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No progress appears to have been made on the question of Bhutanese Refugees of Nepali origin though high hopes were raised soon after the visit of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to Bhutan, Nepal and two of the Refugee camps in the last week of April and the first week of May, 2000.

Mrs. Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees visited Bhutan in the last week of April in an effort according to Kuensel "to encourage an early solution to the problem of the refugees in eastern Nepal." She was received by the Foreign minister Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley.. Except for a big write up about the past achievements of Ms. Ogatao, the Bhutanese official sources kept a studious silence and the official statements were more in the nature of diplomatic generalities.

It was in Kathmandu that Ms. Ogata opened up and said that the "objective of her visit was to facilitate the resolution of the nearly decade old problems at the earliest" and that she had embarked on a visit to Nepal and Bhutan to **mediate** between the two sides.

She stopped short of calling for India's involvement for solving the dispute. Instead, she said that "while she believed that India's role in resolving the refugee issue as significant, she believed that the problem between Nepal and Bhutan would be resolved bilaterally." She also met the Prime minister, the Foreign minister and the Foreign Secretary of Nepal.

It was during the visit to the two of the Refugee camps in Jhapa Goldhap and Beldangi that Ms. Ogata made the surprising statement that she came to the refugee camps after holding talks with senior officials of the Bhutanese government and that the Bhutanese officials had urged her

to convey the message that they were ready to take back home the Bhutanese refugees back to Bhutan. This statement was made before thousands of refugees in the Beldangi camp and she added "**I pledge that UNHCR will take every effort to return you.**"

A fortnight prior to her trip to Bhutan and Nepal, Ratan Gazmere, the Chief Coordinator of the Association of Human rights activists, Bhutan, submitted a compact disk containing a digitalised database covering 50,000 refugees and asked her to use her influence in solving the Bhutanese refugees crisis.

More significantly Gazmere in his statement called upon the UN Commissioner for Refugees and the UN High Commissioner for Human rights to jointly undertake an independent and impartial verification exercise on the basis of "internationally recognised human rights norms and principles and expressly repatriate the Bhutanese people to their homes."

The declaration of the UNHCR Commissioner that they would be sent back to Bhutan has raised very high hopes among the refugees. Nothing has been heard from the UNHCR after the visit though the refugees are eagerly awaiting the good news.

The statement that Bhutan will be willing to take all the refugees to Bhutan appears to be too good to be true. There could be no dispute or argument in repatriating those who were coerced to sign the voluntary relinquishment of their citizenship and those who have valid documents to prove their citizenship. Instead what appears to be happening is that haggling is going on to the numbers that could be taken into Bhutan and numbers that would remain in Nepal and India. Bhutan and Nepal will be doing great injustice to the refugee cause if they agree to some arbitrary figures behind the backs of the refugees.

UNHCR by making the high profile visit of the Commissioner has given notice that it would take a "pro active" role in the Refugee crisis henceforth. Worse still, when the UN high commissioner for human rights also steps into this crisis. This has serious and larger implications particularly for India. While India has been washing its hands off by insisting on bilateral negotiations, it cannot now complain when UNHCR is taking the initiative to actively mediate between Nepal and Bhutan. India has also to take note that many of the left overs in the crisis are bound to settle down in India ultimately once UNHCR stops funding the refugee camps.

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