

Democracy Movement Steps up in Bhutan

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

Some political analysts say the movement for democracy in Bhutan may be an important foreign policy issue for major political parties in Nepal's May parliamentary elections.

Can We Afford 140 Million?

Bangladesh's population at the end of the present century, which is a matter of ten more years only, is projected to reach 140 million. Can we afford to have such a population with the area and the economic and social indices remaining constant at around present figures? That's quite a question, perhaps one of the most important questions that the country now faces. A correspondent has written to The Daily Star from Beijing focusing on the very same question and contrasting Bangladesh's situation on the issue with China's satisfying performance on the same score.

The answer to that is very easy. No, we cannot. It is not this answer that is sought while posing the question. What then? — is the true question that lurks quite transparently behind the obviousness of our headline today or of the article by the correspondent as published on Monday. We must, by all means, stave off an accretion of about 26 million in our population over the next ten years — that's again an obvious answer which again begets a tough query — how?

Before we go into an examination of that we must be sure in our minds that by cringing from the 140 million mark we do aim not to hit that in the next ten years alone — but that we decide not to hit it in a matter of fifty years by which time we can hope to raise ourselves from the present socio-economic morass. Only when we shall clearly be out of our present holes can we be able to grapple with that big a population. This thought, this keeping the 114 mark quite out of any time-frame and making it absolutely out of bounds for many decades to come, is sure to give a new perspective to all our plans and endeavours in the field of containing the present chain reaction of population growth. Radical growth in every aspect of our social being, excepting in population and poverty, is a precondition for proving a match for the 140 million mark. All this is another way of saying that our birth rate must diminish at a rate that it drops dead at zero growth before the century is out — and doesn't pick up again anytime before many many decades.

Consonant with the above we must also be clear about another thing before we can hope to come to grips with the present population problem which so much resembles a cancerous growth. We can hardly entertain 'can we afford 140 million?' as a good and meaningful question unless we first face up to the more primary one — 'are we quite affording our present 114 million?' The answer should be an emphatic no. We have miserably failed to make even 114 million affordable. When we had to contend with some 50 million less than that we were rending the skies with cries of this is no life. To improve on those days of unrelenting exploitation and injustice and indignity we carved out a state all for ourselves. Things have hardly improved after that and the population figure has raced past the 100 million mark as if in no time. There was at that time no sign by which we could say well this 64 million seems to be affordable. This affordability is a phenomenon that does not capitally relate to population statistics but calls for other socio-economic parameters. That is where the story from Beijing — so definitive and enlightening — falls short of contributing meaningfully to the point of affordability. It focuses only on one of the aspects — how best to restrict population growth. The Chinese success story was there to inspire us.

But for Bangladesh it is much more than a question of the mechanics of bringing the size of the family down — with norplants or morning-after pills or whatever. It is a maddeningly convoluted maze of a social phenomenon crying not only for drastic measures in all directions but for restructuring at the base. And this is far from un-realizable. The just concluded elections have provided reasons for optimism in all areas of national life. Given the will to overcome and the right quantum of application we can certainly, with time, improve on our socio-economic parameters just enough to make our present 114 million meaningfully affordable.

Hiding Your Waste

It had never been much of a secret that several industrialised nations have been dumping their toxic and other waste on developing countries, especially in West Africa, often in collaboration with local unscrupulous companies. It took a little time for some Third World nations to know what was going on. Once the alert was on, most African countries imposed a total ban on import of industrial waste, while Latin American nations started talking of a similar move. Unfortunately, nothing much was heard from Asian countries.

Now, the environmentalist group, Greenpeace has just released a 400-page report at a news conference in Brussels detailing how the export of toxic and industrial waste has been going on from the developed nations to the Third World, often disguised as materials for recycling. According to the report, the waste export has climbed a record level of 50 million tons a year, despite all the efforts by some developing nations to deal with the menace.

Unless the details of the report are made available, we would not know the situation in Asia. Whether or not we are directly affected, we must see this as a global threat to environment and, to that extent, a matter of immediate concern to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Meanwhile, let us give credit to the Greenpeace for a job well-done.

QUOTES

In is unrealistic for the public to expect that a single meeting between the ANC and Inkatha would resolve the question of violence.

— Nelson Mandela

On renewed wave of black-on-black violence in South Africa.

DEMANDS for democracy and human rights in Bhutan are gaining momentum with activists staging silent demonstrations in the neighbouring Himalayan kingdom of Nepal.

The demonstrations, organized by the Bhutanese Cooperation Group, have been supported by various political parties in Nepal. There is popular sympathy for the movement in Bhutan as the repression affects mostly ethnic Nepalis.

In the eastern township of Biratnagar, a "Bhutanese People Cooperation Forum" has been launched to support the dissidents. Some Bhutanese have alleged that it is a design for "Greater Nepal," or a federation of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

Bhutanese are inspired and encouraged by "Jan Andolan," or the popular movement that toppled down the authoritarian Panchayat regime in Nepal last April giving way to multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy.

"We have to support the Bhutanese people for democracy with the same spirit when we took part in the liberation movement of India (against the British in 1947) and are raising our voices against the apartheid policy in South Africa," says Nepal Communist Party general secretary Man Mohan Adhikary.

He has called for ending a "despotic system" which exercised control on all aspects of life: religion, culture and custom.

Girija Prasad Koirala, general secretary of the Nepali Congress, the largest political party which most believe would form the future government, has also appealed to the Bhutanese ruler in September to "give up the policy of confrontation and introduce multi-party democracy before things get out of hand."

Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, who came to power following the "Jana Andolan," has not yet taken a public stand on the issue. He had a word with Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuk in Male during the South Asian summit conference in November on the treatment of ethnic Nepalis in that kingdom.

"We had friendly and frank conversation on the political situation in Bhutan, particularly the problems faced by ethnic Nepalis there. His

Majesty agreed that there were some problems and assured me to try solve them," Prime Minister Bhattarai told *Depthnews*.

Rishikesh Shah, eminent scholar and president of the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal, says the "despite the close religious, cultural and geographical ties between Nepal and Bhutan, the Nepalis are not extending due sympathy to the Bhutanese people in their struggle."

He wants Nepalis to give full support to the movement launched by the Bhutanese People's Party (BPP).

BPP President R.K. Budhathoki claims here that Bhutanese troops have killed 531 Bhutanese opposed to the regime, and they have been able to recover only 194 bodies so far. More than 200 people have sustained injuries, and 4,115 activists have been detained and are being tortured.

The Bhutanese people would not remain a silent spectator if the royal regime in Thimphu continued the sup-

pression, he warns. He says, "we would revolt if our demands are not met."

"We are ready for a dialogue with King Jigme Wangchuk," says D.P. Kafle, a Kathmandu-based BPP liaison officer. The talk must take place outside Bhutan as BPP workers have been described by Thimphu as "traitors" and liable to punishment by Death.

"The demand for democracy was launched by the BPP last October 16 which the Nepalis celebrated as the traditional Day of the Crow. In response, King Jigme increased the number of troops from 6,000 to over 17,000. Young people are being forcibly recruited, Bhutanese dissidents say.

Most schools and government offices in the southern and eastern parts of the kingdom have remained closed for the last several months. There are 10,000 Bhutanese in exile in Nepal, and another 12,000 have taken refuge in India, according to Mr. Kafle. Government troops have

been harassing ethnic Nepalis. Last October 30, in Dagapala, troops set on fire the houses of opposition leaders. Ethnic Nepalis face political and social discrimination and are also deprived of citizenship if they fail to produce evidence that they have lived in Bhutan before 1958.

The BPP had submitted a memorandum to King Jigme on July 2 asking him for political reforms. But the government has shown no response other than further suppression. The regime has dubbed the democratic movement as "acts of terrorism."

"We are aware that the regime will suppress our demonstration but every member is ready to face the bullet in the quest for a free and democratic Bhutan," the BPP said in a statement.

In a pointed editorial, the state-run Nepali daily *The Gorkhapatra* noted that monarchy was set up in Bhutan only 83 years ago and that it

was not yet free of India's influence despite independence from Britain in 1949. Monarchy in Nepal has a 200-year history and the Hindu kingdom has never been under any colonial rule.

"It would be prudent on the part of the Bhutanese government to fulfill demands for multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy," the daily said hoping that this would be in the interest of the kingdom's territorial integrity and stability.

Mana Ranjan Josse, a widely respected columnist, recently pointed out the wide discrepancy in the official and more independent estimates of Bhutan's population.

Bhutan's official figure is 1.4 million. Balram Paudyal, leader of the People's Forum for Human Rights of Bhutan, says the population is 491,000. The BPP says it is 'no higher than' 600,000.

Mr. Josse says there are many explanations for this yawning gap. Mr. Paudyal claims Thimphu "inflated population figures to get more aid from world organizations." Another explanation is that Thimphu is trying to surpass the true figure of Nepali ethnic component of its population. — *Depthnews Asia*

Cracks Widen in Yugoslav Federal System

Petar Hadji-Ristic writes from Zagreb

Yugoslavia is in serious trouble. There is talk about a break-up of the federation of six republics formed at the end of World War Two under marshal Josip Tito. Two republics, Croatia and Slovenia, reject the federal army's view that federal laws take precedence over republican ones. They want a loose confederation of independent states, or even complete secession, but Serbia, the largest republic, is determined to preserve the old federal system.

GRAFFITI on a wall just off the main Square of the Republic in Zagreb, the capital of Yugoslavia's second-largest republic, reads in English: "Croatia forever." On public buildings the republican flag—not the Yugoslav one—is flying.

But behind this display of independence there is deep anxiety about the possibility of federal army intervention and civil war. Housewives are hoarding food and children are kept off the streets at night as Yugoslavia faces its most serious crisis since the war.

Police dressed as commandos, with rifles slung over their shoulders, could recently be seen guarding the parliament of the republic of Croatia. Inside the government buildings was Croatia's Minister of Defence, Martin Spigelj, the man at the centre of the latest scandal rocking the country.

The federal army, which is drawn from all six republics, has claimed Spigelj was planning an insurrection and illegally bought arms from Hungary for a reserve police or paramilitary force in Croatia. But the vice-president of the Croatian parliament, Vladimir Seks, said the army made up the story as a pretext for intervention in Croatia.

"The evidence was rigged, the witnesses false and the aim was to provide the psychological justification for army intervention in Croatia," he said. "I hope this (army intervention) doesn't happen. But if it does, it will be the end of Yugoslavia and the army."

Spigelj, who, until multi-party elections a year ago, was himself a lieutenant-general in the federal army, dismissed the army evidence against him. But he had already recalled the arms and demobilised the reserve police force he had been arming. Now the federal presidency is trying to defuse the crisis it fears could bring about a bloody end to Yugoslavia.

Spigelj's defence has been: "No one can threaten me with arrest or interrogation; for me, only the laws of the republic of Croatia apply, and nothing else."

At issue is whether Croatia will submit to the army's view that Yugoslav federal law takes precedence over republican law. Croatia, and the republic of Slovenia to the west, clearly believe they do not. That sentiment speaks volumes about the quagmire into which the Yugoslav federation seems to be sinking.

The Croatian and Slovenian vision of Yugoslavia is at best a loose federation of independent states. Otherwise, they could try to secede from the federation.

With the conflict between

the federal army and Croatia still unresolved, the army has been forced to move on yet another front. Top generals, both serving and retired, are backing a new nation-wide political party aimed at preserving communism in a federal Yugoslavia — just as the country's founder President, marshal Josip Tito, would have wished.

The President of the new movement, the League of Communists Movement for Yugoslavia, Dragan Atanasovski, announced at the party's first conference in Belgrade that: "The main aim of our movement is to keep Yugoslavia as a federal, democratic community of all its nations and nationalities and to build socialism."

Says Stojan Cerovic, a journalist on the independent Belgrade magazine *Vreme* (Time): "This party is made up mainly of army pensioners, people who worry about the future of Yugoslavia and their status in society... army, police, people form the power structure whose main aim is to keep everything as it is."

They couldn't possibly

come to power through normal elections. But with the help of army intervention they could, and so become a political instrument of the army."

A resolution to the current conflict might only be found if Croatia were to allow Serbs living in its boundaries to join with Serbia. But Croatia has ruled this out.

And even if that question were resolved, there would be many others. Serbs are spread throughout the country. Such is the heritage of communist rule under which Tito, drew republican borders without much regard for distribution of different nationalities.

Sociologist Vesna Pestic explains: "Croatia wants its independence immediately. But Serbia wants to keep Yugoslavia as an expression of its national interest or to make a greater Serbia which would mean taking a part of the territory of Croatia. For the moment this conflict seems unsolvable."

This sentiment was confirmed by the Croatian vice-president Vladimir Seks when he was asked whether Serbs

from Croatia could eventually join Serbia. "Croatia's constitution would not allow it to be divided up," he answered firmly.

Film-maker Lazar Stojanovic thinks civil war has already begun in the country. "Now it's a propaganda war but with all the characteristics of a civil war."

Liberals like the sociologist Pestic are deeply concerned by the way politicians like Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic have whipped up nationalist tensions and the effect of endless political scandals on public opinion. "Almost every 15 days a new scandal erupts, whether made by Milosevic in Serbia, Tudjman (in Croatia) or someone else. Our enormous energy is taken up by matters which are not of prime importance, everything else in life goes into second place," said Pestic.

The Yugoslav economy is also in crisis. Annual inflation is running at more than 100 per cent, some factories have not paid workers for months, thousands have joined protests, even pensions are now sometimes being held up, and the economy seems on the verge of collapse with the

prospect of several millions out of work. with the prospect of increasing economic difficulties, new fears raised by the Spigelj affair and with people hoarding food in case of an outbreak of serious violence, perhaps even civil war, some intellectuals are calling on politicians to declare a moratorium on the settlement of their conflicts.

Pestic has suggested it should be formulated to give each republic the maximum independence and the minimum requirement for joint action. It is hoped that one or two years of peace would allow the introduction of democratic reforms. But even if the federal presidency, which has representatives from each republic and is meeting in the coming weeks, were to agree to such a moratorium, there are still deep anxieties among intellectuals. "We are worried because we never and enough strength to break away from this totalitarian ideology on which we relied, either communism or nationalism," said Pestic. "It's a specific problem of the Yugoslav people."

GEMINI NEWS

PETARHADJI-RISTI has written extensively on Balkan affairs. He was previously based in Belgrade where he represented several major western newspapers. He has just returned from making a documentary on the political crisis in Yugoslavia.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

a worthy citizen of the country, given a chance.

We generally tend to think, that once a person becomes old, and is still healthy, he or she should devote more and more time to rest and religious pursuits and somewhat retire from daily-life chores.

But this is wrong. The old can be as useful as the young, and may equally contribute to the society.

Fahim Dewan Munshiganj

Plastic wares

Sir, It is indeed encouraging to note, that plastic wares are taking over almost completely in the area of household items. More and more plastic goods, mostly for the kitchen, the dining room and other sundry stuff are being produced of colourful plastic.

The positive side of plastic is that it has brought variety and colour as well as innovative designs, which give a chance for joyful shopping to a bored housewife. Besides, it is light in weight and to an extent fall-proof, which add to its advantage.

Moreover, the items made of plastic are comparatively cheaper than those made of glass porcelain and metal. So it is economical in these days of hardship.

The best and most important part is that these are locally manufactured, thus we can hope that a

day will come in the future, when we won't have to depend on imported wares at all.

But how healthy these are as alternative to china or glass tablewares; experts please pay a heed to.

Rafiq Ahmed Wari, Dhaka.

Nostalgia

Sir, While we admire your column "My World" intensely, and make it a point to read it from the outset to the end on the weekends despite all other preoccupations, we don't get to the point why do you assume the role of a super-annuated grand-uncle who loves to dwell on the past, and simply suffers the present for the lack of a suitable alternative? Why must men in their fifties and sixties act like octogenarians?

We read as treasure every word you care to hammer out on the page, appreciate the psychological insight, integral humour as well as the social impact of whatever topic you care to dwell on. But could you not be looking ahead, telling us also more about the present, mingling as you do it with the nostalgic past? The past is nothing to belittle or brush aside, but there is still a wide world ahead — of mental creativity if not more.

G.D.H. Banani.

Of letters and post offices

Sir, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that letters cost different rates at different post offices. My post cards abroad cost me Tk 11 at the Dhanmandi post office while the same cost Tk 9 at the PG Hospital Day and Night Postal centre.

Again, the postal authorities do not always care to read the address and charge you according to their own calculation and fancy. This often arises from the misreading of the address such as Austria for Australia.

Another factor that annoys me is that I am not always given my change in money but in postal stamps which are so tiny that they disappear in my miscellaneous bag for my nine-to-five job. When I am given spare tickets for Canada, it might take me a couple of months before I might require them again, by which time I may have misplaced and lost the necessary tickets.

Although I am always pleased to get my letters on my table when I return from work, it sometimes happens that my letters are delivered at the wrong address, despite clear

addressing on the part of the sender. I am again not always lucky enough to get the letters that contain photographs.

I would be grateful if the postal authorities were a little more careful with their duties.

Mrs. F. de la Harpe Dhanmandi.

Life and hope

Sir, In the recent polls, we noticed that elderly people, both men and women and some as old as a centenarian, had eagerly come to the polling centres to cast their vote.

Now, this shows two things, one that although we may consider the old as useless and good for nothing, except perhaps praying and telling tales to grandchildren, they themselves would not want to be all that useless.

Another thing that came out is, as long as there is life there is hope, and together with it a desire to be of use.

A person may be very old, but that does not mean that he or she has lost all interest in life and its myriad manifestations. He or she may still want to be

The making of Yugoslavia



Country known as Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed under King of Serbia, Alexander I, partly from old Austro-Hungarian Empire.



- 1929 Serb-Croat dissension leads King to abrogate constitution, form own cabinet, rename country Yugoslavia.
1934 King assassinated. Son Peter, aged 11, succeeds. Uncle Prince Paul becomes regent.
1941 Paul signs pact with Germany. Peter sets up own government. Germany invades. Guerrillas fight Germans under rival leaders-Tito and Mihailovich.
1945 Tito is victor, forms full communist state. Mihailovich shot.
1948 Tito breaks with Stalin
1953 Tito becomes President
1980 Tito dies. Collective presidency takes over
1990 First multi-party elections