebellion came just after two weeks of serial bombings that rocked at four different places including the capital city, Thimphu. Messages of likely violence, even in the days ahead, can be read between the lines if Druk oligarchy still turns deaf ears towards resolving the current political problem in the country.

Besides, this violence can undoubtedly be termed as a 'result' of India's, one of the big democracies of the world, continued intension to keep absolute Druk regime under its armpits. Nevertheless, violence doesn't necessarily hammer on the exact 'point' to establish democracy as has been observed around the globe.

CPB-MLM should admit the fact that peaceful struggle will moreover garner support and solidarity from international communities in comparison to what they launched 'Armed Rural Class Struggle' as an alternate means to establish people's democracy in Bhutan. The absolute Druk regime, on the other side, should own up responsibility for greeting violence in the peaceful country by underestimating the genuine demands raised by suppressed Bhutanese people.

Bhutanese government should initiate urgent measures to sort out peaceful solution before violence gets matured thereby leaving adequate space to see blood-bath situation in the country. No violence please!

Analysis

Fledgling Democracy

Bhutan's first democratic election has produced a notably young band of lawmakers for its upper house, the National Council. The body, elected in the historic poll of 31 December 2007, is made up mostly of Bhutanis in their 20s and 30s, and contains a number of fresh graduates, a few retired and working bureaucrats who resigned to contest elections, and others with military-family backgrounds. Indeed, the oldest newly elected official is only in his mid-50s. The main reason for this result was the Thimphu government's requirement that candidates have college degrees – a necessity that rules out much of the country's populace. As could perhaps be expected in a first-time democracy, these faces may be fresh, but each now appears to lack political experience. Indeed, many would do well with some rapid inculcation of democratic culture and norms.

As Bhutan's first democratic institution, the new National Council boasts a relatively skewed representation of the country's major communities. Of the 15 elected members, six are from the Ngalop community, the ruling elite; six are from the Sarchop community, of the east; two are from the Lhotshampa community, the Nepali-speakers of the south who make up 30 percent of the country's population; and one is from the Kheng community, hailing from the centre of the country. Among them, just three are women.

The end result notwithstanding, the early reports on 31 December showed that the road to democracy would not be without bumps. On the whole, voter turnout was lower than had been forecast, despite the royal government's public urgings, and the two rounds of mock elections in April and May 2007. The attendance on polling day appeared even less than the fairly dismal 55 percent claimed by the Chief Election Commissioner, Dasho Kunzang Wangdi. In Trashigang, Bhutan's easternmost district and the stronghold of the Sarchops, 47 percent of the 18,109 registered voters turned out to vote. In Wangdue Phodrang, in the central part of the country, there was a 61 percent turnout.

These figures, however, do not necessarily reflect actual turnout, as problems also persisted at the polling booths themselves. According to eyewitnesses, many voters encountered 'unsupportive behaviour' from election officials while attempting to vote, and ultimately went home without having cast a ballot. In Trashigang District alone, hundreds of people were forced to walk again and again between two polling stations located two hours apart, trying to find their names on voter lists.

In Zhemgang, Trashigang and Pemagatshel districts, large numbers of voters never received the necessary voter-identity cards, which only months earlier had been made mandatory. Still others arrived assuming that they would be allowed to vote with only their standard identity cards, a confusion that was evidently fuelled by the fact that such cards had been acceptable months earlier, during the mock polls. Already by lunchtime on 31 December, the number of voters had shrunk, and polling booths in many districts were going empty. Those who were still around seemed to lack much enthusiasm for the elections: while leaving the polling booths, observers reported that there tended to be little talk about who the voters had selected, and very little comparing of notes. Some voters appeared grumpy that polling officials had asked them to spit out their doma, or paan.

Procedural lapses

Despite claims to the contrary, Bhutan's first polls were not an accomplishment that

was built on lengthy preparation. Not that there had been no time. The country's democratic transition began a decade ago, when then-King Jigme Singye Wangchuk replaced the longstanding cabinet with a new one. At that time, in 1997, such actions, including a rethinking of the king's autocratic rule, had begun to seem increasingly necessary. Dissatisfaction among the Sarchops of the eastern districts was high and climbing, and even some high-level officials within the royal government had begun stepping out of line. Then there was the decision on the part of the general-secretary of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce to extend support to the demonstrations in the east.

In an attempt to win sympathy, King Jigme subsequently brought into his fold a small number of influential eastern Bhutanis. Thereafter, under pressure from the easterners, a plan for democratic transition was put in place. It would also have to be said that the demands for democracy and representative politics from the Lhotshampa of the south was met with the boot. It was this suppression that ultimately led to the flight of a hundred thousand refugees, who today live in UNHCR-overseen camps in southeast Nepal.

On the evidence of the recent elections, Bhutan's transition to democracy still has some hurdles to cross. According to the country's draft constitution, released in March 2005, the National Council polls were not to have been politicised. Rather, it is not until the elections to the lower house, the National Assembly, currently slated for 24 March 2008, when the country's few nascent political parties will technically be able to openly take part. But the politicisation of the National Council elections is now being seen by some as reflective of insincerity on the part of party leaders and the monarch. In Trashigang and Zhemgang, for instance, party workers openly lobbied for their desired candidates, and met with no disciplinary action from the Election Commission. This was in direct contradiction with the Commission's sternness in the southern districts, such as Chhukha and Sarpang. In these areas, Lhotshampa candidates who failed to receive tickets from political parties were barred from contesting in National Council elections, and tshokpas (local-government village representatives) of Lhotshampa origin were terminated from their positions for attending party meetings.

This supposed non-politicisation of the National Council election process proved a bugbear until the end. Despite the time devoted to preparations, voter education, which would seem to have been considered a priority in the context of Bhutan's embryonic democratic process, left much to be desired. Leaving aside understanding the crucial difference between the upper and lower houses, until just before polling began the electorate was even confused about whether it was voting for a party or a candidate.

The actual process of voting seemed just as fraught. Despite the use of sophisticated electronic voting machines, many voters lamented either not being able to see the photos of the candidates on the ballot, or were still unsure as to which button corresponded with which candidate. Some expressed outright uncertainty over whom they had voted for. Others reported having simply tried correlate their favourite candidate with the colour of the gho (the national dress for Bhutani men) being worn by the figures in the ballot photos.

The absence of observers throughout the country on polling day was another notable

lapse on the part of the Thimphu government. All in all, there were only nine international observers – three from the Indian Election Commission, one from Australia and five from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Thimphu. Some raised questions about the Indian Election Commission sending observers, as it could have been seen as having been an organiser of the polls. The other observers, meanwhile, seemed unable or unwilling to file much of a report on the proceedings, or they seemed impressed enough that the process was simply going forward in the first place. The UNDP chief in Thimphu, Nicholas Rosellini, visited a few booths around the capital city, to conclude that the polling was both smooth and fair. Election Commissioner Kunzang Wangdi trumpeted similar claims.

Council to Assembly

In the end, perhaps they were correct. The lapses detailed above are only to be expected in the first-ever exercise in conducting a countrywide poll. Though there is much work to be done in the interim between the 31 December National Council elections and the upcoming 24 March National Assembly elections, Bhutanis have reason to be optimistic that the process of a peaceful transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy has gotten underway.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, in the month since the polls, there has not been a single formal complaint filed at the Election Commission against the results. In fact, most of the losing candidates themselves have expressed satisfaction with the outcome. The attempt to democratise an absolute monarchy itself is appreciable – not least with regards to the erstwhile absolute monarch himself. In time, Bhutan's case may well set a new example for absolute rulers regarding the option of progressive transformation.

That said, the movement towards the National Assembly will not be nearly as easy for the country as was the National Council elections. Two months before the lower-house polls, there are still just two legally registered political entities, the People's Democracy Party and the Druk Phuensum Tshokpa. Both of these entities have stated that their ideologies are based on Bhutan's 'Gross National Happiness' agenda, while the former has also emphasised the environment, and the latter the preservation of 'culture'. But the inevitable complaints and counter-complaints between these two parties could well mar the fairness of the next democratic exercise, not least by souring the experience for the people themselves. Despite the calm surrounding the National Council elections, the Election Commission has already received more than five dozen complaints from both sides in the lead-up to the 24 March polls.

Even outside of the public political arena, things have been heating up. On 20 January, the kingdom was rocked by a series of bomb blasts in four places across the country, including Thimphu. With the people of Bhutan now fearing that inadequate arrangements have been made for public safety, observers have warned that the attacks could further impact on voter interest and turnout. Given the lower-than-expected participation the last time around, the government could face even higher hurdles in bringing the public to the polling stations in late March – particularly if the situation on the ground gets increasingly tense as campaigning goes on.

Meanwhile, preparations for the National Assembly polls remain far behind. To learn from the experience of the National Council elections, there is a press-

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Exile Voices

Eight Leave BACC to Join ABA

Bhutan News Service

California (USA), January 15

A group of Bhutanese American Community Center (BACC) defected from the organization to join Association of Bhutanese in America, chaired by D. P. Basnet.

But ABA said it is not necessary to defect from an organization to join it. Ananta Gurung of BACC told Bhutan News Service that the defecting members have not tendered their resignation formally, while Hari Acharya of ABA did not clarify if this organization has accepted membership of defecting members outside BACC.

Dick Chhetri, Sunita Chhetri, Rajen Giri, Rita Giri, Phal Rai, Mamta Giri, Kiran Pradhan and Anup S. Lepcha left the BACC to join ABA. The defecting group accused BACC being 'factional organization'. The defecting BACC members denied plea from establishment group to reconsider their split.

Nepal Issues Exit Permit, UNHCR Welcomes

Bhutan News Service

Kathmandu, February 01

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has welcomed Nepal's recent decision to issue exit permits to exiled Bhutanese so they can be resettled in third countries.

The Nepalese government had decided to issue exit permit for the exiled Bhutanese willing to resettle two weeks ago.

In a statement, the UNHCR's spokesperson William Spindler said, the move is 'an important step towards finding solutions for over

107,000 exiled Bhutanese who have been in Nepal for 17 years'.

As the resettlement process gets momentum, first batch of the exiled Bhutanese are expected to leave Nepal early next month.

"While resettlement offers a welcome solution for those who voluntarily choose this option after 17 years in the camps, the UN refugee agency will continue to advocate for the option of voluntary return to Bhutan for those exiled Bhutanese who wish to do so," Spindler said in the statement.

Children's Difficulties

Bhutan News Service

Kathmandu, January 17

Bhutanese children in exile identified that economic difficulties to study beyond grade 10, lack of citizenship, the current political tensions and insecurity in the camps are the major problems they have been facing at this point of time.

In a new research carried out by 29 children, coordinated by an Oxford researcher Roz Evans, revealed that some children live in especially difficult situations. These include children living without their parents, in single parent families and with elderly and/or disabled parents.

A group of the child researchers, in a public presentation of their research in Kathmandu, expressed their interest in moving to third countries where they hope they will have a better future, with more rights, citizenship and access to good educational opportunities but equally stressed their wish to return to Bhutan as well.

Hold the horses of your imagination. This is just an accurate extraction from a poem written by one of my relatives of just 12-years-old, at the end of her letter, delivering an explicit message not to opt for the option of Third Country Resettlement (TCR) floated by the United States.

It could be a theme of great concern as she inked yet an added two-lined much consequential 'slogan' - *Tesro muluk janey ko birodh garu, sahid haruko sapana pura garu* (meaning- Lets oppose those going to third countries and lets fulfill the dreams of martyrs).

I immediately made her telephonic inquiries if she had known what 'martyrs' and 'TCR' mean because she had not even seen Bhutan once. "I don't know", she replies with quiet a shivering voice where confusions could be easily read between the lines of her expression. Not only Devi Maya (Name withheld), hundreds of Bhutanese children languish-

From Regime

Govt Forms GNH Commission

Bhutan News Service

Thimphu, January 19

The government formally announced the formation of a commission on Gross National Happiness on Friday, which will combine the functions of the National Planning Commission and the Committee of Secretaries to streamline the principles of GNH in national plans and policies.

The new commission will be chaired by prime minister with

the cabinet secretary as vice-chairperson. All government secretaries and chief of the national environment commission secretariat will be the members of the commission. Present planning commission secretariat will be transformed into the GNH commission secretariat.

The Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS) will develop practical and target-oriented indicators for GNH while the coun-

try will have its own Bhutan Development Index (BDI), being developed by the CBS to measure the progress in development.

A press statement by the PMO said, all ministries will have GNH committee chaired by secretary, the directors as members and the chief planning officer as member-secretary to the committee. Similar committees will also be formed at the dzongkhag and gewog level.

Candidates Ready For Contest

Bhutan News Service

Phuentsholing, February 02

The two political parties - People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) said they have finalized their candidates for 47 constituencies for the National Assembly Elections

scheduled for March 24.

A statement by PDP said its executive committee meeting held on January 30 finalized the names of the candidates.

After the nominations, its president Sangey Ngedup instructed the candidates that it is not enough for the candi-

dates to just win the elections but the party has to win for the country and the true winners must be the people of Bhutan.

The other party Druk Phuensum Tshokpa also said it has finalized its candidates in all the 47 constituencies.

Resettlement Vs Child Psychology

By T P Mishra

*"Tesro muluk haina hami
Tesro muluk haina hami
Aphnai desh janu parchha
Bharat hudai Phuntsholing hudai hami
Bhutan chhirnu parchha hai ta?"*

Meaning:

*"We should go to our own country
Not to third countries,
Through the routes of India-
Phuntsholing
We should enter Bhutan"*

ing under the UNHCR-sponsored camps in Nepal are mentally disturbed due to lack of reliable and adequate information on TCR.

Devi May simply knows that her country is Bhutan. She even lacks knowledge on how Bhutan looks like because she was born and grown-up in Nepal for almost a decade. Devi Maya's father

who served in one of the schools inside refugee camps as an assistant teacher for more than 7-year terms her daughter's newly adopted style of penning letters as just a 'depiction of worsening environment prevailing

in camps'.

When asked if he is responsible for not clearing up mental disturbances of her daughter on TCR, he presented himself 'irked' towards concerned authorities

Tesro muluk janey ko birodh garu, sahid haruko sapana pura garu (meaning- Lets oppose those going to third countries and lets fulfill the dreams of martyrs).

including the UNHCR for not publicizing reliable information on TCR in an open way. "How can parents make their children aware when they themselves lack information on TCR", he questions.



Today, many children in refugee camps simply opine in the exact ways how Devi may expresses. They are even mentally disturbed on whether to give continuity to their studies. Resettlement process itself is a lengthy process. Besides, the TCR program is likely to happen spending another few years with quiet a significant figures of refugees opting for it. Hundreds of refugee children like Devi Maya are new practitioners to swim in the rivers of confusions getting themselves mentally disturbed following the lack of accurate information on TCR.

Devi Maya's slip-up and immature opinion, 'Let's oppose those going third countries', clearly reflects mental disturbances within refugee children. Aren't concerned authorities morally ready to own up responsibility to clear-up mental disturbances possessed by refugee children?

Blasts...

the country.

A bomb had exploded behind the Renewal Natural Resources (RNR) office in Ghumauney gewog at the midnight on February 3. It further said, two more unexploded bombs were found in the area, one behind the RNR office and another behind the office of gup (head of village).

Four bombs that blasted in between 11.10 am and 2.10 pm in four different dzongkhags on January 20, including one in the capital, Thimphu, left million worth properties damaged. One minor was reported to have sustained critical injury in the blast that took place in Chukka.

Bhutan Press Union, Association of Press Freedom Activists - Bhutan and Third World Media Network- Bhutan Chapter condemned the action. Similarly, Druk National Congress (DNC) led by Rongthong Kuenley Dorji has categorically denounced the serial bombing.

Options For Refugees

By Vidhyapati Mishra

When bilateral approaches in resolving Bhutanese refugee crisis failed, a group of countries came forward with the Third Country Resettlement Plan (TCRP). The United States, Australia, Canada, Denmark and Norway represent the core-group headed by the United States. These countries vow that the resettlement offer is totally a voluntary and humanitarian.

A press statement issued by the US Embassy on January 16 highlighted that each refugee is entitled to make his or her own choice, in an atmosphere free from threats and intimidation. This shows that the third country resettlement plan is voluntary. Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, Ellen R Sauerbrey during her visit to refugee camps last November made similar comments at UNHCR-administered Goldhap and Beldangi-I camps. In her speech, she stressed that the TCRP was 'voluntary' and no one could force individual refugee to adopt it.

During Sauerbrey visit to Goldhap camp, a few interesting things happened. She delivered her speech to refugees gathered there and left the stage telling representatives from the UNHCR, International Organization for Migration and the United States would answer all queries related to the TCRP. During the question-answer session, the scene was quite funny. Refugees raised several questions to quench their curiosity but answers given by the delegates made refugees crack jokes out of them. The situation pointed that refugees lack enough information on the TCRP. They have several questions and want the authority concerned to clarify them.

Rumors on TCRP

It is not that all refugees understand what delegates of UNHCR or core-group communicate. There are elderly who regard that the TCRP to the US or elsewhere is like a human going to the Moon from the Earth. Youth have some reliable information but they want more specifically based on health, education and employment in the host country. In this regard, information provided to the general mass is insufficient. Even means of information on the TCRP is inaccessible to everyone at the camp.

The elderly and illiterate refugees raise several questions to literate ones or refugees staying outside the camps. What can they expect from those who also lack detail information on this issue? The responses to such questions have made them more confused when answers differ from one person to another. When these sorts of details are passed to a third person, many things go added or subtracted. Finally, it becomes a source of confusion and rumor.

Country selection

The refugees are not informed on what basis a family or individual refugee is chosen. When country selection is granted to refugees, there are questions on voluntary resettlement. The questions refugees have on the TCRP are related to the host countries. Therefore, refugees anticipate clarifications from agents of concerned country

but not probably from the staff of UNHCR or of International Organization of Migration.

Refugees attending interviews are also confused. Some are called to the UNHCR and others to International Organization of Migration, Norway or Australia desks. Different agents interview even refugees having same case or condition of vulnerability. Interviewees, who come to the UNHCR or International organization of Migration, raise several questions on the TCRP. However, several interviewees are simply told that a particular host country taking them will answer their questions.

If qualified for resettling country's interview, refugees will probably raise questions but when conditions are unsatisfactory, there is a chance of withdrawing applications. Nevertheless, UNHCR's booklet on the TCRP clearly states that applicants withdrawing their processing are not granted the TCRP in the future. This is more complex as it creates fear on voluntary processing for the resettlement plan.

Employment opportunities

Sauerbrey informed refugees that selection of refugees wishing to adopt the TCRP in the US is not determined by age, sex, skill or education of individual refugee. However, the US has not informed the refugees about the system of employment once the refugees reach there.

The US offers three types of employment opportunities for the refugees. First is the entry-level-job which requires little skill or experience such as hotel housekeeper, stewards and factory workers. Welcome to the United States, a guidebook for refugees writes that these jobs do not require a high level English and many refugees willing to resettle in the US find these jobs comfortable. Second is the skilled-labor-job requiring higher education or certain level of skill. But these kinds of jobs require licensing or membership of a union. The guidebook has clearly mentioned that licenses possessed by the refugees in the host country are not accepted without the US certification. The third type is professional job, which needs college degree with advanced English and high level of skills in the field.

Refugees have no idea as to what type of jobs they get in the host country. If they are clearly mentioned about the type of jobs, hourly wages, house rents and the like they can create a true judgment in

their hearsays. Students who have acquired various certifications and academic degrees in Nepal have a fear that their documents will turn into showpieces.

Travel loan

The next confusion on the TCRP is travel loan. Different countries have different schemes and facilities to the refugees. From the very beginning, the US has been stating that refugees will have to repay the travel cost.

The US sources claim that the travel loan paid by the refugees goes into a fund that helps other refugees travel to the US. The US system requires that family members over 18 years of age receive such a loan. Before a refugee travels to the US, he will sign a paper called a promissory note, promising to repay the loan. A few months after a refugee arrives in the US, he must start repaying travel loan on a monthly basis and must complete in maximum three years. However, refugees are not informed of the exact figure of travel loan. Further, what happens to the loan if refugees do not get employment in the US is not clarified.

US military service

Several young refugees fear that they need to join the US military services. The US system asks male refugees over 18 and below 25 to register with the selective service. The selective service is a government agency that can call individuals for military service, usually at the time of war and all members of US military are volunteers at present. The US has been telling that this is a voluntary scheme to refugees. Nevertheless, there is hidden secret that people who do not register might find it difficult to get permanent residency and citizenship if they wish to make the US their permanent home.

Thousands of Bhutanese, who fled their country for safety and security in the late 80s and early 90s also, filled up a so-called voluntary form, which described that they would never return to Bhutan or undergo rigorous imprisonment if they do so. That has become a great tool for the Druk regime and often it utters that the refugees left their country voluntarily. Again, after 17 years of unproductive stay in the camp another voluntary offer — the third country resettlement plan — is knocking doors of ramshackle huts.

(Source: *The Kathmandu Post*)

Fledgling Democracy

ing need for the Thimphu government to smoothen the process of voter education, and to increase the number of polling booths across the country. This would ensure that more people are both willing and able to take part in the election, and would ease the burden on villagers in remote places. With an electorate that is around 400,000-strong, this should be relatively easy to accomplish within the next two months. Additionally, the Election Commission critically needs more personnel, both permanent and volunteer, to educate the electorate about the importance of adult franchise in a new democracy.

In addition, the voter-education campaign must not focus solely on the immediate elections, but increase its scope. It will need to educate the people about the role of voters specifically in a parliamentary democracy, as Bhutan aims to become one. As things currently stand, for instance, draft constitutional provisions in Bhutan require an interim government, led by a chief justice, to come to power 90 days before polls are held, vested with the sole responsibility of overseeing the electoral process. This requirement has yet to be highlighted, prompting speculation that the eventual power centre might not adhere to the country's constitutional provisions, even after promulgation.

In the Bhutani context, one particular factor to watch out for in the upcoming months will be nepotism. Unfortunately, this inevitably became the basis for acquiring votes during the National Council polls, with many voters noting that the predominant factor in their choice for candidate had been their family's proximity to the contender. More than anything else, this is perhaps one of the most crucial reasons that Bhutan's new slate of Council members is relatively short on pertinent experience and expertise.

Ultimately, as has been proven time and again in Southasia and around the world, simply holding polls is far from enough to declare a democracy. In particular, a democratic transition powered in part by outside forces — whether India, the US or the World Bank — would undoubtedly face complex contradictions if it does not match local aspiration and public sentiment. More troubling, in bypassing the massive number of Lhotshampas evicted during the early 1990s, while also restricting a similar number still within Bhutan from casting votes, the Thimphu authorities have injected an unneeded tension into the country's fledgling democratic process, just as it is taking its first steps. (*Himal South Asian, February 2008*)

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