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If injustice is happening to your neighbour and you can sleep, wait for your turn. You are Next- Shiv Kherra, International Educator and Motivator.

The great "show" of verification goes on: The Joint Verification team has so far verified 862 houses from the Khudunabari camp consisting of 5336 members. It took them 77 working days in the period between 26th March and 27th July 2001 (4 months).

Thus to verify 100,000 members in all the camps, it would take 6 years and 3 months. Meantime there would be a natural addition of another 12,000 members at least which would take another 9 months and in all, at the present rate, the verification may be completed in seven years.

From what we hear, after verification, the process of categorisation will take place under four heads namely 1. Bhutanese forcibly evicted, 2. Bhutanese who "voluntarily" migrated 3. Non Bhutanese and 4. Bhutanese with criminal records. Then comes the harmonisation process. It is not clear what the Bhutan government means by harmonisation. If it is meant "discussion" between two governments in evaluating the verification data and placing them in slots it would take a few more years and then comes the major problem- repatriation.

Thus it would take more than ten years to complete the harmonisation process (whatever that means) and the Bhutan government could take its own time

to settle the refugees. Thus the refugees (granting that genuine refugees as identified) who had waited ten years will have to wait for a minimum of another ten years to go back!

It is now clear that the Bhutan King and his coterie are not willing to take back any refugee in the near future. It is alleged in the camps that the whole process of verification is a fraud being committed on the refugees. **None of the refugees in the camp believes that the verification process will take them back home.**

It appears that UNHCR is in a position to make logistical arrangements for as many teams as may be required. But Nepal and Bhutan do not appear to be interested in expanding the teams to expedite the process.

Bhutan is happy with the current pace of verification: Some analysts believe that it suits them, as the very idea of verification was to postpone the repatriation itself. Otherwise how does one explain the statement of the Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan (Kuensel July 14, 2001, P 6) "that in the final analysis, it was the result of the process that counted most, not the pace of the process?" Well said, since neither he nor his family is affected, but what about those hundred thousand refugees who are eager to return home?

Worse still, is the statement made by the deputy minister of the National environment commission who alleged that the people in the camps are not refugees at all but are those who have been lured by money. It is nothing but an irresponsible statement from a responsible minister. Only he and his King would have the international community believe that many of these people who owned property worth thousands and lakhs of rupees have willingly gone into camps to get a daily dole of 400 gms of rice, 60 gms of dhal and 25gms of vegetable oil from the UNHCR! What a Goebbelisque statement!

Injustice of this magnitude is nothing but a sin: One has just to visit the camps and the conditions under which the refugees live to realise the abject conditions under which the refugees live. The families live cheek by jowl. There is no privacy for women or young girls. Teen age marriages are now on the increase. A few touts from outside have started operating within the camps and some girls have already been lured to Mumbai. Some Christian missionaries have become active and playing upon the frustrated feelings of the people have successfully converted a few of the refugees. The neighbourhood in all the seven camps are not friendly either. The irony is that most of the elders in the camps had not visited Nepal until they were forcibly evicted from southern Bhutan. They knew only India! **All of them without exception want to go back home.**

Thus a great injustice has been perpetrated on the innocent people of southern Bhutan and there is no end in sight. Persecuted by Bhutan, neglected by Nepal and worse still, with Indian indifference, the refugees have no where to go or complain.

The only silver lining for the refugees is that the UNHCR is doing a magnificent job. Whether it is in distribution of rations, running of schools or in making logistics arrangements for verification, they are doing it efficiently to the satisfaction of all the refugees. Some leaders of the refugees want the UNHCR to take a more "pro active" role to persuade the two governments Bhutan and Nepal to expedite the verification and to ensure that the genuine citizens are settled back home in Bhutan. The European union is already seized with the situation and is aware of the plight of the refugees. The United States is also interested in expediting the process of repatriation. The chances of the issue getting internationalised are bright.

Verification process is not transparent either: No one knows how the verification is going and both the teams of Bhutan and Nepal are tight lipped. People from the Khudunabari camp who have been verified say that most of them have produced over a hundred documents to prove that they have been living in southern Bhutan for generations. Tax receipts, Identity cards, communication from the government approving the construction of buildings, Pattas etc. have all been produced. Some of them have been village "mondals" for generations. The questions that are asked are "why did you leave?" If one said that he was forcibly evicted by the Police, the team leader of Bhutan responds , "what is the proof? And where is the order? . When the magistrate comes personally with a posse of police, what orders are the poor individuals supposed to get in writing before they are thrown out of their homes?

Take the case of Gang Ram Nepal, who was a mondal. He had 25 acres of land under paddy cultivation and his annual income was in lakhs. He was told that he had, on his own run away with 12000 rupees of the government to escape law and is supposed to have registered himself as a "refugee." If he was to run away, he would do for other reasons and not for a paltry sum of 12000 rupees which he could pay any day. Some of the points that have come to notice, in the verification process were

* The Bhutanese delegation is taking the lead in asking questions. They have all the records with them and know exactly why and under what circumstances individual families left. Having the records before them, the leader looks for the "weak points" and puts the question in an aggressive manner. The refugee on the other hand out of fear that he and his family including his children will be placed under category 4(criminals) is afraid to open up and relate the atrocities committed on him and his family.

* The form the refugees are made to fill, does not have space for more than 20 words in the column in which the refugee has to indicate why he left Bhutan. To list all the aggressive tactics and forcible eviction made by the Bhutanese administration officials would take many pages! Take the case of R.B.Gurung or of I.B.Khadka of Beldenga II camp. In both cases their families and relatives were systematically harassed and some were put to jail for months. How are they to write all the atrocities committed on them in 20 words?

* The Nepalese delegation have got into their head that their role is one of "observers" and do not have to ask questions even by way of clarification. They give the impression of being happy to be there and to leave as soon as possible at the end of the day, having earned their daily allowance!

* No effort is made to scrutinise the voluminous documents produced by the refugees. Three copies are made of all the documents. One copy each is meant for each delegation and it is not clear for whom the third copy is being made.

An analysis of those interviewed indicate that most of them are genuine citizens: A sample survey of 4000 persons who have been interviewed in the verifications gives the following startling results.

* 68.5 percent of the people left the country under severe administrative pressure from the Dzongda (District Administrative Officer), the Dungpa (Sub divisional officer) and village head mondal. The Police were present to give them the "muscle " to forcibly drive them out.

* 21.05 percent were for other reasons, like they were afraid when their relatives were harassed or the anchor man of the village was taken to prison.

* 10.3 percent said they left under military pressure.

Almost 80 percent of them had identity cards to show.

This division is likely to be obtained in most of the camps. The surprising thing is that not one of those verified is a non Bhutanese.

It looks as though Bhutan is buying time with the tedious process of verification in the hope that at the end of the day the refugees may give up all hope and begin to look for a new life in Nepal or outside!

Is the refugee problem a result of a deliberate policy of an ethnic cleansing pogrom? There is no doubt that the refugee problem is the result of an ethnic crisis. In the initial stages in the eighties when the King was confronted with a figure of over 44 percent of the presence of Bhutanese of Nepalese origin in southern Bhutan he perceived a threat to his position and the political system where all the powers are concentrated with the King. The immediate cause for eviction would have been due to the activities of a very minute section of some misguided members who demanded the introduction of democracy. But soon the problem took an ethnic colour with the enforcement of Dzonkha language, dress code etc. It now looks that the King is now proceeding towards a conscious policy of strengthening the Dzonkha Buddhist identity, where the Nepalese culture, religion or language would have no place. Some of the recent steps taken by the King lend credence to this view.

* The resettlement programme continues with full vigour and the places vacated by the Nepalese are being given away to the people from the

hills from the central and eastern region.

* All the evictees have Nepali ethnicity.

* The coterie round the king have indicated that not a single refugee will be taken back whatever be the result of verification.

* In the Royal council, there is not a single Nepali member now.

* There is no representation for the Nepalese in the council of ministers.

The *Chimi* brigade goes into action: From the current national assembly session of the last three weeks one could see that the whole show was nothing but a competition among the *Chimis* one trying to outdo the other in condemning the people in the refugee camps. It is obvious that such statements are meant for the King. Or is the King orchestrating all the proceedings to give him space to reject the verification process itself (if and when it is over) to say finally that his **people** do not want it?

- The *Chimi* from Samtse: The people did not want the Ngolops (southern Bhutanese) to return because they left the country after destroying schools, BHUs, and committed acts of violence including murder. (Some forty thousand people in the camps are students and attendance is hundred percent in some schools. Why should they destroy the schools to become refugees when they looked at education as their main asset? It should be mentioned here that the performance of the students in the schools in the camps is far better than the students of schools of Nepal itself. If these "violent prone" people have come to camps how come there is not a single case of murder within the camps?

The Haa *Chimi*: " We have not forgotten the unpardonable acts committed by them (refugees) against the people and the nation. How can the government even consider the return such people.

The Gasa *Chimi*: The camps in Nepal consisted of two kinds of people: criminals and those who were masquerading as Bhutanese refugees. These people tried to take over the country through propaganda and outright violence."(The Gasa Chimi should get full brownie points from the King although what he said was absurd)

The Paro *Chimi*: It is important to note that the people who had gathered in Jhapa,Nepal (the refugees in camps) were not Bhutanese as claimed by them. (Then why this verification process?)

Inactivity of Tek Nath Rijal is curious: Ever since Tek Nath Rijal, one of the world's prisoners of conscience was released from jail he has been totally inactive. For a while he remained in Thimpu after seeking audience with the King. There was no response from the King and for medical reasons he has moved to Phuntsoling. It is not clear whether the cases against him have been withdrawn which is most unlikely. He is also being harassed by local intelligence and is moving from hotel to hotel. One is reminded of the situation faced by B.P.Koirala who though released never got an audience for a long time from King Birendra and even though he was free, the cases against him continued in the courts. B.P.Koirala never lived to see the ushering in of democracy in Nepal for which he spent his entire life. One hopes that Tek Nath Rijal who spent ten years in jail takes an active part to ensure that his people now languishing in Nepal return to their homes with honour, in his life time.

The Maoists and the Refugees: Despite the propaganda of Kuensel and the chorus one sees in the National assembly proceedings in Bhutan, the Bhutanese in the camps indulge in no political activity. There are signs that this situation may soon change as there are too many frustrated youths now who have no employment and are uncertain of their future. Some disturbing trends are

- * The regions surrounding the seven camps are all hot beds of communist activity.
- * Till last year UNHCR through Caritas were funding the higher education of students who pass the tenth standard. From this year this has been stopped. These youths have nothing to do and are good material for extremist activities.
- * Some of the teachers from the camps who found jobs outside the camps have been forced to return to the camps by the Maoists who of late have become very active in Jhapa once again. Probably the Maoists want a quid pro quo for allowing the teachers to teach outside.
- * There is an unconfirmed information that over two hundred youths have joined the Maoists. The figure is a little high but it is certain that more than fifty have joined the Maoist ranks and more are likely to join. By this, youths get training and soon many elders may come to think that it will be an asset later.

The hope of the Refugees: It is rather surprising, but most of the refugees hold the view that only the King of Bhutan and India could solve the problem and get them out of the misery they are experiencing. Some of the elderly refugees who had worked with the King are surprised that the King of Bhutan has changed from what they knew of him.

A few years ago, when we started studying the problem of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, we honestly felt that the King who by himself benign and sympathetic was being misled by the coterie round him. But over a period of time it looks that we were mistaken. The whole exercise seems to be not only to strengthen his position and the system but to strengthen the "Druk identity" of the Kingdom. He appears to sacrifice the good of the hundred thousand of his subjects for the sole objective of preserving the Druk culture and language. It is a heavy price to pay.

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