

US attempt to settle refugee issue in Nepal

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, December 2

THE CLINTON administration, now in its last days, has initiated a move to end the dispute between Kathmandu and Thimphu over the identification and repatriation of nearly a lakh people who have been languishing in refugee camps in Nepal after being displaced from Bhutan for about a decade ago.

United States Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Karl Inderfurth, along with Assistant Secretary of the United States State Department's population, refugees and migration Julia Taft, will fly to Bhutan on Monday to discuss the two-step mechanism that they initiated to end the refugee crisis in their meeting with Nepalese Prime Minister G P Koirala here yesterday.

The United States proposal includes identification of the head of each nuclear family who would then identify other members of his family.

Following this, Thimphu and Kathmandu, with the assistance of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, will

begin verification of persons eligible for repatriation.

Julia Taft claimed that Nepal has given a gesture of support to the proposal. She added that it would also address the Bhutanese concern of knowing who their people are.

Describing the refugee stalemate as "one of our unfinished businesses", Inderfurth said, "We want this problem to end in a manner that is satisfactory to both."

He added, "We expect a continuity in the United States policies in South Asia whether there is a Republican or Democratic administration."

Like India, the United States holds the refugee issue as a bilateral issue between Bhutan and Nepal.

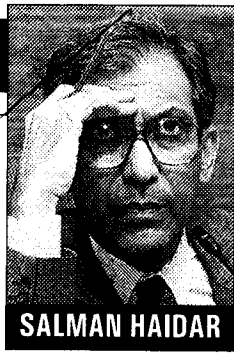
For a long time, Kathmandu has been seeking Delhi's help to resolve the problem.

The United States move, first of its kind since the refugees from Bhutan started arriving in eastern Nepal in 1989, is significant.

The move is noteworthy since it comes just a month before the 10th round of talks between Thimphu and Kathmandu over the fate of the displaced persons.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 3 DEC 2000



SALMAN HAIDAR

WIDEANGLE

Himalayan refugees

51-9/24/12

JUST a few days ago it was reported that a senior functionary of the US state department, Julia Taft, scion of one of America's most prominent political families, had floated a plan for the rehabilitation of the southern Bhutanese in refugee camps in Nepal.

This came after a visit by Ms Taft to the region, which she had also visited earlier this year. Her initiative draws renewed attention to a long-standing and tricky issue that brings two of India's closest neighbours into contention with each other.

To recall, the problem derives from the widening ethnic divide in Bhutan between the original Bhutanese settlers and the more recent Nepalese immigrants. As the numbers of the Nepalese, or "Southern Bhutanese" as they are euphemistically called, swelled through continued migration, both authorised and illicit, and through natural increase, the Bhutanese began to fear that they would become a minority in their own land.

There was the nearby example of Sikkim, where the original inhabitants of Tibetan stock came to be heavily outnumbered by Nepalese migrants, the newcomers eventually achieving dominance at the former's expense.

The Bhutanese took this as a warning and became determined not to lose their distinctive customs and culture under the pressure of the new arrivals. Well-meant efforts to integrate the communities were pursued but ultimately a clash of values and traditions became unavoidable.

An agitation for Nepalese rights, more restricted than those of the Bhutanese, took shape, leading to some violent incidents, and ethnic tensions invaded this renowned Shangrila.

Bhutan tried to resolve the problem with a quick move against the trouble makers, who were expelled. In the resultant panic, a good number of Nepalese elected to leave, and they were encouraged and assisted to do so.

This attempt to sort out matters with a swift surgical strike was no more successful in Bhutan than anywhere else. Nepal, with scarcely any choice in the matter, took back its diaspora, actively supported by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees who helped set up camps for them and gave funds for their subsistence. Far from melting away and starting afresh, the displaced persons have retained their separate identity in their camps. They have a bitter sense of grievance and have learned how to present their case before the world, gaining considerable international sympathy in the process.

After the initial shock wore off, the demand was raised on behalf of the refugees that they should return, and this was backed by Nepal. Bhutan expressed readiness to take back those who had eligible status but refused to condone the "anti-national" activity that, in its view, had caused the problem in the first instance.

The foreign ministers of the two countries worked out a well-balanced agreement that promised to resolve the problem, but despite numerous high level-meetings over several years, it has not been possible to implement it. Ms Taft seems now to have tinkered with this agreement and suggested a fresh modality for putting it into effect.

Willy-nilly, and despite its wishes, India has been drawn into the problem. These are, after all, its two closest neighbours; one cannot move from one to the other without traversing Indian territory. Many people of Nepalese origin are settled in tracts of India adjacent to Bhutan. In these areas, activists from the camps have been able to stir things up. Protests, marches and the like have elicited local support, bringing the issue home to India.

Even so, until now India has remained deliberately uninvolved. Though both Nepal and Bhutan would be glad if it could assume a role, India knows that it could easily be misunderstood, appear partisan and give offence to one or other, if not to both.

Besides, once involved, India could well be expected to be more than a facilitator, as both sides may assume that those of the refugees who cannot be fitted in anywhere else should find their way to India. After all, there are already over seven million Nepalese in India, where they have a perfect right to live, so how would a few tens of thousands more matter?

The situation now seems to be coming to a head because funding for the camps in Nepal may be drying up. Already the benefits to the residents have been reduced and the UNHCR may have to close the camps before long. Donor fatigue may be a factor in the recent American involvement.

None of this would be especially noteworthy if Ms Taft's initiative did not introduce a significant new element into south Asia. Till now, India has been very chary of big powers carving out a role for themselves in its backyard. These countries tend to bring with them their own priorities that India may not share. During the Cold War, India was especially touchy on this score, and has remained watchful ever since.

The Himalayan region is particularly sensitive as it lies along the Chinese frontier and thus calls for special vigilance.

American brokering of a Bhutan-Nepal agreement on the refugees would thus be a new departure and an important precedent. Indian acquiescence in this initiative can be assumed, for the actors have been in and out of New Delhi.

No need, perhaps, for alarm, but no disguising the fact either that a major new presence is now within the gates, where ingress was once not freely given. It is almost as if with our new found strategic aspirations our heads are in the clouds, seeing remote visions of global import, while happenings in our backyard are given the go by. A less airy view would have had us taking on ourselves the responsibility of bringing our two neighbours closer in the task of implementing their agreement on the return of the refugees. Our abiding interests in our region demand no less.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary.)

Palestinian refugees want to keep right to return

REUTERS

KHAN YOUNIS (GAZA), DEC 25

SCAMPERING through muddy puddles, the children of the Khan Younis refugee camp believe they are only temporary visitors in Gaza until they can return to homes that may now exist only as family memories.

Like many of the 3.5 million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Arab world, the people of Khan Younis believe conflict with Israel will end only when they are allowed to go back to their homes in the Jewish state.

Palestinians burying one of the latest casualties in their uprising were infuriated by rumours from Washington peace talks that the Palestinian leadership might compromise over the return of refugees in exchange for sovereignty over Arab East Jerusalem.

"The most important issue is the refugees," said mourner Shadi Mohammed, standing in a funeral procession amid a sea of flags, mostly from militant Islamic groups but also peppered with Iraqi banners and a picture of Saddam Hussein.



Right-wing demonstrators wear mask faces of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, President Clinton and hold the strings of an Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak puppet during a demonstration in front of the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem on Sunday. Demonstrators called on Barak to stop trying to achieve a "last minute" agreement, saying he has lost his mandate and has no right to negotiate with the Palestinians before the upcoming elections in Israel — AP/PTI

"The violence will continue as long as the refugee problem remains unsolved," he said.

However, many Israelis are sceptical.

Some believe that allowing

even five per cent of the refugees to return would be a demographic timebomb for the world's only Jewish state set up after six million Jews were killed in the Nazi Holocaust during World War II.

INDIAN EXPRESS

26 DEC 2000

Nepal, Bhutan agree on refugee verification

Kathmandu, December 28

THE BHUTANESE refugee problem in Nepal seems to have moved closer to solution with both Nepal and Bhutan agreeing to procedures for identifying and verifying refugees, Nepalese newspapers reported today.

The newspapers, quoting Nepalese foreign ministry officials, said the agreement was reached late on Wednesday at the end of the 10th round of high-level Nepal-Bhutan talks in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu.

Under the agreement, both Nepal and Bhutan are to name their representatives to the joint verification panel within a week and the panel is to begin the actual verification by January 31 next.

The three-day Nepal-Bhutan meeting decided that the verification of the refugees will take place on the basis of the head of the family, and in case of those without a family, individually.

The agreement was said to be based on the proposal put forward by the United States in early December to both Nepal and Bhutan.

Both sides agreed that the minimum age of family members for the purpose of verification will be

25, with anyone under that age to be verified individually.

Gyan Chandra Acharya, the spokesman of the Nepalese foreign ministry, said: "Basically, the development is that in the tenth round, the two sides agreed to begin the verification process. This is one step forward."

There are more than 125,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and India. Nearly 100,000 of them are in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-run camps in eastern Nepal.

The Bhutanese, especially from southern Bhutan, began pouring out of Bhutan after a failed pro-democracy movement in late 1990.

The previous nine rounds of talks between Nepal and Bhutan spread across many years failed to produce any substantial results.

Nepalese officials are confident that more than 90 per cent of those in the refugee camps in east Nepal will be verified as Bhutanese.

However, after verification there will be the difficult hurdle of 'categorization'. The Bhutanese government has in the past said that the laws of Bhutan will not allow those leaving Bhutan on their own to return.

(DPA)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 DEC 2000

Palestinian refugees face hard choices

By Kesava Menon

AMMAN, DEC. 28. For the large number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, this Eid is going to be a memorable one and not for the most positive of reasons.

Although the negotiations with Israel are going through last minute glitches as both sides try hard to achieve the best possible results for themselves, it is reasonably clear that this is the final stage. Palestinian refugees in this country and other parts of the world will soon have to decide whether they should cling on to a dream which will probably soon become an impossible one or assess how they can make the best of the bargain that will be made.

Since they were ousted from their ancestral villages in 1948, many Palestinian refugees have placed faith in the international guarantees that they would be allowed to return. During the past seven years during which they have been negotiating with Israel, as per the format of the Oslo agreements, officials of the Palestinian Authority have insisted that the right (of the refugees) to return is a non-compromisable principle. The officials had probably realised early on that this objective would be very difficult to achieve if not impossible. Yet, they continued to emphasise the immutability of the principle if for no other reason than to buttress their demands on the other issues in contention.

After the latest round of negotiations in Washington, and the drafting of bridging proposals by the U.S. administration, it appears that the Palestinian Authority is being asked to trade off the right to return in exchange for full sovereignty over Arab East Jerusalem. Israel had so far taken the position that they would concede neither the right to return nor full sovereignty over East Jerusalem to the Palestinians. Now they are prepared to hand over full sovereignty in East Jerusalem provided the Palestinian Authority drops its demand on the right to return.

A few proposals have been added on to make it easier for the Palestinian Authority to swallow the idea of forsaking the right to return. There is talk of an Israeli apology for the ethnic cleansing they carried out in 1948 and a hefty

monetary compensation. Israel is also likely to drop its traditional objection to the prospect of refugees returning to the occupied Palestinian territories. But there are very serious problems still to be resolved.

Countries which had accepted the refugees in 1948 are not willing to let them settle permanently. The Palestinians have found it relatively easier to assimilate themselves into the Jordanian society. In fact, the Hashemite monarchy in this country has made some effort to incorporate the Palestinians into a composite Jordanian identity. But Syria, and especially Lebanon, are not prepared to absorb the Palestinians as full-fledged citizens. Theoretically, these refugees may now be able to shift themselves to the West Bank and Gaza Strip but a whole lot of attendant issues have to be settled prior to that — how will water resources be re-allocated between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to cater for the expected influx; who is going to foot the bill for compensation to the refugees etc.

From what the Palestinian chief negotiator, Mr. Saeed Erekat, has disclosed, it appears that the Authority is seeking clarifications on all these issues. But there is an unmistakable feeling that the Authority has realised that a major compromise on the right to return is the price they will have to pay for a final agreement. Israel is adamant that it cannot concede the right to return since an influx of Palestinians would inevitably transform the Jewish character of their state. This point of view appears to have the strong backing of the U.S. administration.

For the Palestinian Authority, the problem is double-fold. They have to ensure that in compromising on the right to return, they get such compensation in monetary and other terms that re-settlement of the refugees in Palestine or elsewhere is viable. They then have to sell the deal to their people who have not really been prepared for it. For the Palestinian refugees who have been dreaming of returning to their ancestral homes this is one of the most emotionally distressing moments of their lives.

THE HINDU

29 DEC 2000

'Reangs neglected'

AGARTALA, Oct. 26. — The Bru National Union today alleged that the Centre was neglecting 35,000 Reang refugees from Mizoram, now languishing in six camps in North Tripura.

"Despite assurances towards the proper rehabilitation of Bru (Reang) refugees, no effective steps have been taken," Mr A Swaibunga, the BNU president, said.

"We have been staying in makeshift camps for more than three years and are suffering from malnutrition and different diseases as the supply of rations and medical facilities are poor," he said.

Assam minister faces rape charge

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Oct. 26. — Kokrajhar district police are preparing for the second phase of investigation into the allegations of rape against a minister after the alleged victim gave birth to a baby boy on Tuesday night.

In her FIR, the girl had alleged that the minister of state for welfare of plains tribes and backward classes, Mr Rajendra Mushahary, and a companion of his had raped her several times on two occasions in February this year. This took place at a hotel in West Bengal, close to the Assam-Bengal border.

The minister and his companion subsequently obtained anticipatory bail after denying involvement. He said the allegation was politically motivated and levelled at him at the behest of the All Bodo Students Union.

that the police would not test the baby and the minister for DNA test. He said that the minister was indeed was the father.

This is the only version of the case that is true, the SP said.

He denied that the case had moved to court. He said that the minister was involved. This was a case that had to wait for the DNA test. He said that the DNA test can be conducted no matter what the result is, he said.

The baby and his father were taken to the hospital by members of the All Bodo Students Union who have reported the case to the police. They said that the minister had received three times compensation.

THE STATESMAN

27 OCT 2000

Repatriation of Reang refugees fails to take off

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Agartala, Oct. 29: Repatriation of over 35,000 Reang tribals has once again run into rough weather with Mizoram government imposing fresh conditions.

According to the decision taken at a tripartite meeting between chief minister Manik Sarkar, Mizoram home minister Tawnluia and Union home minister L.K.Advani in New Delhi on August 7, the repatriation process was supposed to begin this month. As per the agreed formula, 16,000 refugees were to be repatriated to Mizoram by October 21 and the process was to be completed by the end of the year.

But the Mizoram government created fresh obstacles by demanding identification of the refugees to ascertain whether their names figured in the voters' list and whether they possessed ration cards. An official communiqué by the Mizoram government made it clear that they had grave doubts about the identity of the inmates.

The Mizoram government suggested that many local Reang tribals, including the Bru National Liberation Front activists, had taken shelter at the Tripura camps. Highly-placed sources in the state government's relief and rehabilitation department said they had offered to conduct a fresh verification of the refugees in the presence of Mizoram government representatives. The dithering by the Mizoram government over repatriation of refugees has sparked resentment among Reang tribals in Tripura and Mizoram.

The Bru National Union

(BNU), a Mizoram-based organisation and the Bru Refugee committee have condemned the role of the Mizoram government. A statement issued by the two organisations criticised the role of the Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga saying, "The chief minister seems to be more interested in blocking the repatriation process than completing it."

The statement also dismissed the Mizoram government's stand on the identity of refugees as "motivated and designed to block all avenues of repatriation." It added that all the inmates of the refugee camps were indigenous Mizo people. Demanding immediate intervention of the Centre in the impasse, the Reang organisations said unless the Centre mounted pressure on Mizoram government, the refugees would never be able to return to their homeland.

Official sources here said the cost of providing ration to the refugees was a severe financial drain on Tripura's depleted exchequer. A senior official of the relief and rehabilitation department said, "The Centre is paying for the upkeep of refugees and Rs 22 crore has already been spent. It is a difficult task because of our slender resources." The refugees have apprised the National Human Rights Commission of their plight and the role of Mizoram government in it.

Ganja seized: Police have seized 4,030 kg of ganja worth Rs 24.18 lakh over the past few days from different parts of Nagaland, a senior police official said here today, reports PTI. The contraband items were seized in Kohima, Dimapur and Mokokchung.

THE TRIBUNE

90 000 000

For Lankan refugees, India is still a safe 'home'

By Charu Lata Joshi

The Times of India News Service

COLOMBO: The Indian government may have given up its policy of welcoming Tamil refugees across the Palk Straits but to the 10,000 odd residents of Point Pedro, at the northern-most tip bordering Sri Lanka's coastline, India is still their "home". "We feel more at home when we manage to visit Chennai than when we visit southern Sri Lanka," says Ananthkumari Kumudi, an employee of People's Bank in Point Pedro, who has managed to come to Colombo for a week after a three-week wait and facing count-

less check-points.

An overwhelming sentiment of commonness in language, culture and religion apart, a large section of northern Sri Lankan Tamils, find India "safe". Adds Vasanthadeva Somasundaram, a school teacher, who managed a three-day permit to move south from the military and LTTE-controlled northern terrain: "It is easier for relatives who are abroad to come to India and meet us there, rather than trying to meet in Sri Lanka. It is indeed ironical."

Irony, laces the lives of this flock of people who live in communal comfort in the army-flanked urban council

area of Point Pedro, as they continue to pay taxes and provide safe houses for the LTTE cadre, more out of fear than allegiance to the militant cause. Heavy fighting in adjoining areas like Thaliddiya, Nahar Kovil and Maruthalkerney has pushed Tamil residents from these areas to the tip of Point Pedro, which despite the army domination, emerges as a safer zone.

"We are fugitives in our own country," adds Kumudi, as she recounts her days in India with nostalgia. For many others like her, India remains the safe, aspirational haven where they will send their children for higher education and future employment.

Pak. shuts the door on Afghan refugees

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, NOV. 10. Pakistan has banned entry of Afghan refugees and ordered strict vigilance at all the entry points bordering Afghanistan.

While those crossing into Pakistan from Afghanistan are required to possess valid documents, there has been a free flow of Afghans since the invasion by the Soviet Union over twenty years ago.

The ostensible reason for the ban is to prevent the opposition forces in Afghanistan from sending their supporters in the guise of refu-

gees to carry out acts of sabotage in Pakistan. But there is something more than what meets the eye in the sudden realisation on the part of Pakistan on the mischief potential of the new Afghan refugees.

An important factor that could have compelled the Pak. authorities to impose curbs is the enormous socio-economic burden posed by the refugees. Pakistan hosts an estimated two million refugees and the number is mounting day by day.

There has been a spurt in the inflow in recent weeks. The worst drought in several dec-

ades and the unending civil war is driving people by the droves to migrate to greener pastures. Pakistan and Iran have been the favourite destinations of the Afghans on the run. According to estimates, over 30,000 reached Pakistan in recent weeks.

The presence of a large number of Afghan migrants has triggered a social unrest in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan with the locals forced to compete for the same cake of economic opportunities. The crime graph in these provinces has registered an upward trend.

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NOV 11 1979

Musharraf to visit Kabul for talks on refugees

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

188 a X9-17
ISLAMABAD, SEPT. 17. The Chief Executive of Pakistan, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, intends to travel to Afghanistan for discussions with the Taliban authorities on a host of issues, including the need for early return of the Afghan refugees staying in Pakistan.

Gen. Musharraf told the visiting United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Sadako Ogata, when she called on him here for his assessment of the problem of Afghan refugees that he soon intended to visit Afghanistan.

Since he took over as the Chief Executive after the coup in October last year, Gen. Musharraf has expressed the desire several times to visit Afghanistan but it never materialised. The fact that the military ruler, who has visited several countries in the last 11 months, never made it to Afghanistan despite the close relations between Pakistan and the Taliban regime has not gone unnoticed.

One of the reasons for Gen. Musharraf not journeying to Afghanistan could be the constant American pressure on Pakistan to use its influence on the Taliban and prevail upon it to hand over the Saudi fugitive, Osama bin Laden. Another factor could be the general state of affairs in the war-ravaged Afghanistan.

Pakistan shares the perception of the rest of the world on the need for restoration of peace in Afghanistan. It has been backing the several initiatives to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table for a settlement. However, Pakistan has not been able to erase the impression that it is doing nothing to persuade the Taliban to be more reasonable.

In her meeting with Gen. Musharraf, the UNHCR chief expressed concern over the prevailing conditions in Afghanistan and its direct impact on the refugees. There are over two million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran and not all them are from the time of Soviet invasion.

Mrs. Ogata did not mince words in suggesting that fresh inflow of refugees from Afghanistan could be linked to the policies of the Taliban. She made a specific mention of the treatment of women and the track record of Taliban on the human rights front.

Mrs. Ogata, who is visiting the refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran and flying to Kandahar for discussions with the Taliban authorities, said her agency would like to have a fresh assessment of the situation keeping in mind the "fatigue" factor. That is, the donor and asylum fatigue. Mrs. Ogata said funds from donor countries to help the Afghan refugees have begun to dry up as the conflict has prolonged without a solution in sight.

THE HINDU

18 SEP 2000

Mizoram CM submits Myanmarese²⁶⁷⁹ refugee list

Aizawl, September 25 ^{Hr-6}

MIZORAM CHIEF Minister Zoramthanga has submitted to the Central Government, a list of 32 Myanmarese political refugees, who were opposing their deportation to Myanmar.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, the Chief Minister said that except the 32 registered political refugees, the State Government would continue deporting illegal settlers from Myanmar.

The submission of the list follows a meeting between the Chief Minister and Myanmar Foreign Secretary Dr R O Dinga, earlier this month. During the meeting Dr Dinga had requested the Chief Minister not to deport Myanmar's opposition leaders back to Myanmar.

After the meeting, Zoramthanga had agreed to issue identity cards to the political leaders. The State administration claimed that apart from a few loom industry workers,

most of the Myanmar nationals living in Mizoram were indulging in illegal activities, including smuggling of contraband and country liquor. According to Government sources, Aizawl district alone has 20,000 illegal Myanmarese settlers. Recently, the State Government had deported over 180 Myanmarese nationals.

Tezpur University convocation: Assam Governor Lt Gen (retd) S K Sinha on Monday urged the university authorities to chalk out programmes and courses so that students could successfully face the challenges of the 21st century.

At the second convention of the Tezpur University, the Governor hoped the university would emerge as a centre of excellence for Assam and the North-East. Sinha, who is also chancellor of the university, expressed happiness over the preparation of a vision document by the university with an agenda for the next five years keeping in mind future needs of the society.

(Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 SEP 2000

Advani calls Tripura, Mizoram CMs for Reang refugee talks

Agartala, Aug 3

UNION HOME Minister L K Advani has convened a meeting of Chief Ministers of Tripura and Mizoram on August 7 in New Delhi for repatriation of over 31,000 Mizoram Reang tribal refugees sheltered in six North Tripura camps for the past three years.

Official sources told reporters here on Thursday that Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar had left for Delhi on Thursday and would attend a meeting with Planning Commission Deputy Chairman K C Panth to finalise the current year's plan allocation and participate in another related to the internal security in addition to the one called by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Saturday.

Sources said that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had also asked the

Mizoram Government to take back the tribal refugees.

Recently, the NHRC in presence of senior Government officials had held a meeting with the Chief Secretaries of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura here to finalise the modalities of repatriation of the refugees.

A high-level central team led by Union Home Ministry's Deputy Secretary Ajoy Srivastava, along with senior Tripura and Mizoram Government officials, recently visited the camps and held a series of meetings with the camp officials and refugee leaders.

Sources said the refugee leaders had submitted a memorandum containing a 22-point charter of demands to the central delegation that included setting up of an autonomous district council for the Reang tribes in Mizoram, reservation of seats for them in the Mizoram Assembly and socio-economic development of the tribe in that State.

1/8

The Mizoram Government officials stated that only the bonafide citizens of Mizoram, among the refugees, would be allowed to return.

According to the Mizoram Government officials, the number of refugees sheltered in Tripura was around 16,000. But the Tripura Government said that the number of refugees from Mizoram was more than 31,000.

(UNI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1-4 AUG 2007

Mizoram asks Myanmar MP to submit Chin refugee list

T C Ralte
Aizawl, August 26

MIZORAM HAS asked Myanmar MP U Than Sein to submit a list of all Chin "refugees" in the country. Sein took refuge in the country fleeing from military persecution in Myanmar.

The State would issue identity cards to the refugees to distinguish them from illegal Myanmar immigrants who routinely cross over in search of livelihood, apparently triggering a spurt in criminal acts. International criticism over the Government's move to push back illegal migrants of Myanmar origin has prompted the action.

He had accused Chief Minister Zoramthanga and Home Minister Tawnluia of "deporting Chin refugees to Myanmar from the Champahi border" under the Young Mizo Association (YMA)'s influence. YMA, a non-Government organisation, has been apparently pushing the Zoramthanga Government to pursue causes important to it. The association gets

its strength from the all-powerful Presbyterian and Baptist churches.

The Union Home Ministry is said to have pulled up the State over its deportation bid. US Committee for Refugees (USCR) senior policy analyst Hiram Ruiz wrote to Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani on August 12.

He asked them to restrain the State from deporting the "refugees". Several organisations of the Chin ethnic tribe of Myanmar cried foul over the State's move and put up appeals on the internet to attract international attention. Even the Chin National Army (CAN), a Myanmar militant group, is holed up in the State. The outfit has demanded full regional autonomy from Myanmar.

Myanmar Chins have been demanding sovereignty and complete independence from their home country. According to them, British colonialists were the first to subjugate them. Rulers of former Burma never ruled over them. So the Chins are an independent eth-

nic people with their own country.

Mizos anthropologically belong to the Chin-Burmese stock. The Chin-Mizo ethnic affinity has encouraged numerous Myanmar Chins to pass themselves off as Indian Mizo citizens to enter Indian universities, defence services, and Central and State civil services.

Several Chins, Christians like the Mizos, have gained admission to Christian theological colleges in south India. Unlike Bangladeshi Muslims and Hindus who have faced considerable opposition in Assam and Meghalaya, the Chins have escaped victimisation till recently.

YMA has accused illegal immigrants of drug peddling, burglary, murder and illegal sale of arms. According to the association, the immigrants do this in the guise of Mizos or Kuki tribals from Manipur.

C Ropianga, Aizawl DC, told Sein at a recent meeting that over 20,000 Chins were working as domestic help in Aizawl alone.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 AUG 2000

REANG OUTRAGE

Mizoram failed to read writing on the wall

THE writing was on the wall that the Bru (Reang) National Liberation Front would create trouble for the Mizoram government. In March militants abducted six people releasing them only last month. Three Mizos abducted in May were returned unharmed. That was some consolation. But last week the militants ambushed a police convoy and killed seven people. Ironically, the Centre only recently gave Mizoram monetary assistance as a bonus for keeping the peace. Implicit in Chief Minister Zoramthanga's condolence message eulogising the seven policemen was the hurt pride of the government run by the Mizo National Front. There obviously was either an Intelligence failure or the police believed the Bru militants were incapable of brutality. The use of sophisticated weapons confirms the BNLF's links with the National Liberation Front of Tripura, which receives help from outside agencies. Only firm handling can crush the menace.

Ever since the sudden exodus of a large number of Reangs in 1997, there were indications that if Aizawl failed to persuade them to return it would only be a matter of time before the BNLF, armed wing of the Bru National Union, would exploit the situation. Reangs reportedly fled Mizoram following an ethnic riot. They are Mizo citizens, Aizawl admitted as much by sending an official team in December 1997 to persuade them to return. But now the Zoramthanga government sees things differently, claiming that all those refugees taking shelter in Tripura camps are not their citizens and they would take back only the genuine ones after screening. The problem is that Reangs are clamouring for an autonomous district council. Even if this is unviable, their socio-economic grievances cannot be ignored. The refugee problem is nearly three years old. Aizawl has to evolve a realistic formula for peace.

THE STATESMAN

8 JUL 2000

Sri Lanka admits to existence of refugees

AGENCIES
COLOMBO, MAY 31

THE Sri Lankan government admitted for the first time on Wednesday that the war against the Tamil tigers in northern Jaffna peninsula was forcing people out of their homes and making them refugees.

However, the government's figure of 8,352 refugees is far less than estimates by international aid workers who say as many as 150,000 of the peninsula's 500,000 residents may have been displaced.

"All such persons are provided with cooked meals in the first three days and thereafter, dry rations free of charge," said Gen Sarath Munasinghe, the government's top official in charge of rehabilitation. "Basic requirements of sanitation, health and drinking water were provided," he said.

There was no immediate con-

firmation of Munasinghe's claim as the government cut off Jaffna's telephone lines and journalists are not allowed to go there. The government has also imposed censorship on news reports about the war.

However, a physician with the relief organisation *Doctors Without*

26 Tigers killed

COLOMBO: TWENTY-SIX Tamil Tigers, including 11 women fighters, were killed in armed confrontations with the Sri Lankan security forces in the country's north and east regions even as the army claimed to have repulsed LTTE's Rocket-Propelled Grenade attacks at Chammani and Colombothurai near Jaffna town. Army also repulsed two LTTE attacks on forward defence lines of the army at Chammani and Colomboturai near Jaffna town. Seven rebels were killed in these attacks. (PTI)

and power supplies inadequate or erratic, and medical care insufficient.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has said the government had full confidence that the army would hold its

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Sri Lanka admits to refugee problem

ground on the northern Jaffna peninsula in fighting against the LTTE.

Briefing diplomats and heads of diplomatic missions based in Colombo on Tuesday on the measures undertaken by the government for the welfare of the civilians in the war-torn peninsula, he said the army has been able to stop the rolling onslaught launched by the LTTE.

Minister of Rehabilitation Sarath Amunugama explained to the diplomats and heads of UN's specialised agencies and officials of the Red Cross that Sri Lanka is one of the few countries to supply basic requirements to the people of the north even during the times they had to live under LTTE control. He said a three month supply of essential food items are at present available within the peninsula. Another consignment of food items was being carried by a vessel which has already sailed from Colombo and would reach the peninsula within the next few days.

The Commissioner of Essential Services Gen Sarath Munasinghe said the government has the capacity to replenish stock at a short notice and pointed out that the transport of cargo by sea is quite adequate with two vessels being hired by the government and ten others hired by private firms.

He said road transport for passengers and supplies within the peninsula was satisfactory with over 90 buses plying. He said as on May 23, a total of 2320 families or 8352 people had registered themselves in welfare centres run by the government.

All such persons were provided with cooked meals for the first three days and thereafter, dry rations.

He said the Jaffna Teaching Hospital and another hospital at Point Pedro were not well equipped with medical supplies. The Jaffna Hospital, however, was facing shortage of staff as several doctors had left the peninsula for security reasons.

INDIAN EXPRESS

• 1 JUN 2000

Mizoram stand on Reangs rejected

SR-2
1/6
Refugee
Problem

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, May 31. — The Tripura government has taken exception to the Mizoram authorities' stance regarding the repatriation of Reang evacuees.

According to Press reports, the joint home secretary of the Mizoram government said in Aizawl on Monday that only a small number of Reang tribesmen, now huddled in camps in North Tripura, were "genuine citizens" of Mizoram. The Mizoram government will take back only the "state's genuine residents".

Mizoram's joint home secretary, Mr C Tawnluia, was quoted in the reports as having said that the Tripura government's claim about the size of the Reang evacuee population in camps in the state was not justified.

He also denied reports that the Mizoram government had been told by the National Human Rights Commission to create a conducive atmosphere for repatriation of the Reang evacuees.

A high-level delegation of the NHRC had visited the Reang refugee camps in North Tripura some months ago. Delegation members talked to the refugees as well as senior state officials regarding the problem.

The NHRC subsequently wrote a letter to the Mizoram government to take appropriate measures so that the Reang tribals who had crossed over to Tripura were repatriated as early as possible. A copy of the NHRC's letter to the Mizoram government was sent to the Tripura chief secretary by the

commission.

There was a tripartite meeting among Reang refugee leaders in 1998, with senior Tripura and Mizoram government officials taking part, to find a solution to the tribal refugees' problem. But the talks made no headway in view of the Reang leaders' demand for an autonomous council for them in Mizoram.

Earlier, Mizoram's former chief minister, Mr Lalthanhawla, had rejected the same demand by Reang refugee leaders who met him Aizawl. Mizoram's present government is also vehemently opposed to the demand for Reang autonomy in the state.

The Tripura officials persuaded refugee leaders not to make the autonomy demand a precondition for repatriation of the evacuees. The state government is constantly persuading the Aizawl authorities for taking measures immediately to ensure return of evacuees.

A high-level team of the Union home ministry, led by its deputy secretary, Mr Ajoy Shrivastav, was scheduled to come here yesterday to talk to the Reang refugees and their leaders. The team's visit was put off at the last moment. The home ministry officials are expected here any time next week.

The team is likely to hold a joint meeting of officials of Tripura and Mizoram during its visit here to start the process of repatriation.

The influx of Reang tribesmen from Mizoram began in October 1997 following ethnic disturbances in some border villages of the state.

THE STATESMAN

E 7 JUN 2000

Battle for Jaffna churns out refugees in huge numbers

COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan government on Wednesday admitted for the first time that the war against Tamil Tigers in northern Jaffna peninsula was forcing people out of their homes and making them refugees.

However, the government's figure of 8,352 refugees is far less than estimated by international aid workers, who said as many as 150,000 of the peninsula's 500,000 residents might have been displaced.

"All such persons are provided with cooked meals in the first three days and thereafter dry rations free of charge," said General Sarath Munasinghe, the government's top official in charge of rehabilitation. "Basic requirements of sanitation, health and drinking water were provided," he said.

There was no immediate confirmation of Gen. Munasinghe's claim.

However, a physician with the relief organisation, Doctors Without Borders, Manana Anjaparidze, told last week that people have moved into temples, mosques and churches, sharing meagre food supplies and sleeping on cement floors. She said amenities at the religious sites and relief camps are primitive: toilets are few, water and power supplies inadequate or erratic, and medical care insufficient.

Gen. Munasinghe said, "A three-month supply of essential food items is available in the peninsula."

Stocks could be replenished by sea, he said, although rebels had cut off the land route to Jaffna. It takes about 72 hours for ships to sail to Jaffna from Colombo—a distance of 400 km. Gen. Munasinghe also said road transport within the peninsula for passengers and supplies was satisfactory. Trucking food to areas adjoining combat zones was difficult, he said, but he added that those areas were not extensive.

Meanwhile, in a daring attack, the LTTE used rocket propelled grenades at the army's forward defence localities in Chemmani while troops destroyed a terrorist bunker in Chavakachcheri killing seven rebels. Government spokesman Ariya Rubasinghe said troops did not suffer any casualties.

He said in the Chavakachcheri area, where fighting has been intensified during the last few days, troops attacked a terrorist bunker killing all the five who were inside.

In Colombuthurai, two terrorists were killed in fighting. In Mannar, troops raided a terrorist hideout in Thakvupau area and killed one terrorist. One global positioning system, one night vision device and one radio set and two grenades were recovered from the house.

In eastern Trincomalee, the LTTE broke open a government departmental store at Mutur and removed most of the dry rations that were stored for sale. (Agencies)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 JUN 2000

Hotly Needed, a national refugee law

By V. Suryanarayan

AS THE battle for Jaffna intensifies, the flow of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to Tamil Nadu is increasing, nearly 300 refugees have sought asylum since the escalation of the conflict. From August 1996 to May 31, 2000, 21,267 refugees have arrived in Tamil Nadu. Most of them started their arduous journey from Talaimannar. They trekked long distances, assembled in Talaimannar, paid huge amounts to boat operators and reached Rameswaram. Since the Navy and the Coast Guard have stepped up vigil and since the Tamil Nadu Government has impounded a few boats used to transport the refugees, the operators either drop the refugees in the sea (very near the coast) or on one of the islands which dot the Palk Straits.

Tamils from Jaffna are unable to come to Tamil Nadu; reasons being large parts of Jaffna continue to be under army control, the Sri Lankan Navy controls the adjoining islands and, what is more, no mechanised boats are available. But if Jaffna and the surrounding islands fall to the Tigers, the flow of refugees from Jaffna to Vedaranyam will commence. Sri Lankan Tamils belonging to non-LTTE groups are bound to seek asylum in Tamil Nadu. The attitude of the Sri Lankan Tamils towards the LTTE can be understood from a recent incident. The LTTE asked the civilian population to move from conflict zones to Wann. The appeal elicited a lukewarm response. Large numbers of Tamils preferred to move over to army-controlled areas. The flow of refugees is closely linked to the violence unleashed on the civilian population in the island. The twists and turns in India's Sri Lanka policy also had their inevitable impact on the refugees. It should be mentioned that the Sri Lankan Tamils are highly politicised and the refugees were the "warm waters in which the militant fishes thrived". The competitive nature of Tamil Nadu politics, with the two major Dravidian parties vying with each other to support the Sri Lankan Tamil cause and New Delhi's policy of arming the Tamil militants paved the way for the setting up of a large number of militant camps in different parts of Tamil Nadu. As time went on, the militants became a law unto themselves and the peace and tranquility of Ta-

New Delhi should take immediate steps to enact a national legislation on refugees. This legislation should spell out the rights of the refugees; at the same time, it should also safeguard the territorial integrity and security of the state.

mil Nadu was vitiated by gun-toting militants. The dastardly assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the suicide squad of the LTTE swung the pendulum to the other extreme. Tamil Nadu — people and Government alike — is yet to recover. The DMK and the AIADMK have distanced themselves from the Tigers. However, pro-LTTE political forces, which were lying dormant, have started their propaganda in favour of the LTTE. What is more, some of these parties are integral parts of the coalition Government in the Centre.

If immediate steps are not taken to revamp the security machinery, the situation in Tamil Nadu is likely to deteriorate. During recent years, there had been a number of serious lapses, which enabled the LTTE to become a law unto itself. The assassination of Padmanabha and his EPRLF comrades in June 1990; the cold-blooded murder of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991; the escape of Kinuban, a top LTTE leader, while being taken to Pudukkottai in April 1993; the escape of Charles Nawaz, a witness in Rajiv Gandhi case, in May 1993 from the Saidapet Special Camp; the daring escape of the LTTE cadres from the Tipu Mahal Camp in Vellore in August 1995 — the list is very long, it brings no laurels to New Delhi or Chennai. If on that fateful night in Sriperumbudur, female security personnel had physically frisked all women who wanted to greet Rajiv Gandhi, perhaps we may not have lost a political leader of great promise in the prime of his life. Among the accused in Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, half a dozen — Robert Payas, Jayakumar, Shanti (Jayakumar's wife), Vijayan, Selva Lakshmi (Vijayan's wife) and Bhaskaran (Vijayan's father-in-law) — were registered as refugees.

New Delhi should take immediate steps to enact a national legislation on refugees. This legislation should spell out the rights of the refugees; at the same time, it should

duras flag. It was allegedly carrying weapons and ammunition for the LTTE when the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard intercepted it. After an exchange of fire, the ship was set ablaze and some Sri Lankan Tamils, including the LTTE leader, Kittu, committed suicide. The judge acquitted all the accused and ordered the Commissioner of Police to hand them over to the State of Honduras. The Supreme Court found the accused guilty of some charges and sentenced them to a total period of imprisonment of three years. Here again, the accused had already completed the period of imprisonment and, therefore, were set free. Honduras did not want to take the Tamils; nor did the Tamils have a Honduras passport. The Tamils also did not want to go back to Sri Lanka. One Tamil went to the Middle East. The rest are in "safe custody" in Visakhapatnam.

The third illustration is a grim reminder of the ignorance of the Tamil Nadu security officials about the international network which the Tigers have built up over the years. Bhaskaran, an LTTE guerilla, was detained in the Saidapet special camp after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. No charges were preferred against him, and Bhaskaran appealed to the authorities for permission to go abroad. The immigration authorities left Bhaskaran at the Meenam-bakkam airport. A few weeks later, he was in Phnom Penh negotiating the purchase of surface-to-air missiles for the LTTE.

The examples given above should serve as a warning to Chennai and New Delhi. Even under existing rules and regulations, aliens working against Indian national interest can be deported. There are judicial precedents too. In *Mohammad Sadiq v Government of India*, the Court ordered the deportation of refugees under the Foreigners Act, 1946, since they had engaged in anti-national activities. What is lacking is the political will to take difficult decisions. India, especially Tamil Nadu, cannot afford to become a "soft state". A national legislation on refugees, combining the humanitarian needs of the refugees with the security interests of the state, should be immediately enacted.

(The writer is former Director, Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai.)

THE HINDU

3 JUN 2000

Reangs' return uncertain

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, June 6. — The demand of the Reangs for "autonomy" in Mizoram has made their return from Tripura uncertain.

A high-level Union home ministry team, led by its deputy secretary, Mr Ajoy Shrivastav, yesterday visited refugee camps in North Tripura. The delegates persuaded the tribals to return home as soon as possible.

The refugee leaders, in return, handed over a memorandum to Mr Shrivastav, demanding a "political solution" to their problem. Some of the demands included setting up an autonomous district council for the Reangs in Mizoram, reservation of seats for them in the Mizoram Assembly and a financial package for their socio-economic development.

The Mizoram government had earlier rejected the autonomy demand.

The officials also met some refugees before holding a joint meeting of government officials from Mizoram and Tripura in North Tripura's Kanchanpur town. The deputy commissioner of Mizoram's Mamith district, Mr Kaplaliana, SP, Mr K Hrangkhawl, and the joint secretary to the Mizoram government, Mr Rumaia, were present. The DM, North Tripura, Mr Alok Kumar, SP, Mr Punit

Rastogi, and another senior district official, Mr Pallav Devbarma, were present.

The Mizo officials said they were prepared to take back only those evacuees who were "genuine residents" of Mizoram. They added that only 16,000 refugees were genuine citizens.

But the Tripura officials pointed out that according to state government records, all refugees were from Mizoram.

The meeting ended inconclusively.

The refugee leaders want the home ministry to arrange for talks between ministry officials, the Mizo government and refugees to finalise the mode of repatriation.

A high-level delegation of the National Human Rights Commission had earlier visited the camps and talked to the refugees. The team, in a communique, later urged the Mizo authorities to plan for the repatriation.

The ministry and the Tripura government have written to the Mizoram government, asking it to ensure an early return of the tribals to their villages.

The influx of the Reangs began in October, 1997, following ethnic strife along the Mizoram-Tripura border. Over 41,000 Reangs are now staying in six camps in North Tripura.

Many have returned to their villages. The Centre has so far released Rs 19 crore for the refugees.

THE STATESMAN

. 7 JUN 2000

Panel to be formed for Reang refugees

HT Correspondent
Agartala, June 7

MIZORAM AND Tripura agreed to constitute a committee to arrange modalities for the repatriation of the Reang refugees now housed in makeshift camps in Kanchanpur sub-division of North Tripura.

The decision was taken on Monday in a meeting between officials of the two States in the presence of Ajay Srivastava, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Home.

The committee will endeavour in dispelling contentious issue on the actual number of the Reangs who had moved to Kanchanpur following the ethnic violence in Mamith district of Mizoram in September-October 1997.

Mizoram officials present in two rounds of meetings with their counterparts in Tripura, categorically stated that their records confirmed exodus of only 16,000 tribals. Altogether 32,000 Reangs are currently living in seven makeshift camps. Officials argue that thousands of Reangs, also known as Brus, had sneaked into the camps to get relief.

Srivastava arrived here on Monday morning and drove to

Kanchanpur. He visited three camps with officials of North Tripura and Mizoram.

They also visited the camps and held discussions in Kashirampur camp and Kanchanpur circuit house. No concrete decision was taken about the refugees, an official said. But they resolved to constitute a joint committee for verification of the camps.

The refugees placed a 22-point charter of demands to the Home Ministry official. The memorandum included demand of enhancing rice quota and cash dole for the evacuees. Officials here said the joint committee will accelerate the repatriation process, though no time-frame was fixed.

The refugees have been facing an uncertain future in absence of positive measures taken by the Centre and the Mizoram Government. The State Government has virtually taken an adamant stance and is not interested in initiating a dialogue with the refugee leaders.

Like his predecessor, Lalthanhawla, present Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga is less interested to give any concession to the displaced people. The refugee leaders urged a tripartite meeting to resolve the crisis.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 8 JUN 2000

Refugee influx
continues
By Our Staff Reporter

RAMANATHAPURAM, JUNE 12. The influx of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka continues despite the Indian Navy, along with the Coast Guard, stepping up vigil against illegal ferrying of refugees from Thalaimannar and Neduntheevu. A total of 154 refugees have arrived here since last Friday.

According to police, 40 Tamil refugees, who were stranded on the fifth island in Indian territorial waters, were rescued by the Navy and revenue officials on Monday evening and brought to Dhanuskodi. The refugees — 20 men, 12 women and 8 children belonging to 16 families — headed for Dhanuskodi, boarded two fibre glass boats at Thalaimannar.

The boatmen dropped them at the fifth island on Sunday night saying they could walk to Dhanuskodi. However, they realised the next morning that they had been cheated. A Navy helicopter spotted the refugees during routine aerial surveillance and alerted the district administration.

THE HINDU

13 JUN 2000

Fresh influx of Tamil refugees

By Our Staff Reporter

RAMANATHAPURAM, JUNE 9. After a brief lull, the influx of Sri Lanka Tamil refugees into Tamil Nadu has begun again with a fresh batch consisting of 46 Tamil refugees belonging to 10 families from Pesalai in Thalaimannar arriving at Arichalmunai, near Dhanushkodi, on Friday evening.

According to officials, 46 refugees including 16 men, 13 women and 17 children were spotted by Mr. Babu, Lt. Commandant, Naval Air Station, Uchipuli, at Fourth Island, within the Indian territorial water during a routine surveillance.

The 46 refugees reportedly boarded two fibre glass boats at Pesalai. The boat operators, who collected Rs. 6000 to Rs. 3000 from each of them, dropped them at the Fourth Island. However, a wordy duel erupted between the boatmen and the refugees who demanded that they be dropped on the Indian shore. When the boatmen refused, the refugees detained a boat. Finally the boat operators were forced to flee the place, leaving a boat at Fourth Island.

One of the refugees picked up 20 refugees in the abandoned boat to drop them at Arichalmunai, but they were intercepted by the Indian Navy. Indian Navy personnel brought the remaining stranded refugees to the shore, before seizing the boat. The refugees were later shifted to the Mandapam refugee camp.

10 JUN 2000

Navy rescues five Sri Lankan refugees

410-13 By Our Staff Reporter 16/6

RAMANATHAPURAM, JUNE 15. Of the 28 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees stranded at the sixth island in Sri Lankan territorial waters for the last three days, five refugees arrived in Dhanuskodi on Thursday morning.

Moreover, a fresh batch consisting of 24 Tamil refugees were also reportedly dropped by boatmen at the sixth island on Thursday evening. A total number of 47 refugees including 16 children have been reportedly stranded at the sixth island.

Official sources said that Indian Navy spotted five refugees at the fifth island in Indian territorial waters and brought them to the shore today. Later, they were handed over to the Dhanuskodi police.

According to the refugees, they boarded a fiberglass boat at Thalaimannar and the boatmen dropped them at the sixth island on Tuesday night. Owing to the stepping up of night vigil in the fifth island by the Navy, the boatmen could not cross the Indo-Sri Lankan international border.

The refugees had been left with no food and water for the last three days. Hence, five of them swam to reach the fifth island. Later, they were spotted and brought to the shore by the Navy.

Further, the refugees, who arrived in Dhanuskodi, appealed to the Indian Government to rescue the remaining 23 refugees.

Some unidentified miscreants are reported to have removed the board indicating the border of the Indian territorial waters - which had been installed by the Navy at the fifth island - and installed it at the sixth island. However, the Navy restored the board to the fifth island.

When the plight of the stranded refugees was brought to the notice of Mr. Mani Bharathi, District Collector, he said that as they were in Sri Lankan territorial water the Navy as well as the rescue team were unable to extend help. However, he had informed the State Government to take immediate action.

The Navy, Coast Guard and the coastal security wing have stepped up night vigil to prevent the infiltration of cadre belonging to militant groups as well as the smuggling of petroleum products and other essential commodities to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan fishing boat seized

By Our Staff Reporter

TUTICORIN, JUNE 15. A Sri Lankan fishing craft which violated the Indian Maritime Zone Act

was caught by the Coast Guard about 86 nautical miles south west of Cape Comorin.

The Kochi-based Coast Guard vessel, INS Varuna which was patrolling the Exclusive Economic Zone on Wednesday noticed the Sri Lankan vessel in the Indian waters and signalled it to stop. It, however, attempted to flee without heeding the warning. Immediately the Coast Guard fired in the air from a light machine gun at the vessel as a warning. When this failed to stop the craft, the officials fired 10 more rounds from a 30 mm gun, in the air and brought the vessel to a halt.

A through search of the 59 feet long craft christened "Akila" yielded about two tonnes of shark and tune fishes. The boat, according to sources, set sail from Legombu on June 1, and was equipped with sophisticated gadgets, including the Global Positioning System.

It, however, did not contain any weapons, the source added. The Coast Guard Commandant, S.P.S. Basra and the Deputy Commandant, Somasundaram, who seized the boat under the Indian Maritime Zone Act of 1999, handed it to the Thermal Nagar police. All the eight fishermen were reported to be safe.

Incidentally this is the eighth vessel caught by the same Coast Guard ship within the last three months.

16 JUN 2000

Repatriation of Reang refugees under cloud

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, June 16. — With the Mizoram government imposing condition on Reang tribals' return to their villages, the proposed repatriation of the tribal evacuees has apparently become uncertain.

The Mizoram Home Minister, Mr Tanluia, has made it clear in Aizawl on Wednesday that there is no question of initiating process for the Reang refugees repatriation until the Bru National Liberation Front, an underground outfit of the Reangs, ends insurgency in Mizoram.

Mr Tanluia felt, if the Reang evacuees were now brought back to their villages for rehabilitation in Mizoram it would definitely be interpreted as government's weakness to the Reang undergrounds. In no circumstances the government's action should encourage the Reang insurgents, he said.

The Chief Minister, Mr

Zoramthanga, had last month made a statement that his government would take appropriate steps soon so that the Reang refugees can return to their villages in the state. He said it was unfortunate that the leaders of evacuees were giving inflated figure of refugees who are now huddled in North Tripura camps.

The Chief Minister said his govt was keen on rehabilitating only those Reang refugees who were the "genuine residents" of Mizoram.

The Home Minister, Mr Tanluia, also made it a point that the people of Mizoram would never approve the Reang leaders' demand for an autonomous council for Reangs in Mizoram nor they would support demand for reservation of three Assembly seats for the Reang minorities.

Mr Tanluia alleged that many Mizo villagers of Tripura had fled to Mizoram under "systematic attacks" from the Reangs.

He said the Tripura government had already been approached to take back the Mizo refugees and arrange for their repatriation.

A Tripura government official today denied Mr Tanluia's allegation. There is no report of any migration of Mizo villagers from Tripura areas so far, he said.

Meanwhile, the Vanabasi Kalyan Ashram, an organisation affiliated to the RSS has criticised the Union home ministry for its failure in persuading the Mizoram government to take back the Reang refugees.

A senior spokesman of the Ashram said, the National Human Rights Commission had urged the Centre in last October to take immediate steps so that the Reang refugees in Tripura could return to their villages. "But the Union home ministry has failed to perform its role in the matter," the spokesman alleged.

THE STATESMAN

17 JUN 2000

Tamil refugees shut out mid-sea

FROM T.N. GOPALAN

Chennai, June 17: In a dramatic policy reversal, India today slammed doors on a batch of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka and allowed them to be shipped back home in a vessel sent by the island nation.

This is the first time that refugees from Lanka have been turned back mid-sea, signalling a hardening of stance by the Tamil Nadu government and the Centre.

The refugees, numbering around 50, had been offloaded by Jaffna fishermen near an island-like formation off Rameswaram on the south-eastern coast. However, unlike on previous occasions, their pleas to the Indian

Coast Guard and fishermen plying the route to take them to the shore fell on deaf ears.

In the evening, a Lankan naval vessel appeared and all the refugees were forcibly herded into it. Sources in Rameswaram told **The Telegraph** that the operation was masterminded jointly by Indian and Lankan authorities. It was on an Indian tip-off that Lanka sent the vessel, they added.

Officials in Chennai were tightlipped and those in Rameswaram were quoted as saying that since the action took place "in Lankan waters", they had no comment to offer.

Karunanidhi has been supporting the cause of the Tamils, but he had been making it clear

that he would not like to be burdened with more refugees who could become a law and order problem. The state now hosts more than 65,000 refugees in 120 camps. In the last few months, over 1,200 refugees have reached Tamil Nadu.

Today's closed-door policy could create problems in the ruling coalition at the Centre as leaders like S. Ramadoss and Vaiko are not expected to support the move.

So far, the state and Central governments were only discouraging the influx of refugees, but never orchestrating their return before they set foot on Indian soil.

In the eighties, which saw a massive exodus from Jaffna, the refugees were given a red-carpet

welcome. However, in the next wave in 1990 — after the IPKF-Tiger confrontation — the boats ferrying refugees were regularly impounded. But the refugees were allowed to stay back.

Despite the boat seizures, thousands continued to arrive. India also allowed special ships to bring in supporters of Tamil groups which had joined hands with Delhi.

During Jayalalitha's regime, over 30,000 refugees were forcibly repatriated, but the drive was suspended following protests from human rights groups. But the administration imposed a series of restrictions on the refugees, making life difficult in the camps.

■ **Lanka hits Tiger camp, P 4**

THE TELEGRAPH

18 JUN 2000

700 refugees evacuated in Indonesia

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TERNATE (Indonesia), June 22. — Two Indonesian navy ships today evacuated more than 700 refugees fearing for their lives days after Muslim fighters killed scores of people in a Christian village.

The evacuation of Duma village on Halmahera island was conducted as more savage sectarian fighting rocked other parts of the eastern Maluku islands despite increased patrols by security forces.

Unconfirmed reports from church workers said as many as 187 people had died since Monday's assault on Duma.

Ambon tense: Ambon remained tense today after the attack on police housing complex at Tantui village in Sirimau district, which claimed at least five lives, Jakarta Post reports quoting Antara news agency. Among the dead were the deputy chief of the local mobile police brigad and a three-and-half-year old child.

THE STATESMAN

23 JUN 2000

27 refugees arrive in TN

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, June 26. — Twenty-seven Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, including 13 men, seven women and seven children, dodged Indian naval and Coast Guard patrol boats and arrived at Dhanushkodi in a boat painted black under the cover of darkness in the early hours yesterday.

The refugees, who arrived from Talaimannar, were taken to the special camp at Mandapam in Ramanathapuram district. This is perhaps the first batch in several days, to be dropped by boat agents at Dhanushkodi in Rameswaram. Due to stepped up vigil in the Palk Strait, boat agents have been dropping the refugees on sand dunes away from Indian shores in Sri Lankan waters.

Only on 14 June, two batches of 47 refugees were dropped on a sand dune, identified as the seventh island on the Adams Bridge, which comes under Sri Lankan territory. For nearly three days, the refugees camped on the sand dune before they were taken back by the Sri Lankan Navy on 17 June to Talaimannar.

Indian officials refused to intervene and merely informed their Sri Lankan counterparts.

Lanka war: Refugee influx in TN normal, coastal security tightened

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI, MAY 9

ABOUT 60 refugees have entered Tamil Nadu through Rameswaram during the last one week, after the war between the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE intensified. The refugees have been housed at the Mandappam camp.

However, the Government said the influx was normal and such arrivals were happening throughout the year. "There is no cause for concern. Every month, over 300 refugees enter Tamil Nadu," an official said. Some of the refugees who are sick are being sent to hospitals for medical check-ups.

DGP F C Sharma said, "there is no major influx. The refugees are being put through the normal procedure." Meanwhile, the Govern-

ment has tightened security on the coastal belts. The coastal district SPs have been put on alert to watch out for militant activities. So far, there has been no militant movements. The other district SPs too have been put on alert.

Maintaining that no militants have entered Tamil Nadu in the recent past, an official said the refugees have been coming from Thalaimannar and have been entering through Rameswaram. If there are any militants, they would in all probability come from Jaffna and enter through Nagapattinam or Vedaranyam, which is the nearest point.

ADGP (Coastal Security) C S Munzini said every check post was being monitored and the district SPs were on constant vigil of the seashore. The district Collectors are

12 refugees found stranded

Ramanathapuram: AS many as 12 refugees from Mannadi in Northern Sri Lanka, who were found stranded in the third sand dune from Adams bridge in Ramanathapuram, today, were rescued by fishermen from Dhanushkodi, official sources said. The refugees were later sent to the Mandapam refugee camp. Refugees from the island nation had been arriving in small groups during the past one week, the sources added.

catering to the civil supplies of the refugees. He said there was no arrival of refugees on Monday.

INDIAN EXPRESS

16 MAY 2000

MIGRANT ISSUE

Ad Hoc Measures Will Not Do

By SANJOY HAZARIKA

THE other morning in New Delhi, the sun beat down on a small group of people outside the Bangladesh High Commission as they prepared to meet the diplomats inside, armed with a few sheets of paper. In the background, a few dozen activists shouted slogans demanding action against north-eastern insurgents who are based in Bangladesh. The mandatory press briefing was held for the television crews who shoved mikes in front of the band of members of Parliament — six men and one woman — as they waited to be called in. These were MPs from the Asom Gana Parishad, the ruling regional party of Assam, but also from the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Communist Party of India as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party. More than 40 members of Parliament signed the appeal to the Bangladesh High Commission drawing attention to the "increased activities of the extremist organisations" of the North-East, operating out of Bangladesh.

TERRORISM

The issue of cross-border terrorism cuts across party lines and this development is something that Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta, who is given little credit for anything at all, can justifiably be pleased about. Over the years, Mahanta's strategy has been to forge a front with other parties in firmly opposing the presence of militants in Bhutan and Bangladesh and pressing for action against them. Despite failures in several sectors, he seems to have developed a consensus on this sensitive and strategic issue.

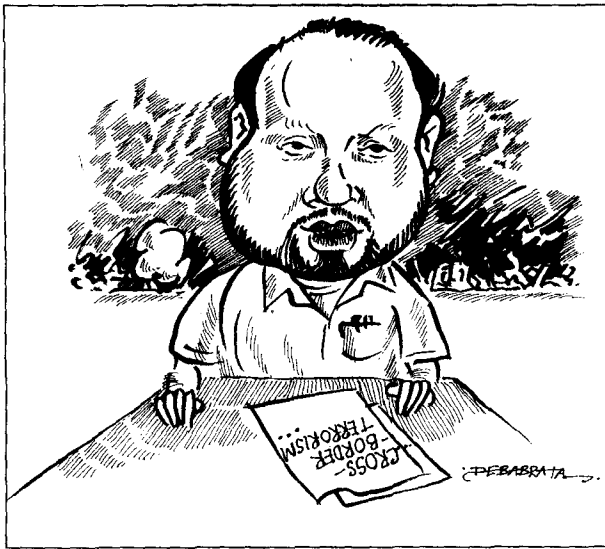
However, where Mahanta and his party have not succeeded in winning the support of other parties is over the question of illegal migration from Bangladesh into the North-East, especially Assam. Assamese fears about the continuing influx of Bengali-speaking migrants (Hindu and Muslim) and how this is altering the demographic structure of the state and the rest of the region have been dismissed as xenophobia and worse by groups within the North-East, but especially in Bengal. The Bengali media is in no mean measure responsible for this irresponsible attitude to a national problem that has begun to haunt West Bengal itself.

Gone are the days of comfortable vote banks for the left and centrist parties: every society can receive immigrants to a threshold level. Once that threshold is passed — and it has been in Bengal just as it was many years earlier in Assam — they the host regards the new settler not merely as an intruder but a threat to his peace of mind, political control and prosperity. What strategies must be devised to deal

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with this new challenge?

The unheralded visit of Mrs Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to India assumes significance in this search for answers. Mrs Ogata's visit is the first by the head of this humanitarian organisation to India. UNHCR has a presence in several parts of South Asia, where not one country has



signed the 1950 Refugee Convention. But it has not been particularly welcome, despite its low profile activity.

India has said for long that this country's own traditions of tolerance and acceptance of refugees over the centuries has made adherence to any international convention redundant. Our record of welcoming and sheltering refugees from the neighbourhood — be it Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tibet or Sri Lanka, to name four of the major refugee flows in the past 40 years — speaks for itself.

The Indian line has been: "We are capable of handling our own affairs, we don't need any international guidance or assistance". However, with diplomatic skill and sensitivity from both New Delhi and UNHCR, the latter has been able to help quietly with Sri Lanka's Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu, assist in the settlement of Afghans in India as well as a handful of Burmese refugees.

CAMPS

UNHCR has also been playing a low-key but effective role in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bhutan as well as Nepal not to forget Pakistan (the Afghans) with outflows of Tamils from the Jaffna area, the Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar to Bangladesh as well as Bhutanese of Nepali origin who are now sheltered in UNHCR camps in eastern Nepal.

Mrs Ogata's visit to India was low-key, unlike her other international trips, although she did meet External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and Foreign Secretary Lalit Man Singh. What has clearly gone home to the UNHCR chief is that on the subcontinent, especially in India, refugees are not really a core issue. Migrants are. She clarified her position with vigour that cannot but have pleased South Block. It was not just political oppression or internal conflicts which lead to displacement but "poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment are also contributing to population movements in search of economic opportunities".

She spoke of the need to differentiate rigorously between the two with the need to develop, as in the case of Vietnam and its one million Boat People of the 1970s and 1980s, an overall action plan which guaranteed settlement for genuine refugees after a procedure which determined their status. The country of origin (in this case, Vietnam) "acknowledged their responsibility toward their citizens by agreeing to take back all non-refugees and ensure their safe and orderly return".

Will Bangladesh even consider admitting that millions of its people are in India and will it be prepared to take even a fraction them back if a resettlement package by international agencies was made attractive enough? Dhaka and its representatives will officially say: "There are no Bangladeshis in India". They know, as well as we

do, that this is nonsense and have admitted to it in informal conversations.

MIXED FLOW

The critical issue that Mrs Ogata has flagged and which all governments in the region, especially India, Nepal and Bangladesh, will need to develop policies for is that of mixed migration flows, where the settlers are both refugees and economic migrants.

One has been advocating for long a procedure of work permits for migrant workers (valid for one year and extendable by another year with the photo identity, address and work location on such a permit) and the issuance of Identity Cards (the Election Commission cards which got halted in mid-process) for all Indians. This is not an easy process but is there an alternative? It is foolish for anyone to talk about ousting millions of "foreigners" from this country — the State has neither the capacity or the interest in doing so. It is time for innovative thinking that will face the problem squarely and work on specific ways in which it can be turned to India's advantage — and especially that of its distant and vulnerable North East.

No amount of talk about the rights of indigenous people will get us anywhere. It is time for specific, practical measures not flawed concepts of nationality and origin which create more confusion. Mrs Ogata's remarks put the issues in an useful perspective.

The migration of people from one settlement to another, one nation to another is as old as humankind itself. People move as a measure of historic necessity. The history of the world is migration. Nothing can change that. The question is its management so that the rights of vulnerable communities at home are protected.

For this to happen, the Government of India must consider a legal regime to govern migration instead of dealing with it on an ad hoc basis and depending on a slew of old laws. Today's migrant could become tomorrow's terrorist.

THE STATESMAN

11 MAY 201

'Influx' of refugees affecting Assam'

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, May 10: The deputy chairperson of the state planning board, Mr Deba Kumar Bora, said on Sunday that the alarming population growth caused by the influx from Bangladesh was directly affecting the growth rate of the economy in Assam.

Mr Bora, who is preparing an ambitious project for the all-round development of the state "Vision 2020," told *The Asian Age* that the influx from Bangladesh was one of the main stumbling block in the development of the state's economy but it was never taken into account by the Planning Commission while allocating funds for development.

"If we go by the records, Assam was completely left out by the Planning Commission during the first four Five Year Plans as most of the multi-purpose mega projects were awarded to other parts of the country and Central assistance failed to reach the North-east.

In fact, the northeastern region was deprived of the benefit of independence for at least 20 years. Though, the per capita income of an individual in 1960-61 was Rs 103 that was above the national average. Suddenly in 1970-71 it came down to Rs 85 and reducing trend continued since then as in 1980-81 it was Rs 78," Mr Bora said, adding that 1970-71 was the period when the highest migration from Bangladesh was reported and its impact over the per capita income was visible.

He also admitted that the state's political leadership also failed to project it before the Centre and subsequently regional imbalances even provoked a section of the youth to switch to armed struggle to demand their basic rights.

The mass upsurge against the migration problem resulted in the Assam agitation that drew the attention of the Centre and some mega projects were awarded to the state that, too, under pressure, he said.

THE ASIAN AGE

11 MAY 2000

HD-13 An uncertain future awaits refugees

By Our Staff Reporter,

RAMANATHAPURAM, MAY 10. A cloud of uncertainty hangs over Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who will henceforth be allowed to land in the sixth island (Aram Theedai) within Sri Lankan territorial waters.

Since the intensification of the conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan armed forces in the Jaffna peninsula, the Ramanathapuram district administration has been gearing for the arrival of refugees from the island.

The Indian Navy has set up a "forward observation post" at the land's end near Arichalmunai in Dhanushkodi to keep a round-the-clock vigil on the movement of Sri Lankan Tamil militants and activities of the Sri Lankan Navy along the International Border Line. After checkpost was set up, agents fearing arrest have been dumping the refugees on the sixth island. Over the last four days, 50 stranded people were rescued by local fishermen.

As the sixth island comes under Sri Lankan territorial waters, the Coast Guard as well as Navy personnel cannot enter it. Local fishermen have also been warned against crossing the IB

line. Hence, picking up Tamil refugees dropped in the sixth island by so-called agents from Thalaimannar is a risky affair.

Naval officials said they could only ask their Sri Lankan counterparts to take the refugees back raising the question of turning back people who fled Jaffna to save their lives.

Local people feel that on humanitarian grounds the Indian Government should intervene and frame a clear policy on the issue after discussions with Colombo.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Francis, of the Naval Detachment, Rameswaram said that though the Navy did not want to pick up the refugees, local fishermen were allowed to do so. The Thalaimannar-based agents drop the Tamil refugees either on the third island (in Indian territorial waters) or on sixth island. After the Indian Navy intensified patrolling, the agents preferred the latter.

Around 114 refugees touched Indian shores after violence erupted. Last month their number was 195.

Meanwhile, it has been learnt that the tourist flow into Rameswaram has come down since last week.

THE HINDU

MAY 2000

Call for law on refugees

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, MAY 20. A national legislation on refugees that will take into consideration humanitarian concerns as well as the security interests of the Indian State is essential in the prevailing situation, according to Prof. V. Suryanarayan, a specialist in South and Southeast Asian studies.

During a discussion on Sri Lankan refugees in India, he said there could be an influx of refugees to Tamil Nadu if Jaffna fell to the LTTE. The first batch of such refugees were likely to be non-LTTE Tamils, he said.

The events in the island nation would have an impact on India too. There were 70,000 refugees in camps, and another 80,000 staying in Tamil Nadu, he pointed out.

While many of the refugees would insist that they were fleeing from the Sri Lankan Army, they were actually scared that the LTTE would forcibly recruit their children, he said.

The Chief of Mission of UNHCR, India, Mr. Augustine Mahiga, said India had no law to deal with refugees apart from the Foreigners Act of 1946 passed by the British. While India allowed the UNHCR to exercise its mandate, the refugees were treated as for-

215
eigners on extended stay. A national legislation would provide predictability and consistency and prevent ad hoc responses to refugee problems.

HD-5
In dealing with refugees, it was necessary to go beyond humanitarian responses and go to the root causes of displacement. India had provided a new perspective as a developing country to the refugee issue. If the UNHCR did not provide relief and assistance to those internally displaced in Sri Lanka, more people would have been fleeing the island, he said.

Frontline Editor, Mr. N. Ram, presiding over the discussion, said the crisis of the island was characterised by two traps — the Sinhala-only trap and the Eelam trap. Pseudo-nationalism was the core content of the liberation movement.

The LTTE efforts to obtain Eelam were a pipe-dream, as Eelam would not be tolerated by India, he said.

India had to abandon its earlier isolationist attitude to the island nation. There was now a great challenge to India's policy-making on Sri Lanka, he added.

A book on Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu, *Between fear and hope*, authored by Prof. Suryanarayan and Prof. V. Sudarsen, was released on the occasion.

THE HINDU

21 MAY 2000

Refugee influx resumes

By Our Staff Reporter

9/20/11/12
RAMANATHAPURAM, MAY 21. With the LTTE *49-1* reportedly advancing towards Jaffna, Tamil refugees from various parts of Sri Lanka have started arriving here. A fresh batch of 24 families consisting of 72 Sri Lankan Tamils, including 32 women and 14 children, landed in Arichalmunai near Dhanuskodi from Pesalai on Sunday after a gap of 12 days.

They were reportedly dropped at the third island in Indian territorial waters on Saturday. Though they could have reached the Land's End by walk, they were unable to do so owing to the presence of neck-deep water. They were, however, identified by the Indian Navy personnel on Saturday midnight and the police were informed. They, in turn, asked the Department of Fisheries to rescue the stranded refugees, who were finally shifted to the Mandapam camp after a thorough screening by security agencies.

49-1 *MS*
The district administration here has come out with a contingency plan to tackle the refugee influx, according to sources. There are plans to shift 3,000 inmates from Mandapam to camps in other districts to ensure the immediate accommodation of refugees. Around 1,500 refugees will be shifted to Kanyakumari, Salem and Coimbatore district camps within two days.

The Public Works Department has also undertaken repairs of two big sheds in the Mandapam camp. A proposal has been sent to the Commissioner for Rehabilitation for the installation of four watch-towers and construction of compound walls around the camp, with the aim to prevent any infiltration of Tamil militants in the guise of refugees, according to Mr. S. N. Seshsasai, Superintendent of Police.

He told *The Hindu* that the police have stepped up vigil in the coastal areas of Ramanathapuram district.

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2000

Mizoram told to bring back Reang refugees from Tripura

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 25

ACTING ON a complaint by an RSS body, the Human Rights Commission has asked the Centre and Mizoram to bring back hundreds of Reang tribals who fled to Tripura after ethnic clashes in 1997. The panel rejected Mizoram's stand that the Reangs were originally from Tripura and so had left the State on their own.

It said the tribals in refugee camps of Tripura's Kanchanpur subdivision were legal inhabitants of Mizoram, which was obliged to take them back in accordance with an agreement with the Union Home Minister in November 1997. The Human Rights Commission

requested the Centre to play an active role on priority basis to arrange the repatriation of the Reangs. It asked the governments of Mizoram and Tripura to keep it informed of the progress of the resettlement process.

According to the RSS body - the Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, the Mizoram Government has been discriminating against non-Mizo tribals, like Buddhist Chakmas and the Reangs, who practise Christianity as well as Hinduism.

The Reangs, who number 85,000 are concentrated in 75 villages of Aizawl district. They are demanding setting up of an Autonomous District Council on the pattern of one set up for the Chakmas.

In 1997, a Mizo student group attacked the Reangs after serving "quit notices" on them. It forced them to flee to neighbouring Tripura, Assam, and even to Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Ashram spokesperson Surya Narain Saxena said his organisation would now pursue the issue with the Election Commission on restoring the voting rights of 20,000 eligible Reangs whose names were struck off the electoral rolls in Mizoram.

In response to a petition filed in Delhi High Court by the Ashram, the Chief Election Commissioner agreed to supply a complete set of electoral rolls and establish special polling booths inside Mizoram for the Reangs, Mr Saxena said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 MAY 2000

Naval pressure keeps Tamil refugee flow to a trickle

G C Shekhar
Chennai, May 26

A VIGILANT Sri Lankan navy and the increased presence of Indian Naval and Coast Guard vessels in the Palk Strait has kept the refugee influx into Tamil Nadu to a bare minimum. So far, after the fall of Elephant Pass, hardly 250 refugees have arrived. Unlike in the past when they used to arrive in droves, Sri Lankan Tamils have so far managed to come only in isolated batches.

Though over 1,000 Tamils are waiting at Thalaimannar jetty in Sri Lanka, the heavy handed approach of the Lankan Navy has made it difficult to sail across to Rameswaram as few boats are available for the illegal trip.

According to Indian security sources, the Lankan navy was seizing the engines of Sri Lankan fishing vessels once they returned to their berth after a day's fishing.

Since most of the refugee cross-over took place at the night, this action by the Lankan navy has prevented Sri Lankan fishermen to ferry refugees. Even a few boats that managed to cross over have not been able to land the refugees at Dhanushkodi on the Rameswaram island since a temporary Coast Guard camp has been set up there.

Consequently, the refugees have been dropped on some prominent sandbars in the hope that Indian fishermen would cite them and alert the authorities. On the Indian side, stepped up patrolling by the

Coast Guard, with some additional support by Navy has deterred Indian fishermen from ferrying refugees into Rameswaram.

Previously, Lankan Naval personnel allowed refugees to cross their shores after taking money from fishermen. But the Sri Lanka is keen to avoid a heavy refugee traffic to India fearing refugees' tales of suffering could whip up some emotional support to the LTTE among the mainland Tamils.

"We have information the LTTE has been urging Tamils from the Mannar and Vavuniya area to move to India saying they planned to attack Army camps there. But tough measures taken by the Lanka Navy has deprived refugees of any boats to cross over," said a senior intelligence officer.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAY 2000

Centre fears huge influx of Lankan refugees

VINAY JHA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 28. — The Centre fears massive influx of Sri Lankan refugees if the ongoing conflict on the island nation continues for a few more weeks.

A home ministry official said the present influx was "not too significant", but did not rule out the possibility of a large number of Sri Lankans landing in India. The Union home minister, Mr LK Advani, has, however, hinted that the Centre might take steps to prevent a large-scale influx.

According to official figures, more than 200 refugees have arrived in Tamil Nadu in May. Though the Centre hopes to prevent an exodus, officials say arrangements are already in place to cope with it if it happens. Refugees from Sri Lanka normally come through Rameswaram, from where they are directed to the transit camp in Mandapam after verification by police. Then they make their way to one of the 129 camps in

Tamil Nadu. Orissa too has a camp for Sri Lankan refugees, in Malkangiri. Union home ministry figures say about 70,000 Sri Lankan refugees are staying in the 130 camps now. The numbers have swelled in the past few years as the refugees could not be repatriated since 1995.

The first lot of refugees came to India shortly after the ethnic violence erupted in the early 80s. Between 1983 and 1989, nearly 1,34,053 Sri Lankan Tamils came as refugees. More than 11,000 families (nearly 40,000 people) were lodged in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu.

The remaining 94,000 people did not need government assistance as they preferred to stay with relatives and friends. In 1987 and 1988 about 25,000 people were sent back.

Another 1,22,000 people (nearly 36,000 families) landed in India between August 1989 and April 1991. While about 54,000 people were sent back in the next three years, nearly 19,000 returned on their own after the situation improved.

29 MAY 2000

A case for refugees

51-7 1994
THAT India may enact refugee laws was announced by Justice PN Bhagwati, former Chief Justice of India, at a recent seminar on "National Legislation on Refugees" in the Capital. Organised by Saarclaw, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the seminar was designed to discuss and promote a draft model national law on refugees. "This will soon be the law of the land," Justice Bhagwati had declared, referring to the draft "law" which was prepared by a prominent group of persons from South Asia which he himself headed in 1996. The "law" was formally adopted at the Fourth Informal Regional Consultation on Refugees and Migratory Movements in South Asia held in Dhaka in November 1997.

The Delhi meeting assumes special significance in the backdrop that none of the countries in South Asia signed the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees or its 1967 Protocol. At the same time, none of these countries have any domestic legislation on refugees despite the region accounting for nearly 12 per cent of the world's 13-million refugee population.

Virtually every nation in South Asia is affected by population movements and forced displacement. Pakistan heads the list, hosting over 1.2 million Afghans for over a decade now. India has nearly a quarter million refugees; nearly 100,000 each from Tibet and Sri Lanka, besides nearly 17,000 Afghans and several hundred from Myanmar, Sudan, Somalia and Iran.

In early 1998, over 50,000 Chakma refugees were repatriated from India to Bangladesh which itself hosts over 21,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. While Sri Lanka also has an Internally Displaced Persons problem, Nepal is host to over 90,000 refugees from Bhutan.

Despite the frequent forced population and migratory movements in South Asia, the region is conspicuous for the absence of laws on refugees. A reason that has led to an ad hoc approach is solving refugee problems. India, for instance, addresses its problem bilaterally, leading to discrepancies in the treatment between various groups of refugees — like, for instance, the Chakma refugees were not allowed to work, whereas the Sri Lankan refugees are accorded the facility.

But that is not the major issue. In the absence of refugee specific legislation, refugees tend to be governed by archaic laws meant to deal with foreigners and other aliens. Like in India, the Foreigners Act of 1946 and the Foreigners Registration Act of 1939 are still the primary tools to deal with refugees, giving little or no consideration to the extraordinary circumstances that force a refugee to flee and seek asylum in another country. As a result of this lack of understanding, refugees have often been summarily deported back to their country, endangering their life and liberty.

However it must be acknowledged that in the absence of laws, the courts in India have played a commendable role in protecting the rights of refugees. One of the most prominent court precedents is the 1995 Supreme Court ruling in the Chakma v the State of Arunachal Pradesh case. The Supreme Court had ruled that Article 21 of the Constitution — Right to Life and Liberty — is available to all persons living in India, and by that definition, to refugees as well. Several refugee lawyers in the country laud the role of the courts that have interpreted Article 14, 19 and 21 in a

manner that extends protection to refugees. But is that enough? A plausible answer comes from Rajiv Dhavan, a constitutional expert.

As head of Pilsarc, a public interest litigation firm that takes up the brief of refugees, Dhavan is familiar with the day to day problems of refugee protection. As to whether the court precedents are adequate to deal with refugees, his answer is an emphatic "No!" According to him, the best that he and his associate lawyers are able to do is "fire fighting". At the end of which the refugees have to be resettled in a third country. This, at best, can be described as a difficult and limited solution, considering that finding a third country of resettlement is not an easy job. Besides, repatriation back to one's home country is always a more preferred solution. Resettlement has its own limitations, as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees would vouch.

Augustine Mahiga, UNHCR chief of mission in India, commends the role played by the courts. "The internationally respected judicial system of this country has been in the forefront in creatively interpreting the Constitution to

protect the rights of refugees." According to him, "A legal framework on refugees would greatly enhance the quality of our work. It would provide clarity and guidance on many legal and administrative issues related to the recognition, protection and assistance of refugees."

Others, such as Justice Bhagwati, lament the ad hoc approach in the admission and treatment of refugees which has resulted from a lack of laws. He says, "Vital decisions are left in the hands of sometimes ill informed, bureaucratic minds who have no knowledge of the humanitarian principles of refugee law and of the consequent responsibilities that lie with such decision making processes."

A legal framework, according to him, is "a must" to tackle a complex human problem. The fact that India (along with Pakistan and Bangladesh) has become a member of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR, the highest policy making body on refugees, it is only natural that it should adopt a legislation on refugees.

Referring to the ongoing crisis in Kosovo, Justice BP Jeevan Reddy, chairman of the Law Commission of India, describes how refugees have often been victims of ethnic cleansing. He also refers to the harsh immigration laws in some of the Western countries that prevent refugees from seeking asylum. Describing the adoption of the Model National Law on Refugees as "a step in the right direction", he assured the Delhi discussion that the National Law Commission would forward the draft law to the government of India.

Former foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey also called for an early resolution of the refugee issue by formally adopting the Model Law.

The Model Law will be further refined before it is formally submitted to the government for adoption. That will be a great leap forward to consolidate the traditional hospitality and *karuna* or compassion, as former attorney general Ashok Desai puts it, that India has always extended to refugees, whether from Tibet, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or further beyond.

ASHIM CHOUDHURY reports on a Model Law aimed at remedying the *ad hoc* approach in solving refugee problems. In the absence of specific legislation, refugees continue to be governed by archaic laws meant to deal with foreigners and other aliens

(The author is former information officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Delhi.)

15 APR 2000

Immigration storm hits Britain

BRITAIN sailed into a new storm over immigration on Tuesday with a call by the Opposition Conservatives to hold asylum seekers under lock and key.

The get-tough policy is the latest sign that Britain is running scared over immigration, with a rapid rise in the number of refugees angering voters.

Conservatives accuse the Labour government of going soft on asylum, while refugee groups say both parties are reneging on Britain's long history as a friend to those fleeing persecution.

"This is not about racism," said Conservative Party chairman Michael Ancram in defending his new policy.

"What we are trying to suggest is a system that is going to be firm and fair."

Under the scheme, refugees would be sent to some five secure "reception centres" — probably old Army bases — until their claims are processed.

That would take about six weeks, after which those refused entry would be deported immediately. The new policy, to be laid out by party leader William Hague on Tuesday evening, would mean a major shift in the current system, whereby refugees are dispersed into the community.

Ancram said there were currently more than 100,000 pending asylum cases, most of them bo-



A Kosovar refugee returns home from Australia. Britain has said it would expatriate thousands of Kosovo refugees in coming weeks — AFP

gus, and that processing applications cost the British tax-payer 600 million pounds last year alone.

Asylum is now set to be a key issue in next month's local elections. Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair says he wants to help genuine refugees; his government is busy cracking down on them.

The tough measures include plans to scatter immigrants across the country, often far from friends and family, pay refugees a living allowance in vouchers rather than cash and fine truck drivers for carrying stowaways onto the island.

Campaigners for refugee

rights say Britain is turning into a fortress of xenophobia. The Refugee Council said locking up refugees could provoke attacks of the sort seen in Germany. Barbara Roche, the minister responsible for immigration, dismissed the Hague scheme as rhetoric and talked up Labour's "robust but fair" alternative.

"They are stirring it up. This government is sorting it out," she said.

Of about 32,000 decisions on asylum taken in 1999, Britain allowed 20,000 people to stay: 7,000 were granted asylum and some 13,000 were granted "exceptional leave" to remain.

—Reuters

INDIAN EXPRESS

20 APR 2000

Mizoram not keen on taking back Reangs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AGARTALA, March 13. — Though the Centre and the National Human Rights Commission have urged the Aizawl authorities to arrange for repatriation of Reang evacuees immediately, the Mizoram government is yet to show its readiness to take back the refugees.

The Mizoram Chief Minister, Mr Zoramthanga, had earlier made a statement in Aizawl that the Reangs were not original residents of Mizoram. He claimed they had crossed over to Mizoram areas from Tripura and the Chittagong hills of Bangladesh in search of land for "jhum" cultivation. Mr Zoramthanga also made it clear that his government had no obligation to take back the refugees.

A high-level delegation of the NHRC visited Reang refugee camps in north Tripura in November last year. Delegation members talked to refugees' leaders and senior state officials here regarding problems of the Reangs.

Later on the basis of delega-

tion's report, the NHRC wrote to the Mizoram chief secretary to make necessary arrangements without any further delay so that the Reang tribals, now huddled in camps in North Tripura, could go back to their Mizoram villages. The Tripura government was given a copy of the NHRC's letter.

The NHRC also pointed out that the Reang evacuees were residents of Mizoram and that it was the responsibility of the state government to arrange for their immediate repatriation. The Tripura government has been persuading the Mizoram government regularly to initiate the repatriation process of tribal refugees. There is no favourable response from Aizawl so far.

According to official sources here, the Union government has written several letters and sent messages, requesting the Mizoram authorities for doing the needful so that the refugees can return to Mizoram as early as possible. This is particularly in view of the fact that the refugee problem was giving rise to certain complications following escalating insurgency

and numerous demands being raised by local ethnic groups.

The Tripura Chief Minister, Mr Manik Sarkar, personally talked to his Mizoram counterpart in several occasions and requested the latter to initiate process of taking back the refugees.

The influx of tribals begun in October 1997 following ethnic disturbances in Mizoram villages adjacent to north Tripura areas. Over 40,000 evacuees had taken shelter in six camps of north Tripura. Several hundred refugees, mainly old and children, have so far died of numerous diseases.

The Centre has so far given Rs 17,25,00,000 for providing relief to the Reang refugees.

Meanwhile, the Bru National Union, the Mizoram-based tribal organisation, has wanted the Aizawl authorities to sign an agreement with the state's Reang leaders assuring security for the minority Reang tribesmen in Mizoram before initiating process of repatriation. BNU also wanted the Centre to supervise the process of Reang refugees going back to their villages.

THE STATESMAN

14 MAR 2000

Uprooted, they get relief after 28 years

Jay Raina
New Delhi, March 17

NEARLY 28 years after the signing of the historic Shimla Agreement leading to delineation of the Line of Control (LoC) along the Jammu and Kashmir border, the non-camp displaced persons from around 4,600 uprooted families have finally been granted relief at par with their compatriots.

The relief package okayed by the Union Cabinet on Thursday night envisages ex-gratia payment of Rs 25,000 per family besides other rehabilitation benefits.

However, families with a monthly income of Rs 3,500 and above have been excluded from the new relief package.

Others who own more than 32 kanals of irrigated or 48 kanals of unirrigated or equivalent land have also been kept out of the package.

Official sources said the ex-gratia is to be restricted to those claimants who were already registered with the J&K Government and who had actually fled Chhamb-Naibat area in the wake of 1971 Indo-Pak conflict and the subsequent delineation of the LoC. In accordance

with the Union Cabinet's decision, a committee comprising representatives of the J&K Government and the Centre will be set up to scrutinise the eligibility of the affected persons for relief.

The sources indicated that in cases, where the original claimants had since expired, the legal heirs of such claimants may become eligible for the relief benefits, subject to the production of a succession certificate.

The new dispensation to the hapless victims of

camps located at Kishanpur and Manwal near Jammu.

Many others who lost their homes and hearth chose to live on their own on this side of the border, were denied relief over the years for having refused to settle in camps.

The Centre, later, set up a joint team to ensure effective and expeditious resettlement of all the displaced persons. The team recommended constitution of a central authority to look into the matter afresh.

However, the Chhamb Displaced Persons Rehabilitation Authority (CDPRA) set up subsequently did not grant relief to the non-camp displaced persons.

The issue was recently taken up by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on a representation from the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), represented by Mr Balraj Puri.

The representation drew the attention of the commission to the plight of a large number of the uprooted families who had left behind their homes and hearths and stayed with their friends and relatives on this side of the border.

J-K non-camp refugees

the 1971 Indo-Pak war can be traced to delineation of the LoC following the Shimla Agreement signed between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan on July 2, 1972.

Around 39,000 acres of land in Chhamb-Naibat area in J&K fell on the Pakistani side of the LoC in wake of the agreement and the LoC delineation.

Over 18,000 persons comprising around 4,600 families, who were uprooted during the war, had fled from the area to live in three relief