

SAFHR's E – BRIEFS: BHUTANESE REFUGEE SITUATION
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Scrutinizing land Resettlement Scheme

The resettlement of Bhutanese people from north and eastern zone in Southern Bhutan on the land belonging to the Lhotshampas (Southern Bhutanese) started in 1993. The first resettlement programme was carried out in Samdrupjongkhar district in Bhangtar sub-division in Bakuli block with 58 ex- Royal Bhutan Army families. From 1998 the Royal Government of Bhutan has undertaken a massive land resettlement programme in six southern districts. The names of the districts, blocks and villages have been changed particularly in the south to make them sound more like names in northern Bhutan.

Districts <i>(In Southern Bhutan)</i>	Blocks <i>(Under Sarbhang and Samchi districts)</i>	Villages <i>(Lalai block/Sarbhang District)</i>
Chirang to Tsirang	Lalai (Sarbhang) to Umling	Bistadara to Dumeng
Samchi to Samtse	Danabari (Sarbhang) to Chuzang-gang	Katusay to Rizong
Sarbhang to Sarpang	Suray (Sarbhang) to Jigme Choling	

The resettlement programme is undertaken in the following areas:

S/No.	Districts	Sub-Division	Blocks
1.	Samdrupjongkhar	Bhangtar Daifam	Bakuli Daifam
2.	Sarbhang	Gaylegphug	Gaylegphug Danabari Lalai Taklai Bhur Suray Leopani Sarbhangtar Toribari
3.	Chirang	Lamidara	Lamidara Tshokana Kikorthang Goshiling Dunglagang Shemjong Phuntenchu Chirangdara Patalay
4.	Dagana	Dagapela	Emirey Goshi Suntolay Tashidin
5.	Samchi	Chengmari Sibsoo	Ghumaunay Nainatal Chengmari Sibsoo
6.	Chhuka		

The Royal government of Bhutan, in the guise of rehabilitating landless people, has been closing the possibility of the return of the evicted citizens by distributing land belonging to them. It is reported that the northern Bhutanese persons have often been coerced into settling on land belonging to the evicted Lhotshampas. It is quite apparent from the notices appearing from time to time in the Kuensel that these persons who are being allocated the land are reluctant to occupy it.

Kuensel, March 20, 1999



**Dzongkhag Administration
Tsirang**

DAT/ADM-/98-99-

Announcement

Landless people from other Dzongkhag who got land allotment in Tsirang Dzongkhag under resettlement programme have failed to report despite repeated requests of Dzongkhag. Therefore, Tsirang Dzongkhag administration once again requests them to report immediately as the cultivation season is already set in. Non-compliance shall be viewed very seriously and Dzongkhag administration shall not be held responsible if any complication arises in future on the matter.*

**Old name of Tsirang was Chirang*

Dzongkhag

Kuensel: March 27, 1999



**Sarpang Dzongkhag
Announcement**

All the Shi-Sarps (Re-Settlers) of phase one and two from different Dzongkhags should report to their respective areas under Sarpang Dzongkhag within April 1999. Failure to report within the above dateline, this Dzongkhag Administration would consider the lands to have surrendered by the Shi-sarps (Re-settlers) to the Government. The concern Dzongkhags are also requested to kindly inform their respective Shi-sarps (Re-settlers), to report within the above dateline. For convinence of the Dzongkhags the list of Shi-sarps will be faxed to the individual Dzongkhag within the week.*

**Old name of Sarpang was Sarbhang*

Dzongdag

During the 76th National Assembly session held in August 1998 the Bhutanese government announced that around 1027 households from north and east of Bhutan had been rehabilitated in southern Bhutan. The 'people's representatives' asked the government to speed up the resettlement scheme and also to expand it to other southern districts.

As a result of this, today several hundred acres of land and housing properties in the six districts of southern Bhutan belonging to over 100,000 Lhotshampas (*Southern Bhutanese*) refugees are being distributed to northern Bhutanese families under the resettlement scheme of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

The government authorities undertook this scheme asking the 'land-less people' to apply on the prescribed application forms to the government for land. When asked by the media, it acknowledged that the government was distributing 'only those lands' in Sarbhang, which belonged to people who left Bhutan 'voluntarily'.

It may be noted that this scheme of resettlement in the south is of recent origin and that it was not in practice before forcible eviction of the Lhotshampas. It is ironic that the northern Bhutanese families are being resettled in southern Bhutan on lands belonging to Bhutanese refugees who are still aspiring to return from the refugee camps in eastern Nepal. On one hand the Bhutanese government is trying to convince the world community that it is negotiating for the return of refugees through a bilateral process with the Nepalese government, but at the same time it is distributing the landed property of the refugees to the people from the northern Bhutan.

The resolutions adopted by the 76th National Assembly of Bhutan has linked this resettlement scheme with the government's developmental perspective. Nevertheless, it is not too difficult to see that several of the northern families now resettled in the south had very little option but to accept what was forced upon them by the district authorities. When these northern Bhutanese learned that the land and houses being allocated to them actually belonged to the Lhotshampas and that one day those people might return and claim their land, the northerners did not want to take it. However, they were forced to resettle on these lands by the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Presently the resettlement scheme is on full swing in the districts of Chirang, Sarbahang, Samchi. However, similar schemes are also underway in two other districts of Samdrupjongkhar and Chhuka.

The blocks from Sarbhang district which were the first to have been given away are Lalai, Danabari, Bhur and Gaylegphung. In Lalai block alone more than 300 families from east and central Bhutan are reported to have been resettled. Similarly large quantities of land and housing properties under Lamidara, Kikortang, Tshokana, and in Chanuatay blocks under Chirang districts were given away to northern Bhutanese families.

Resettlement in Samchi district started from Ghumaunay and then moved on to neighbouring Nainital and Chengmari Blocks. More than 200 families have been reportedly resettled so far since January 1999. The Royal Government has established a Royal Bhutan Army Training centre in Ghumaunay block after the mass exodus of early 1990s.

There were reports that when in 1998 the northern Bhutanese families declined to take the government's offer of free land and housing materials, some families were arrested in connection of non-compliance to the order.

Hundreds of acres of agricultural land owned by some 450 families in Dnabari block in south Bhutan's Sarbhang district, most of whom are now refugees in eastern Nepal, have been given away to more than 300 new families from the north beginning in 1998 by the Royal Government. The new settlers are known to have been forcibly brought from north central districts viz *Bumthang* and *Tongsa* and eastern districts of *Mongar* and *Tashigang*.

In order to make this program a success, attractive and acceptable to the families from the north, the government supplied free building materials and financial assistance. The government reopened most of the basic facilities like schools, health centers and other social service schemes in these areas that had been closed indefinitely in 1990 owing to the agitation for democratic reforms by Lhotshampas in the south. The houses in the urban areas from where the southern Bhutanese were evicted is now occupied by the bureaucrats, the main government agents and their kin folk, whereas land in the rural areas have been distributed to the people from northern Bhutan.

Bhutan should stop the resettlement programme that is being undertaken in the southern Bhutan and arrange to moveback all those families who already been resettled on the land of the refugees. The bilateral dialogue between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan cannot yield any result if Bhutan continues the resettlement programme. If this resettlement scheme continues then more Lhotshampa families will be evicted form the country. In the south the culture, language and the religion of the northern Bhutanese is being imposed on the Lhotshampas. There are reports that the Lhotshampas are facing harassment and humiliation at the hands of the new northern settlers and government officials.

Situation Update:

Tek Nath Rizal released:

Mr. Tek Nath Rizal, a leader of Bhutan's democracy movement, who was adopted by the Amnesty International as a "Prisoner of Conscience". was released along with 200 other prisoners including 39 political prisoners on December 17, 1999 coinciding with the National day of Bhutan. Mr. Rizal who was an elected member of Bhutan's Royal Advisory Council was abducted from Nepal on November 16 1989. He was sentenced to life imprisonment by the High Court of Bhutan on November 16, 1993, for violating the National Security Act of 1992, which was passed two years after Rizla's incarceration. Three days after this, His majesty the King of Bhutan had ruled over the court's verdict and declared that Mr. Rizal would be released upon finding a solution to the Bhutanese refugee problem.

Mr. Rizal after his release is reported to be waiting for an audience with His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. He has said that he would continue to struggle for the just cause of the Bhutanese people. The Kuensel (government newspaper) of December 18, 1999, stated that, in a *Kasho* to the Home Minister His Majesty explained that, although Mr Rizal had been sentenced to life imprisonment for subversive and treasonable acts against the *Tsawa Sum* (King, Country and the people), He was being granted the royal pardon because he had not physically carried out acts of violence and terrorism and that he had already served 10 years in prison.

Madline Albright writes to the Foreign Ministry:

January 1st week: Madeline Albright the secretary of State of United States had sent a letter to the Foreign Ministry of Nepal expressing interest in the long standing Bhutanese refugee crises in Nepal. She writes that US wishes the crises to be resolved soon and has appreciated the way Bhutanese refugees are kept in the camps. (The Kathmandu Post, January 22,2000)

Ms. Julia Taft call Foreign Minister Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley:

January 14, 2000: The Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration in the United States Ms. Julia Taft discussed with Bhutanese Foreign Minister and other high officials the 11 year old problem of the Bhutanese refugees who are in the camps in eastern part of Nepal.

Ms. Julia Taft. Visited the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal on October 9, 1999 and met the Representative of UNHCR. (The Kathmandu Post)

Vollebaek to raise refugees issue during his trip to Bhutan:

January 14 2000: Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek said he would raise the issue of Bhutanese refugees during his Bhutan visit. "Since I have discussed with the Nepalese Government about the refugee issue, it will also be natural for me to ask Bhutanese Government how they asses the situation and see that the problem can be solved," the Norwegian Minister told the Rising Nepal before boarding the Bhutan bound Druk Air's aircraft. "This is a serious problem and we will have to see how it can be solved." (TheRising Nepal)

Foreign Minister expects to resolve Bhutanese refugee crises ' in a month':

January 13, 2000: Foreign Minister (Nepal) Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat said that the fate of nearly one hundred thousand Bhutanese refugees languishing in Nepal could be decided "within a month." " We are holding another round of meeting with Bhutan within a month. After that we will hopefully identify the genuine refugees and initiate the process of repatriation. We want it to be the last meeting between the two countries regarding the refugee problem," the Foreign minister said. Eight rounds of talks between the two countries have failed to yield desired results.

"The misunderstandings between the two countries have been cleared," he said, adding that the Bhutanese government thought that Nepal was taking interest in their internal affairs but that the Nepali side has assured them that it has no interest in their internal affairs. (The Kathmandu Post)

Bhutan Charged of Human Rights violation: According to the Wall Street Journal, January 25, 2000 Bhutan's attempt to buy a building in New York's First Avenue to house its United Nations mission has hit a snag following charges of human rights violation.

Nepal Bhutan talks February 14 – 16 2000. The secretary-level talks between Bhutan and Nepal held in Thimphu ended without much progress. The talks were held for preparing the groundwork for the ministerial level meeting and to work on modalities of the verification of refugees ended with a decision to hold yet another round of official level talks in the first half of March as the Bhutanese side asked for more time to discuss the different aspects of the refugee verification process. The two sides have been disagreeing on the verification process for long. Nepal has been demanding that the verification team should visit all the camps interviewing the heads of the families whereas Bhutan wants to interview every member of the family. It is said that Bhutan has been demanding details of every person in the camps. (The rising Nepal and Kathmandu Post)

AI talks with Bhutanese refugees February 22, 2000. Amnesty International (AI) has urged Bhutan to open dialogue with its Nepali-speaking population in the south and stop courting new problems that would further complicate the issue. Mr. Rori Mungoven of Amnesty International's Director for Asia Pacific said that they were shocked to see the level of marginalization of the southern Bhutanese during their visit in 1998. (The Kathmandu Post)

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