

Wrong container cloud on deaths

Reuters

BRUSSELS, Dec. 10. — Refugees found dead in a shipping container in Ireland may have planned to take the much shorter sea voyage to Britain but made a fatal mistake over the container, a Belgian official has said.

Eight refugees, including three children, were found dead in the container on Saturday by a truck driver delivering office furniture to a business park near Wexford in southern Ireland.

Five survivors are in serious condition in hospital.

Officials in Belgium, where the container was loaded on the ship bound for Ireland, were investigating how and where the refugees got into the container and seeking to track down people who may have helped them. No arrests have been made so far.

Investigators suspect the refu-

gees may have climbed into the container when a truck carrying it made an overnight stop in Belgium last Tuesday, according to local news reports.

"It is quite possible that the stowaways made a mistake over the container and that the container was thought to be headed for Britain," Mr Dirk Calemyn, head of maritime police at the Belgian port of Zeebrugge, told RTL TV yesterday.

While the voyage to Dover in England takes four-and-a-half hours, the trip to Ireland takes about two days, Mr Calemyn said.

That would have meant spending much longer in a closed airless container.

The deaths of the refugees, whose nationality is unknown, shocked Ireland, where government officials vowed that human traffickers responsible for the smuggling would be tracked down.

Irish, Belgian and German au-

thorities are cooperating in the investigation.

"What interests us is, firstly, to find out where the victims of this tragedy entered the container which arrived in Ireland and, secondly, to identify and search for the people who helped them to get into all this," Bruges prosecutor Jean-Marie Berkvens told RTL.

The ship that took the container to Ireland arrived back in Zeebrugge early yesterday where the crew was questioned by police but could throw no light on the incident, Mr Calemyn said.

The ship was later allowed to leave again.

Belgium's Belga news agency quoted investigators as saying the container came by rail from Italy to Cologne in Germany.

It was picked up there on 3 December by a Belgian truck driver who drove through Belgium, stopping along the way to spend the night.

Belgian investigators believe it may have been during this stop, in the early hours of 4 December that the refugees got into the container, perhaps with help from outside, Belga reported.

The Belgian truck driver has not yet been questioned by authorities. The container arrived in Zeebrugge around noon on 4 December. The container appeared sealed and was not opened at the port.

The incident has drawn comparison with the deaths of 58 Chinese illegal immigrants found suffocated to death in a truck in Dover, England in June 2000. That truck had arrived on a ferry from Zeebrugge. A Dutch driver was jailed for 14 years by a British court in April for the manslaughter of the Chinese immigrants.

Some 4,500 illegal immigrants have been detained at the Belgian ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend this year, Belgian officials say.

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THE STATESMAN

Kabul, Islamabad to sign refugee repatriation pact

United News of India

ISLAMABAD, Dec. 26. — Islamabad and Kabul are expected to sign an agreement for a phased repatriation of more than three million Afghan refugees living in different parts of Pakistan.

The repatriation is expected to be carried out over the next six months. "As the new interim government is installed in Afghanistan, the refugees particularly those favouring the Northern Alliance are keen to return to their homeland," an official said. "Obviously the repatriation of the Afghan refugees is a gigantic task and cannot be undertaken without the full support of the United Nations," the official said.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's four-day-old interim government held its second cabinet meeting today, as it moved swiftly to establish unity and security after more than two decades of conflict.

In major steps taken so far, the defence ministry has begun planning for an army, a process which will involve integrating tens of thousands of fighters from the ranks of ethnic warlords throughout the country.

Senior Mujahideen commander Mr Atta Mohammad said that after the establishment of Mr Karzai's government, "a new chapter has been opened in our history, so we must have a new army as well". Mr Atta said the army would be recruited on a voluntary basis, ending the practice of forcing men and boys to fight. Iran's defence minister Mr Ali Shamkhani has offered help for building the Afghan national army.

Intelligence sources have discovered that the frozen body found in mountains on the Afghan-Pakistani border and buried on Monday carried French identity documents and a local resident said the dead man was a member of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida network.

Reuters Television showed the body with a French identity card in the name of Herve Djamel Loiseau, a French passport, an air ticket from London to Lahore dated 11 March, 2000 and Pakistani and Afghan banknotes, all found on the body.

In Kandahar, Arab militants believed to be members of the Al-Qaida network remained barricaded today with weapons and explosives in a hospital, a local official said. The Arabs, who occupy the female section of Mirwais hospital, have threatened to blow themselves up if attacked, an intelligence officer said. The official gave the number of besieged militants as eight, although a spokesman for provincial governor Gul Agha said there are seven, after one was captured. Mr Agha's forces have surrounded the hospital in the hope of taking the fighters alive.

In a sign of the changing times in Afghanistan, the first magazine for women in nearly 10 years has hit the shelves of the war-ravaged country.

"Seerat (Attitude)" is a weekly churned out on an old fashioned printing machine and is run by three female journalists funding the

Afghan telecom was under Pak control

United News of India

KABUL, Dec. 26. — Pakistan controlled the entire telecommunication network in Afghanistan during the five-year Taliban regime and all international calls from Afghanistan were directed via Islamabad.

Officials of the Afghanistan communications department said Kabul could be connected to Peshawar by a local call.

From Kabul a call was made to Jalalabad in south Afghanistan which had a microwave link with Islamabad.

For international calls, a caller had to dial 0092 (Pakistan code). Initially Pakistan had permitted international calls from 50 PCO's in Kabul but later 20 private residences were also added to the list.

Call charges to India were the highest, 1,26,000 Afghanis (about \$2) per minute and for Pakistan the lowest with 33,000 Afghanis (about 50 cents).

Asked about the wide discrepancy in the charges, an official said it was because of the Taliban policy to discourage calls to India and encourage Pak contacts.

The official, who requested anonymity, said Taliban communication minister Mullah Yar Moh-

THE STATESMAN

27 DEC 2001

Bangladesh Hindus migrating to W. Bengal

MALDA, NOV. 4. Scores of men and women have left their homes in Bangladesh and bundled up their belongings to sneak into the border districts of Malda, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur of West Bengal.

Whether farmers or college professors, these people belonging to the minority Hindu community are united in their fear of a regime whose supporters have allegedly mounted violence against them since last month's general election in Bangladesh.

When contacted, the Malda DM, Mr. Ajit Ranjan Bardhan, said he was yet to get any report from police on the migration. "I have asked for reports. Unofficially I have heard that the Hindus are coming from Bangladesh and a large number of them have taken shelter in the district. I am getting reports from my own channels."

The Dakshin Dinajpur police SP, Mr. Anuj Sharma, said he was inquiring into the reports that Hindu families were migrating to the district. "The atrocities on the Hindus had in fact started some time before the elections. The situation worsened after the polls especially in areas where the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) won," said a 35-year old farmer, Mr.

Haradhan Biswas, of Gaghael village in Gopalganj district of Bangladesh. BNP supporters had set fire and looted houses in the villages of Rautkhamar, Mollahkandi, Tentulia and Mollarhat of Barishal district and the atrocities are continuing, Mr. Biswas said.

He had escaped to Malda along with his wife and two children in the dead of the night last week. He has been given shelter by his relatives in Pakuahat village and does not plan to return. "You can imagine the situation in which we were forced to flee. I could not even bring a change of clothes," Mr. Biswas said. "What is taking place in Bangladesh is forcible usurping of minority property in the name of fundamentalism."

Even women were not spared, he said. "In a village near Dhaka three daughters of the same family were abducted, raped and killed." The Awami League supporters, Mr. Dhiren Rabidas of Nababgunj district and Ms. Tara Mondal of Ahora village, who had taken shelter in the district, said, "we had approached the Awami League leader, Mr. Safiullah Sheikh, who told us that no guarantee could be given to help the Hindus. He asked us to escape to India and return if there is any

change in the situation in the future."

A professor, who teaches English in a college in Bangladesh, has found shelter in the same village after entering via the Hili checkpost. He has left his children at his brother's house in Bangladesh and is on the lookout for a house in Malda to move in his family. "I want to sell my property and relocate here permanently," he says but refuses to give his name though he was travelling on his passport.

There are many others like him from Rajshahi, Nator, Nababganj, Gomastapur districts who have taken shelter in Baishnabnagar, Gajole, Alampur, Muchia, Pakuahat, Bamingola and other areas of the town.

Reports from Dakshin Dinajpur said a large number of migrants from Pabna, Sirajgunj, Bagura and Dinajpur in Bangladesh had entered through the porous border near Hili checkpost and were staying with relatives in Gangarampur, Tapan and Bansihari areas. Many of them have complained that they had been threatened by the BNP workers before the polls. "The tragedy is even after we voted for the BNP we had to leave our homes," some of them said. — PTI

5 NOV 2001

What infiltrators? Aren't they refugees?

Debasish Roy Chowdhury
Kolkata, November 2

WHAT'S THE difference between the armed 'mujahideens' who slipped into Kargil and the Hindu refugees from Bangladesh? None, evidently, for the Indian authorities. In their eyes, both are 'infiltrators'.

There is a strange hush in Government circles over the recent influx of Hindus from across the border even as the media continues to painstakingly chronicle the plight of the hapless hundreds that have crossed over to India in recent weeks.

A random check with the Union Home Ministry, Ministry of External Affairs and the State Government today revealed that it's virtually a non-issue in the corridors of power. So far as officialse goes, these robbed, raped and riven masses are not even 'refugees'.

But the way India is dealing

with the problem is in flagrant violation of UN norms on refugees. Perhaps that would explain the hush. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees, a refugee is defined as a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country". This more than fits the bill for Bangladesh's Hindu refugees. Not for the Government though.

India's response to the current wave of refugees is appalling. The normal procedure with 'infiltrators' is: they are arrested by the BSF, handed over to the police and tried in the court for violation of the Foreigners Act. After they have served a jail term, the magistrate issues a

CM keeps tab on 'infiltrators'



CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has said that he is keeping a tab on the infiltration problem.

He said he was checking out the situation district-wise and is in continuous touch with border districts, which have "vulnerable spots" for infiltration.

Bhattacharjee said the problem was not yet alarming but added that it couldn't be ignored either. The Government is keeping a close watch and is constantly exchanging reports, he said. Asked if he would inform the Centre on the problem, the Chief Minister said that he would do so, if the need arose.

HITC, Kolkata

'pushback' order. The infiltrators are finally handed over to the BDR, who accept the 'pushbacks'.

The same procedure is being applied to these refugees as well. Only this time more lethally. Border Intelligence sources told *Hindustan Times* that for the last

six months, the BDR has steadfastly refused to accept 'pushbacks', saying they belong to India. So the BSF has devised a novel way of overcoming this.

They push back these refugees under the cover of darkness across the Bangladesh border. Paying back infiltration by the

same coin. What if they are caught on the other side by the BDR? No one cares. "They will try to return again," said an Intelligence officer.

Again, the UN has very specific rules on this, none of which is obviously adhered to by India. Under the Geneva Convention, a person is a refugee whether or not a legal eligibility procedure has already recognised that status.

The United Nations High Commission for refugees mandates that states may not forcibly return refugees to a territory where they face danger. The host country should ensure that refugees benefit from economic and social rights, at least to the same degree as other foreign residents of the country of asylum.

A refugee, as per UN laws, has the right to safe asylum, which comprises more than physical safety. Every refugee should have access to medical care. Every adult refugee should have

the right to work. No refugee child should be deprived of schooling. A fairytale to the refugees labouring in cramped Indian jails on the border, but that's how it should be.

The 1951 Convention specifically bars countries from punishing people who have arrived directly from a country of persecution provided they present themselves speedily to the authorities and show a viable cause for their illegal entry. Wonder then why refugees from Bangladesh are being herded into prisons. Some even serve terms up to six months.

The problem evidently lies in taking the initiative to re-label 'infiltrators' as 'refugees'. Banasree Bose Harrison, Director of the Bangladesh Sri Lanka Maldives (BSM) Division in the Ministry of External Affairs, said the reports reaching Delhi do not occasion alarm "Our agencies put the figure of influx in recent weeks at 600."

Fine, it's not large enough. But how large is large? No one has any answer. The Home Ministry flatly denies that such an influx is actually taking place. "The BSF is there to handle it," said an official. Who will explain to him this is exactly the problem? West Bengal's Minister of State for Refugees' Rehabilitation, Nayan Sarkar, is equally foxed when asked what the State Government's response would be to the current crisis. He says he is reading the reports on refugees everywhere, but hasn't had to tackle it yet.

"Going by the Indira-Mujib agreement, we cannot call people from Bangladesh refugees after August, 1971. But we will have to look into it," he says. Understandably, Banga Bandhu couldn't have foreseen a situation in which Hindus would have to flee to India to stay alive. Besides, what about UN laws? What about humanism? What about common sense?

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 NOV 2001

Bangla refugees turn back on home

MANAS BANERJEE
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Nov. 1. — More than 80 families came to Malda, South and North Dinajpur after atrocities on minorities in Bangladesh and they refuse to return home. "There is no way we will go back. The attackers have taken away our land and property and we are left with nothing".

The Bangladesh government has reportedly deployed secur-

ty forces to prevent further attacks on minorities. But the refugees are not satisfied. They blame fundamentalist organisations in Bangladesh for the attacks on them.

The decision to post security forces in sensitive areas was taken after talks between India's national security advisor, Mr Brajesh Mishra, and the Bangla-

deshi Prime Minister, Begum

Khalida Zia, in Dhaka recently, Intelligence agencies said.

"Shoot us but we will not return to Bangladesh" was what some refugees told BSF officials at Dikul in South Dinajpur. Nearly

25 Bangladeshi families have taken shelter in different parts of the district, a BSF official said.

Police have been informed that some Bangladeshis have taken shelter in the district. But the

authorities have so far refrained from taking action against them on humanitarian grounds.

A senior district official said: "We have taken a go-slow policy and are waiting for instructions from the higher authorities as it is a matter which the Centre must decide upon".

The biggest influx of refugees has been to Malda. Nearly 60 Bangladeshi families are re-

portedly staying here. The DM, Malda, Mr AR Bardhan, told The Statesman he has sought a report from the district Intelligence branch on the exact number of Bangladeshi refugees who have entered the district recently. Informa-

tion on the number of Bangla families in the district is yet to be officially confirmed, he said.

Bangladeshi families have tak-

en shelter in Alampur and Singpara in Gazole, Kaliachak and Baishnabnagar since 15 October. Some have taken refuge in the Habibpur and Bamongola blocks, a district official said.

Malda VHP leaders have submitted a memorandum to the Bangladesh High Commission through the DM, demanding that the Bangladeshis be returned to their country with "honour and protection". The VHP claims over 100 Bangla families have taken shelter in the district.

'SHOOT US BUT WE WILL NOT RETURN TO BANGLADESH'

THE STATESMAN

2 NOV 2007

Cong ditches Vidarbha state issue

By Ramu Bhagwat
Times News Network

NAGPUR: The issue of creation of Vidarbha state raised by Congress leaders here got an unceremonious burial at Delhi when an emergency meeting of the Congress Working Committee decided to accept the suggestion that the matter be referred to the next state reorganisation commission whenever the Centre constituted it.

Frustrated over the party high command's interminable delay in taking a decision on the issue, Vidarbha Congress leaders had, a fortnight ago, decided unilaterally to constitute a Vidarbha Pradesh Congress Committee (VPCC).

Rajya Sabha member and veteran party leader N.K.P. Salve was appointed its president and it was seen as a last-ditch battle for creation of the state.

But this unusual bravado shown by VPCC seems to have boomeranged. As expected, the high command took a serious view of it and party in-charge for Maharashtra Motilal Vora gave a dressing down to the Vidarbha leaders.

On Tuesday, when the Vidarbha Congress leaders were in Delhi to convince the high command of the urgency to endorse their demand, the party called an emergency meeting of the CWC. The meeting took up the much-awaited report of the Pranab Mukherjee Committee which went into the demands of creation of smaller states. The report linked Vidarbha with Telangana and said since it involved an entire gamut of issues, the Congress should ask the Centre to constitute a new states reorganisation commission to consider all such demands.

The decision came as a shock for the Vidarbha

Congress leaders camping in Delhi. Led by Mr Salve, the leaders from Vidarbha included former MPCC president and Maharashtra minister Ranjit Deshmukh, MPs Naresh Puagalia and Uttamrao Patil, former MP Banwarilal Purohit and others. The angry leaders on Wednesday met party president Sonia Gandhi and urged her to review the CWC decision.

Talking to TNN from New Delhi, Mr Ranjit Deshmukh said Ms Gandhi gave a patient hearing to them. She assured them the demand for reviewing the decision would be considered at the next meeting of the CWC. An incensed Mr Salve said the CWC decision linking Vidarbha with Telangana and pushing it to the centre court was a 'weak-kneed approach and a grave injustice to people of Vidarbha. This decision will certainly alienate people of Vidarbha and the party will definitely lose a traditional stronghold, Mr Salve warned.

Expressing surprise over the Pranab Mukherjee committee report, Mr Deshmukh pointed out that three committees appointed party on earlier occasions had favoured creation of Vidarbha. In fact the Fazal Ali states reorganisation committee in 1960 had recommended a separate state of Vidarbha but the party had then preferred a united Maharashtra as a political expediency, Mr Salve said.

Strangely, the Congress rather meekly supported the creation of three new states of Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal by the NDA government. Now when it was important to support the Vidarbha issue, the party has accepted the suggestion to ask the Centre to constitute a new state reorganisation committee to consider the demand, a dejected Mr Salve said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 NOV 2001

Conditions in detention centres 'appalling'

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 30. An Australian prison watchdog has lambasted conditions in immigration detention centres as the country's navy "rescued" 229 asylum-seekers off Christmas Island today.

The Australian authorities said the asylum seekers were rescued after their boat began to take water. They are being taken to Christmas Island and an announcement on their fate made soon, the Australian Immigration Minister, Mr. Philip Ruddock, said.

In the meantime, the Western Australian Inspector of Custodial Services, Prof. Richard Harding, said today that detention centres for asylum seekers were "unacceptably overcrowded" and that medical services were "disgracefully inadequate".

Prof. Harding, speaking at a meeting of the International Corrections and Prisons Association in Perth, called for an independent inspection system to be set up in view of the lack of accountability.

"It is no coincidence that riots occur in a system that lacks accountability," the Professor was quoted as saying.

His remarks come as a major



A TOUCHING TALE: One of the asylum seekers to Australia leans against the chainlink fence of a refugee camp on the Island of Nauru, where he, along with others were brought, in this file picture. — AP

blow to the Australian Government's repeated claims that it treated the "irregular migrants" in a humane fashion.

"Anyone who knows the simplest thing about prison riots knows also that unacceptable conditions against which there is no recourse. ...are the precursor

of riots," he said.

"We do not have riots in our detention centres because we have a riotous group of refugees. We have them because we run appalling systems," Prof. Harding stated.

There have been repeated riots and hunger-strikes by inmates in

these detention centres. All irregular asylum-seekers must face mandatory detention on arrival.

"Australia's reputation for fairness and accountability has been besmirched over the last two or three years," Prof. Harding stated. "It will never be rectified until the main policies on refugees are sorted out," he added.

Prof. Harding said the education services on offer to inmates were "largely a charade".

He said there was also evidence that detainees, who wanted to complain about conditions, were intimidated by detention centre staff.

Mr. Ruddock has denied Prof. Harding's claims that conditions in the detention centres were "disgraceful".

"In terms of the way in which people are detained, our approach is humane, people do get a higher level of service and I would say in relation to dental and medical services, the level of service available to detainees would be of a higher order than many people in regional and remote Australia receive," he was quoted as saying.

THE HINDU

3 1 OCT 2001

Centre alarmed at Bangladeshi migration to Bengal, Tripura

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, October 27

A FRESH influx of Bangladeshi nationals into some of the border States in India following the capture of power by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led alliance in Dhaka has set alarm bells ringing in the corridors of power here.

The brunt of the illegal immigration has been taken by West Bengal and Tripura. A Home Ministry document attributes the recent inflow to "either political vendetta against Awami League supporters or targetting of Hindus" by BNP activists.

When contacted, Union Home Minister LK Advani said: "The Prime Minister is extremely concerned about the developments in Bangladesh and it is with this view that he has sent his Principal Secretary and National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra to Dhaka."

According to the MHA note, women are particularly scared. "It appears that they have migrated in large numbers. So far, 370 persons have entered Tripura and 250 have fled to West Bengal, though the actual influx is expected to be much higher than what has been officially reported so far. The migrants have taken shelter with their relatives already settled in the two States or have rented houses. The document says that extortion and assault, which increased following the BNP's victory in the recently-held general elections,

BSF-BDR PACT ON CHECKING INFILTRATION

BSF and Bangladesh Rifles have agreed to step up measures to contain illegal migration of Bangladesh nationals into India and cooperate with each other in dealing with trans-border movement of narcotics and hazardous articles, BSF sources indicated.

The agreement was reached at the end of a four-day coordination conference of BSF and BDR delegations at Rajshahi in Bangladesh on October 25.

Related report on Page 6

prompted this influx.

There are already an estimated 15-18 million illegal immigrants from Bangladesh settled in various parts of India. Home Ministry sources apprehend a "continuous flow" in the coming months.

In the North Bengal sector, illegal immigration into South Dinajpur, Malda and Cooch Behar districts was reported first on October 14. About 50 families (223 members), mostly Hindus, entered the three districts in groups. A study shows that as many as 535 persons (404 Hindus, 113 Muslims) sneaked in through the Hilli checkpoint in South Dinajpur. The West Bengal police have so far booked 14 illegal immigrants who entered Cooch Behar under the Foreigners Act.

The documents says that only

seven families comprising 21 members and two other families are reported to have entered through Bongaon in North 24-Parganas and Murshidabad districts respectively. But intelligence officials in Calcutta, the note says, believe that the actual migration in the South Bengal sector would be at least "five-fold". The same officials have reported that "Hindu upper middle-class families have shifted about 3000-4000 of their female family members with relatives in India".

However, in Tripura, the influx began on October 6 following the defeat of Zainul Hazari, the Awami League contestant from Feni-II constituency in Bangladesh. The document reveals that Hazari along with Kamal Majumdar, chairman of the Fulgazi Union in Feni district, and about 150 other League supporters and workers, including both Hindus and Muslims, entered Bari village in Belonia sub-division of South Tripura district.

Another group of 200 Bangladeshi tribal Hindus from Khagrachari district sneaked in through the border village of Faisyabari in Gandachara sub-division of Dhalai district. A separate batch of 20 Hindu women belonging to Songazi in Feni district crossed over to Pukurkhala and Gabtali in Belonia. Feni happens to be the parliamentary constituency of Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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Australia's refugee policy comes under fire

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 27. Australia's policy of dumping refugees for "processing" in remote Pacific islands through the promise of "aid deals" has been condemned by the Pacific Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

In a joint statement, the groups, along with other civil society groups, said: "We are concerned that accepting the Australian aid deals will make Pacific island Governments part of the process that solicits money/profits out of trade in human trafficking, and in this case the asylum-seekers."

Fiji is the latest Pacific island nation which has been approached by Australia to house what it calls "illegal immigrants" on its territory for processing in return for cash.

Already, Nauru, the smallest nation on earth, has taken in refugees from a Norwegian freighter, Tampa. These refugees, who were rescued from the sea, spent weeks on an Australian ship before being landed in Nauru. (For its part, New Zealand took some of the refugees voluntarily).

One report said Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, had fired his Foreign Minister, Mr. John Pundari, who had leaked and opposed an Australian proposal for the PNG to take in asylum-seekers. Palau and Kiribati are the other Pacific countries being pressured by Australia to accept refugees.

There is little doubt that cash-strapped Pacific islands, who have sensitive inter-ethnic relations, are tempted by Australian offers of money in return for

processing "illegal immigrants".

A vast majority of these "illegal immigrants" are from Afghanistan, Iraq and other West Asian countries — where political conditions are terrible — and who may have never even heard the names of these remote Pacific island nations.

In their statement, the Church-based organisations said: "We collectively reiterate our stand in safeguarding Pacific islands' dignity and refuse to see the Pacific region continuously becoming a dumping ground for the benefit of industrialised nations."

The release underlined their "concern over the Australian leadership's denial of their moral and legal obligation to support and protect those who flee their own countries because of persecution and violation of human rights. We also appeal to Pacific island Governments to carefully consider the long-term impact and consequences of accepting Australian aid deals in connection to the refugees.

"To welcome and accommodate Australian refugees for the sake of money will add more problems and will have adverse impacts on our communal life as Pacific communities, as well as our sovereignty," it added.

In a response, the Australian Immigration Minister, Mr. Philip Ruddock, said there was no justification for the statement issued by the Church organisations.

"What we are seeking to do is to ensure that people are safe and secure and that their processing can occur in places where they are safe and secure and where any claims can be properly assessed," Mr. Ruddock was quoted as saying.

SEARCHED

Jakarta to hold meet on migrants

Refugee
Problem

HD-15
25/10

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 24. Stung by the deaths of over 350 refugees, Indonesia today announced that it would convene a regional meeting to discuss the growing movement of what are called "irregular migrants".

"We will take the initiative to hold a meeting with some ASEAN members...as well as (the refugees') prospective country, Australia, and hopefully their countries of origin," said the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mr. Hasan Wirayuda, in Jakarta.

Indonesia, which has so far kept Australia at a distance on the refugee issue, feared that refugees would begin moving in larger numbers following the U.S. military strikes in Afghanistan.

"With the military action on Afghanistan, we have to anticipate that the wave of refugees will get bigger," he maintained.

Expressing concern at the death of the Australia-bound refugees, Mr. Wirayuda stated: "Who is to blame for this incident is difficult to say because this was an accident. But this accident reminds us of the need for a handling of illegal immigrants by the concerned nations." Separately, a UNHCR representative said about 30 of those who were on the ill-fated boat that capsized on Friday may have already been designated as refugees.

Mr. Raymond Hall, a UNHCR



RUDDERLESS: A mother comforts her children while they wait at the old customs in Piraeus together with 112 Iraqi, Iranian and Kurdish would-be immigrants who were transferred from a Turkish vessel on Wednesday. Twenty-five more refugees were caught near the island of Kos. — AFP

representative, was quoted as saying: "Governments are not lining up to offer resettlement places. Australia will take none of the recognised refugees (from Indonesia). Other countries say...we are prepared to take some but why should we take the leading role."

"It's difficult for the refugees to understand the limitations of the United Nations. So, they can be

very distrustful," said Mr. Hall in Jakarta.

According to him, the recent terrorist attacks in the United States had made refugees coming from West Asia more pessimistic about their prospects.

"Some refugees tell us the attacks are going to make Western Governments likely to be less enthusiastic to take refugees from our region," said Mr. Hall.

THE HINDU

10/25/10

Refugees overwhelm Pak posts

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

CHAMAN, Oct. 21. — Pakistan's efforts to stop Afghans crossing the border appear on the verge of collapse with huge numbers now fleeing US airstrikes on their devastated country.

The number of people crossing the southwestern Pakistani border post at Chaman alone has risen from 1,000 a day to 5,000 over the past week, according to the United Nations.

Officially the border is closed.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said 10,000 refugees were massed on the other side of the border.

The US bombing of Afghanistan, years of drought and a looming tough winter is expected to propel 300,000 Afghans towards the Pakistan border in the next few weeks, half of them through Chaman.

The UN sees that number touching 1.5 million — in a country already burdened by three million refugees and a chronic water shortage — if US reprisals for the 11 September destruction in New York and Washington continue.

The UN High Commission for Refugees urged Pakistan to open its borders for the "very difficult cases" among Afghan refugees after over 3,500 of them arrived at the country's Chaman border crossing in what may have been the larg-

est single-day exodus since the start of the bombing campaign in Afghanistan, on Friday.

The UN agency is holding talks with the Pakistan and Iran seeking flexibility at the formal crossing points and opening of the borders for the "very difficult cases," United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees, Mr Rudd Lubbers said.

Mr Lubbers warned that the number of refugees could go up "exponentially."

The UNHCR could take care of 5,000 people a day. "We are prepared for that. But the critical point is not our preparedness, it is the cooperation of the Pakistan government," he added. "Pakistan must understand that the misery of the people is such that they have to be more forthcoming," he said.

"We are concerned that thousands of people are approaching the border," UNHCR spokesman Peter Kessler said. He said there were most likely millions of Afghans in remote areas of Afghanistan who were too poor, sick and hungry to travel to Pakistan or another neighbouring country.

Those that have already made it to the 200-metre no man's land on the Durand Line that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan at Chaman have become prey to human smugglers and corrupt guards.

Border officials have claimed those who crossed were Pakis-



IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH: An Afghan carries his wife to a medical camp at Chaman on the Pakistan border on Sunday. — AP/PTI

tanis returning home but one foreign aid worker said: "Everyone we spoke to said they were Afghan and were fleeing American bombs." The UNHCR has said security guards are taking bribes and giving preferential treatment to ethnic Pashtuns, who dominate southwest Pakistan, over other ethnic groups. According to the UNHCR,

Chaman locals are also taking Pakistan travel papers off those who made it across, smuggling them back to Afghanistan and renting the documents for others to use.

Pakistani nationals are reportedly hopping the border with their passports and returning with refugees they claim are family members.

THE STATESMAN

22 OCT 2001

Pak refugee camp delay angers aid agencies

MS-7 17/10

Aditya Sinha

Peshawar, October 12

THE UN and international aid agencies are furious with Pakistan for not setting up the 100 camps as planned for the Afghan refugees even though the US military campaign is well under way.

"They have not even finished identifying sites for the camps," says the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission, Pakistan (HRC), Afrasiab Khattak. "The refugees who are coming in illegally right now have nowhere to go."

Peshawar-based officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have privately blamed the ISI for repeat-

edly creating hurdles in the effort to set up camps to shelter the expected one million refugees, a bulk of which would enter the NWFP.

"The Government wants the camps fenced, and the movement of refugees completely restricted," says Azizurrahman Rafiee of the Agency Coordinating Body For Afghan Relief (ACBAR). "They want to ensure that each and every refugee can be immediately repatriated as soon as possible."

"Every site the Government suggests has problems of space and water," says Khattak. "Then there is the problem of persuading the tribes controlling the area, and setting up a mechanism so that there is no law and

order problem between the local tribes and the refugees".

So desperate are the Afghan aid agencies that they have even suggested setting up the camps inside Afghanistan. "But that has logistical problems," says Rafiee. "If the border is closed, how do we get them the blankets, food and medicine, and other essentials?"

Indeed the closed border remains a sore point, for the UN and other agencies have been requesting Islamabad for a month to open the border. "What are they waiting for?" asks Khattak. "The crisis has begun. What will be the use of opening the border after the military operations are over? Then the camps won't be needed".

As a result of the sealed border, the Afghans are trickling in through traditional routes. "About 700 are coming through Bodha, and 400 through Ali Masjid daily," says Rafiee, naming two popular routes out of the scores available to locals. "A conservative estimate would be 20,000 have arrived throughout the NWFP since the raids began," says Khattak.

With no camp to go to, these refugees are showing up at the doorsteps of relatives, clansmen or people from their localities who stay at the older camps.

The hosts do not have the means to support newcomers, leading to fresh pressure. "That's why the HRCP has suggested that the Government reactivate the

old camps," says Khattak, referring to camps set up in the 1980s and partially vacated in the 1990s.

"At least some sort of infrastructure is there. We can utilise that capacity, as they can absorb substantial numbers."

The situation however is no cause for optimism. The Refugee Camp Establishment Task Force, comprising the USA's International Rescue Committee, the Danish Commissioner for Afghan Refugee Rehabilitation, the UNHCR, and the Commissioner for Aid for Afghan Refugees, has not been able to do much due to "bureaucratic delays". Says Rafiee: "The Task Force has become practically defunct".

Pak draws line for refugees

HR-9
11/10

Islamabad, October 10

AFGHANS FLEEING their country for Pakistan are leaving a land the UN calls "the most difficult place in the world to survive." Many could be heading for places almost as bad. As strikes on Taliban military targets in and around Afghan cities continue, Pakistani bureaucrats and relief agencies are fighting a behind-the-scenes war over what to do with the people who are running for their lives.

Pakistan wants to isolate any newcomers in the wind-blown stretches of desert along its western frontier. They would be held in zones just 5 or 6 miles deep at border crossings near Quetta and Peshawar. Pakistani leaders say this nation can't afford to care for many more refugees than have already left Afghanistan for their nation. And they fear that Taliban fighters might try to slip into the country with refugees. They want to limit movement.

But angry aid workers say the zones designated by the Pakistani Government are dangerously isolated, vulnerable to attack and all but inhabitable.

"It's like putting a million people in Death Valley," says Peter Kessler, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commission on Refugees.

Pakistani authorities already have reneged on a promise to open the 1,042-mile border to refugees once a military conflict began in Afghanistan. The border has been closed since soon after the September 11 attacks.

Relief agencies say air strikes and other military action could trigger an exodus of up to 1.5 million Afghans.

Aid workers don't have a clearer idea how many refugees are heading for the border because they can't talk to their Afghan

employees. Two weeks ago, the Taliban said it would hang or shoot anyone caught speaking on a satellite phone.

The bleakest of the potential refugee sites are near Quetta. The area has suffered through three years of dry weather. In the zone where the refugee camps would be located, the water table has fallen to depths that only large commercial drilling rigs can reach. To dig a well big enough to supply 10,000 refugees, the drills have to bore through 900-1,200 feet of sediment and rock. The job takes 3 to 4 months. The cost: \$100,000 a well.

Even before the terror attacks, the refugee issue had sapped Pakistan's resources and snapped its patience.

USA Today

US airdrops a 'joke'

INTERNATIONAL AID workers today derided US air drops of food rations as a cosmetic exercise that will have little impact on the humanitarian crisis on the ground.

"Frankly, it's a joke," one senior official close to the UN's humanitarian operation in Afghanistan said. "Even if they are lucky enough to find any (of the packets dropped by US planes), hardly anyone will realise what they are."

Officially, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) has welcomed the US initiative to combine its air strikes with air drops.

Officials who have been working in Afghanistan for years highlighted a number of problems with the US initiative. The make-up of the MRES, or meals ready to eat, dropped by US planes in recent days is too rich for Afghans used to a meagre diet.

AFF Peshawar

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 OCT 2001

Japan rushes aid for Afghan refugees

By Harvey Stockwin
Times News Network

HONG KONG: Seeking to indicate commitment within the limits of its no-war constitution, Japan on Saturday made its first tangible contribution to the U.S.-led counter-terrorism struggle by deploying its air force to the Indian subcontinent with relief material.

But the gesture which most interests America—Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's promised dispatch of a small Japanese naval flotilla to the Indian Ocean to assist the Anglo-American fleet with logistics and intelligence—remains entangled in what could be a protracted parliamentary controversy.

Six Hercules C-130H transport planes of the Japanese Air Self-Defence Force (ASDF) left their base in Aichi prefecture on Saturday afternoon laden with tents, blankets, sleeping mats and water containers and other relief supplies for delivery to the ever-increasing number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The operation has been carefully planned and an advance team of ASDF personnel has been in Pakistan since September 29 finalising arrangements for the air-lift. The relief goods are being supplied at the request of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Indicating the political importance which the Japanese government attaches to the participation of its military in the anti-terrorism struggle, even in non-combat roles,

Mr Koizumi himself was photographed at his residence on Friday, greeting some of the ASDF officers who flew the mission.

The six ASDF C-130H transports will take the long route to Pakistan, and will arrive there on October 9, after refuelling stops in Okinawa, the Philippines, Thailand and India, according to Japan's Kyodo News Agency. While this route may reflect the limited range of the non-jet aircraft, it also indicates a non-use of Chinese airspace for shortening the journey. Whether this is because Beijing refused to let the Japanese Air Force use Chinese airspace, or because Japan did not ask, assuming a refusal, is not known.

China, and also Korea, are currently engaged in sometimes bitter acrimony with Japan over the memories of past Japanese aggression on the mainland of Asia. Mr Koizumi will fly to both Beijing and Seoul in the next ten days to try and patch things up—and to gain Chinese and Korean acceptance of the overseas deployment of the Japanese military in the anti-terrorism struggle.

Meanwhile, the dispatch to the Indian Ocean of a small Japanese naval flotilla led by the Aegis-class destroyer Kongo, earlier promised by Mr Koizumi as a way of demonstrating non-combat support for the large Anglo-American fleet assembling in the Arabian Sea, has not yet taken place. An expectation that the Japanese ships would accompany the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk has not been realised.

The Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) squadron has been fully loaded for departure but is held up by political developments. On Friday, the Japanese cabinet finally approved, and Mr Koizumi presented to the Diet (parliament), two bills for further legalising Japanese military action under the no-war constitution.

The two bills make it possible for the self-defence forces to guard the U.S. bases in Japan, thereby freeing U.S. personnel for other duties, and to provide U.S. forces with logistics in areas outside the immediate neighbourhood of Japan.

Previously, indicating the tight constitutional strictures governing the Japanese military, the dispatch of the MSDF ships had been contemplated under an obscure SDF law permitting operations for doing "necessary research and study".

The two parliamentary bills are already generating a great deal of political controversy even though public opinion appears to strongly support the stand that Mr Koizumi is taking.

Rather than risk increasing Diet difficulties by ordering the departure of the naval ships, Mr Koizumi has instead said that the flotilla will only depart from Sasebo naval base in Kyushu once the two bills have been passed by the Diet.

While this is an understandable tactic, it means that as in 1991 during the Gulf War, so in 2001, the MSDF is in danger of showing the flag—after hostilities have concluded.

Influx of Afghans poses problems for Pak.

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, SEPT. 18. Pakistan today talked about hundreds of thousands of Afghans fleeing their country and waiting to cross over to its side of the border fearing U.S. retaliatory strikes.

For the first time since the terrorists attacks on U.S, a Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman acknowledged the deteriorating situation on its borders and warned that it could get out of control if the crisis was not defused.

He said his country had closed the border and was allowing only Afghans with valid documents to cross over. Thousands from across the border were waiting to cross over into Pakistan and it was just not practicable to seal the 2,500-km porous border, he said.

As host to 25-lakh Afghan refugees, Pakistan was in no position to absorb a further inflow of refugees, he said and urged the international community to launch relief and rehabilitation measures within Afghanistan.

The grim scenario was corroborated by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In its latest report, the UNHCR said that population movements out of Afghanistan's principal cities of Kabul and Kandahar were continuing, but transportation was reportedly difficult to obtain.

Over the past days, tens of thousands of people had been on the move, mainly travelling from cities into rural areas of the mountainous country. The UNHCR said that new Taliban checkpoints had sprung up along the road from Jalalabad to the Torkham border-crossing. Taliban guards were reportedly allowing only Afghans bearing passports to cross into Pakistan.

The report said that in Afghanistan's western city of Herat, the atmosphere was tense and that the residents were confused about the developments because of the general lack of information. People were so impoverished

that even radio receiver sets and batteries were in short supply. Television was banned.

In southwestern Afghanistan's main city of Kandahar, headquarters of Mullah Omar, the residents continue to leave for the surrounding rural areas. The UNHCR was informed by Pakistan on Monday that 5,000 Afghans were at the Chaman border-crossing near the provincial capital of Quetta.

The UNHCR is asking the authorities to allow any new arrivals to be sheltered in existing camps where adequate water and other facilities can be more quickly established. Today, it is sending 2,000 tents to Quetta from its stocks in Peshawar. The UNHCR has a total of 9,300 tents in Pakistan, enough for more than 50,000 people.

In a related development, the World Food Programme (WFP) said that it had enough food stocks inside Afghanistan to last normal operations for

two to three weeks. Currently, it has stopped food shipments into the country partly due to the lack of commercial trucks in various parts of the country to move our food.

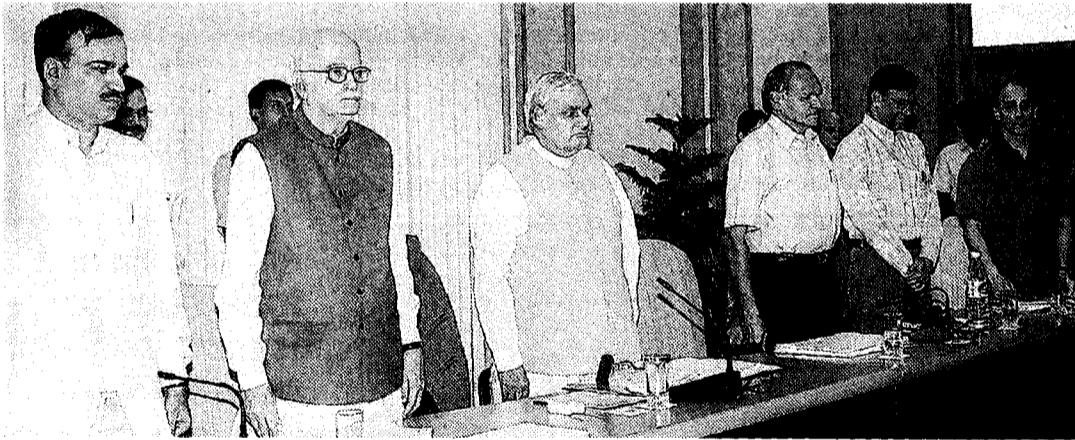
The WFP is concerned about possible massive movement of people towards neighbouring countries. Reportedly, thousands have already left Kabul and Kandahar and more may follow. The WFP hopes to be ready to provide help to 1.5 million people.

China seals border

Telegraph reports from Beijing:

China has closed its frontier with Pakistan, officials confirmed on Monday as Beijing warily prepared for the first American military action in its backyard since the Vietnam War.

The Karakoram highway, the mountain route into Pakistan from the Chinese desert outpost of Kashgar, was sealed on Saturday, officials at the border post of Tashkurgan said.



The Union Cabinet observing two-minute silence to mark 'Solidarity Day Against Terrorism' in New Delhi on Tuesday. Seen from left are the Union Minister for Urban Development, Mr. Ananth Kumar, the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, the Cabinet Secretary, Mr. T. R. Prasad, and the Minister for Disinvestment, Mr. Arun Shourie (extreme right). — Photo: Rajeev Bhat

Solidarity Day against terrorism observed

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, led the nation as it stood in silence for two minutes today as a mark of respect to the victims of the terrorist attacks in the U.S. and to express solidarity with the global community in the fight against terrorism.

Traffic in the capital came to a standstill at 10.30 am as the country mourned the deaths of thousands of victims of terrorism. Transmission of programmes on all stations of the All India Radio and Doordarshan channels was suspended for two minutes.

All government offices and departments fell silent between 10.30 am and 10.32 am. — UNI

THE HINDU

19 SEP 2001

Allow Afghan refugees to land, says court

10-17
12/9

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, SEPT. 11. An Australian Federal Court judge, Mr. Tony North, has ruled that over 430 mainly Afghan refugees, now confined on board an Australian navy vessel en route to Papua New Guinea, must be released on to the Australian mainland by Friday evening.

"I have considered the evidence placed before the Court concerning the situation of the rescuees on the MV Tampa (a Norwegian vessel which originally picked up the refugees on August 26). I have concluded that they were held in detention within the meaning of the law," Justice North said in a statement.

In what comes as a blow to the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, the judge ruled that an "ancient power" of the Court was to "protect people against detention without lawful authority".

The judge's ruling was on a petition filed by the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties and Mr. Eric Vadarlis, a solicitor practising in Melbourne.

Soon after the judgment was made public, reports stated that the Howard Government had gone in appeal to a full bench of the Federal Court. The refugees must be brought back either by Friday evening or at the determination of any appeal arising from

Justice North's decision — whichever is later.

Justice North said in his judgment: "In my view, the evidence of the respondents' (Government and Ministers) actions in the week following August 26 demonstrate that they were committed to retaining control of the fate of the rescuees in all respects.

"The respondents directed where the MV Tampa was allowed to go and not to go. They procured the closing of the harbour (at Christmas Island) so that the rescuees would be isolated. They did not allow communication with the rescuees. They did not consult with them about the arrangements being made for their physical relocation or future plans...." he said.

"The respondents took to themselves the complete control over the bodies and destinies of the rescuees. The extent of the control is underscored by the fact that when the arrangements were made with Nauru, there had been no decision as to who was to process the asylum applications there or under what legal regime they were to be processed," the judgment said.

Justice North pointed out that the question of Australia's policy towards refugees was a matter of great debate within the country, but his role was confined to determining questions of law.

"It is not a part of the function

of the Court to interfere in the policy decisions made by the Government. But it is part of the function of the Court to determine if the Government respondents have acted within the law," he stated.

In his statement, the judge also quoted a letter from the mostly Afghan refugees sent to the Australian Government. "You know well about the long time war and its tragic human consequences and you know about the genocide and massacres going on in our country and thousands of us innocent men, women and children were put in public graveyards, and we hope that you understand that keeping view of above mentioned reasons we have no way but to run out of our dear homeland and to seek a peaceful asylum," the letter said.

Runs aground

In another development, a boat carrying 130 asylum-seekers ran aground on Ashmore Reef in the Timor Sea in Australian waters late on Monday.

A Defence Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying that the Australian navy was "providing assistance to render the boat seaworthy again to enable it to return to international waters. It sustained a little damage in hitting the reef".

Australia swaps oil for boat people with Nauru

REUTERS

AIWO (NAURU), SEPTEMBER 10

THE tiny Pacific island of Nauru on Monday agreed to take a further 237 illegal immigrants off Australia's hands in exchange for fuel and other incentives in a deal Australia said sent a message to people smugglers.

The agreement bought Australia a way out of its latest asylum seeker dilemma after the Navy boarded an Indonesian ship over the weekend and transferred its passengers to a troop carrier already laden with boat people being sent to Nauru and New Zealand.

Australian Defence Minister Peter Reith told reporters that Australia would give Nauru diesel, write off medical bills for its citizens in Australia, cancel some debt and increase scholarships in a deal worth some \$10.2 million. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said in Sydney the deal would show people smugglers their trade was "not the breeze they thought" and would undermine the credibility of racketeers who claim they can land asylum seekers in Australia. "What we're doing is transmitting a message to the people traffickers that



Australia's Defence Minister Peter Reith inspects the Nauru Anaoc Village on Monday where more than 400 asylum seekers will be housed. Reuters

just trying to make a fast buck unloading people onto Australian islands which happen to be near Indonesia is going to be a very difficult way to make money," he said.

Nauru, the world's smallest republic with 12,000 people on 21 square km, has emerged as Australia's white knight since Canberra refused to allow a Norwegian cargo ship to land 433 mainly Afghan asylum seekers it rescued at sea. The container ship, the *Tampa*, was stuck

off Christmas Island for eight days while Prime Minister John Howard faced down world outrage and sent troops aboard to make sure none of the boat people tried to swim ashore.

The asylum seekers will get the sort of ocean view that tourists dream of. They will be able to gaze on the palm-fringed Pacific from the Nauru Anaoc Village, originally intended to house competitors in this year's world weightlifting championships.

INDIAN EXPRESS

11 SEP 2001

HD-12
9/9

Indonesia rejects Australian proposal on refugees

By Amit Baruah

SYDNEY, SEPT. 8 Indonesia has declined an Australian request to set up a "refugee processing centre" on its territory as talks between the two countries on the issue of people-smuggling failed to make progress. An Australian Associated Press (AAP) report said today that the Foreign Minister, Mr. Alexander Downer, the Defence Minister, Mr. Peter Reith, and the Immigration Minister, Mr. Philip Ruddock, "walked away empty-handed" from talks with the Indonesian side.

The report came on a day when the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, stated that the country's navy had intercepted a boat carrying around 200 refugees.

The ship was boarded and the refugees transferred to the HMS Manoora, which is sailing towards Papua New Guinea with some 450-odd asylum-seekers from the Tampa, the Norwegian vessel which Canberra refused to permit into Christmas Island.

Mr. Howard claimed that a request was made to Indonesian authorities to board the vessel while it was in Indonesian waters, but the request was rejected.

"At no stage did this...vessel reach Australian territorial waters...as a result, the questions of application for asylum status do not arise," Mr. Howard was quoted as saying.

Separately, *The Sydney Morning Herald* has reported that guards at the Curtin refugee detention centre smashed mirrors and doors just before the Immigration Minister, Mr. Philip Ruddock, was to pay a visit. The newspaper, which quoted accounts of refugees about a day in July or August last year, said that Mr. Ruddock was taken to that part of the camp and told that the damage had been caused by the refugees.

"Many people wanted to speak to Ruddock and give him a letter, like a letter of complaint to him, and they wouldn't let anyone to get near him," one refugee was quoted



Australia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Alexander Downer (right), meets Indonesia's Vice-President, Mr. Hamzah Haz, in Jakarta on Friday. — AP

as saying. It also referred to other incidents of inhuman treatment at the hands of the security guards.

The newspaper quoted from a Government report prepared by Mr. Philip Flood, a former permanent secretary at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which said there was a "small proportion of detention centre staff" who treated "detainees, including children as they were worse than criminals."

"Credible witnesses have told me of derogatory remarks to detainees, humiliation of people in room searches and people sworn at in an abusive manner....I am satisfied....that these claims are valid," Mr. Flood was quoted as saying.

An Afghan man told the newspaper that the guards went to great lengths to ensure that they did not have any contact with the outside world.

"Every morning, when all of us went to the dining room for breakfast, the ACM (Australian Correctional Management) come and check all of our rooms for pencil, pen and paper — it was not allowed to be kept by us," he said.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

- 9 SEP 2001

H.O-12
9/8

Humanity denied

The 'new boat' people' are seen as a 'threat' to Australian society by the Government, says Amit Baruah.

MR. JOHN HOWARD must permanently remain in the debt of the 450-odd refugees who sailed to Papua New Guinea on the Norwegian freighter, "Tampa," after New Zealand and Nauru agreed to end the stand-off at Christmas Island. The

of superpowers, is now producing refugees at an alarming rate who dare to try and land in one of the world's richest countries to escape persecution and absolute lack of opportunity.

These "rich" refugees, according to refugee-bashers in Australia, are able to pay "enormous" amounts of money to "people-smugglers" and traverse through several countries before landing in Australia. (There have been some suggestions that they fill their bellies at McDonalds in Indonesia before setting sail for Australia in leaky, life-threatening boats).

It is clearly not about rules and

umbrage at their Government's decision to keep the refugees out. Many have written angry letters to newspapers. One couple offered their farm to house the "Tampa" refugees. Some liberal-minded Australians have taken their Government to court, which is still to decide on the fate of the refugees. Norway, which has been in the thick of the "Tampa" controversy, has severely criticised Australia for how it has dealt with this humanitarian tragedy. But Australia, it would appear, does not heed counsel when it comes to its own internal, domestic affairs.

But Canberra, of course, has the right to lecture Jakarta on how to deal



Indonesian sailors locked up by the Australian authorities for bringing in asylum seekers illegally... a closed mindset.

Afghan (and a sprinkling of Sri Lankan) refugees were just what the doctor ordered for the Australian Prime Minister's sinking political fortunes in an election year. By refusing to allow the refugees to land on Christmas Island, Mr. Howard showed that sacrificing humanitarian principles can lead to better ratings.

Two polls conducted in the wake of the "Tampa" affair have shown that 77 per cent of all Australians support the decision not to allow the refugees in and that the Liberal coalition has inched closer to Labour in terms of support. In an election year, "keeping them out" can be a powerful statement. Humanitarian principles or morality, clearly, do not count for much in the Australian Government's lexicon.

For, first and foremost, the "Tampa" affair is all about the wretched of the earth. Afghanistan, the world's lost nation, the plaything

regulations. It is about understanding the plight of other people. But, when you want to outdo the right-wing One Nation party in garnering votes, then Afghans and other nationalities must be made the scapegoat.

As much of the world celebrates globalisation and the new opportunities created, the movement of people is certainly not one of them. Trade barriers are being removed, skilled labour is moving like any other product, but the developed world has erected solid walls to keep the poor, unskilled out of their countries.

In the case of the "Tampa", the Australian position is a violation of the 1951 U.N. Convention on Refugees, according to groups such as Amnesty International. These "new boat people" are seen as a "threat" to Australian society as a whole by the Government.

Individual Australians have taken

with Aceh and Irian Jaya, having already played crusader in East Timor. It can lecture India (very softly these days in the times of an Indo-U.S. thawing) on the need to sign the CTBT and the NPT.

The time has come for poor countries to raise the issue of how Australia has treated the refugees on the "Tampa" as well as the policy of mandatory detention that Canberra follows towards asylum seekers. Afghan and Iraqi refugees have no Governments to speak for them; other nations, too, are unwilling to speak up for any of their "citizens". That certainly suits countries like Australia.

The Australian press regularly carries reports of attempted suicides in detention centres; of teenagers on hunger strike. Are all these the qualifications that lead to the conferment of developed country status? Developing countries must opt out of such a race.

Keeping out the other

A bitter row has broken out between Britain and France over a refugee camp near the Channel Tunnel. Hasan Suroor reports.

THE POLITICAL discourse and media headlines in Britain this past week have been couched in distinctly militaristic terms — “nightly assaults”, “coordinated strategy”, “internment camps”, “border controls” “security concerns” and much more in the same vein. Reason: a paralysing fear of refugees in a climate where anyone from the “wrong” part of the world is seen as an ugly foreigner — an outsider who must be kept out at any cost. And those who manage to get in through the net must be made to feel so unwelcome that others are deterred from following in their footsteps.

But unfortunately there are simply too many desperate people in the “wrong” part of the world who would do anything — stake their last penny, risk their lives, put up with humiliation — to seek a “better” life in the West. Britain continues to be a magnet for asylum seekers despite the widespread criticism of the way it treats refugees. Apart from being targets of racial abuse in the streets, they are vilified by right-wing politicians and xenophobic sections of the media.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recently condemned British politicians and the media for contributing to the climate of hate against refugees. “In some mass circulation newspapers, asylum seekers are continually branded a problem, statistics are being twisted and negative stories are being endlessly highlighted. This often deliberate attempt to tarnish the name of an entire group has been so successful that the words, ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘refugees’ have even become a term of abuse in school playgrounds,” a UNHCR spokesman said.

Yet, Britain is the most favoured destination for refugees from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq and the Balkans. Over 75,000 applications for asylum were received last year alone and the backlog of those waiting for a verdict is a staggering 70,000-plus. After Germany, Britain is the most sought-after country by refugees with hundreds of people massed at various points of entry looking for an opportunity to sneak into what they believe is a land of opportunity.

Refugees from Asia and the Middle East are attracted to Britain partly because many already have friends or relatives here, and partly because English is the only foreign language they know. A third reason is that Britain, despite its harsh asylum regime, is still regarded the most hospitable nation in Europe.

HD-17 9/8
 “Go England. France no good. Money no. House no. Work no. England, international, good,” is how a 22-year-old Kurd, stranded in a refugee camp in France, explained his fascination for Britain. He is among the 1,000-odd refugees in the controversial Sangatte camp in France which because of its proximity to the Channel Tunnel has become a springboard for entry into Britain.

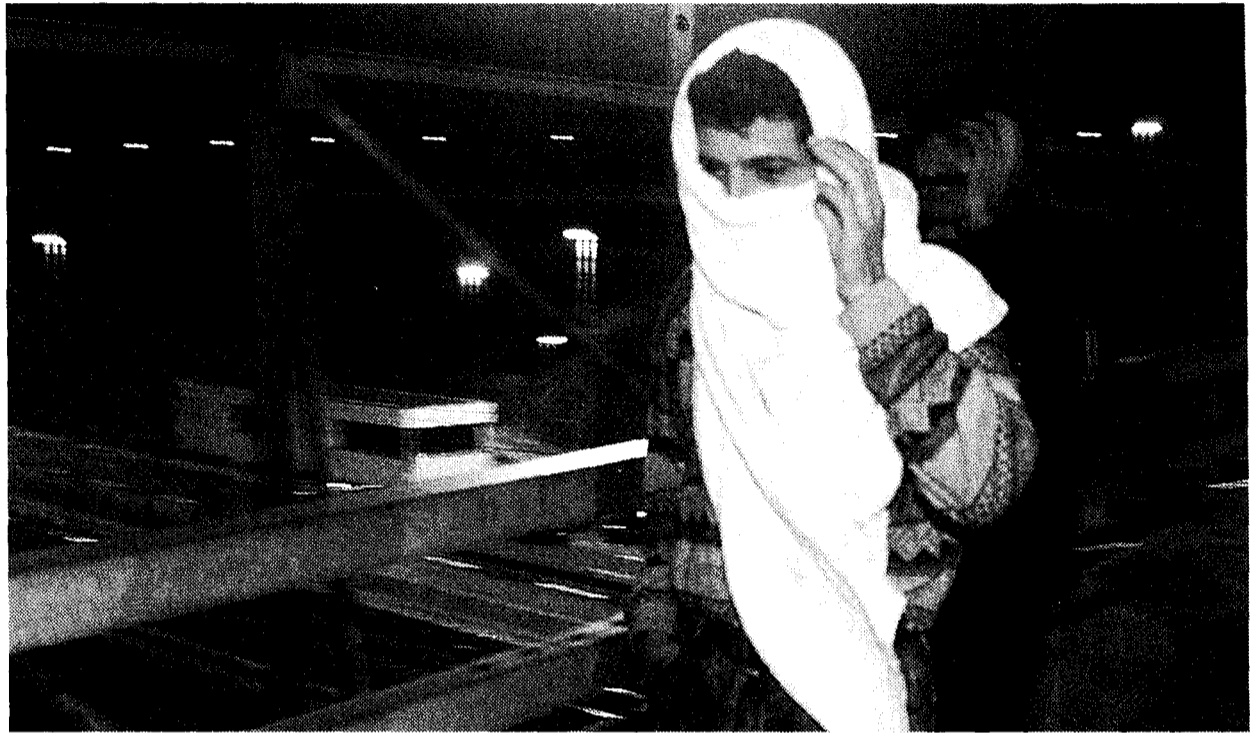
Every night groups of refugees from the camp attempt to break into the Tunnel in a bid to get on to Britain-bound trains. In what has become a nightly cat-and-mouse game, they are

Refugee
 Tunnel, has gone to court demanding closure of the Sangatte camp after the British Government threatened to fine it £2,000 for every refugee who arrived in Britain through the tunnel. The British Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett, is to meet his French counterpart, Mr. Daniel Vaillant, on September 12 to sort out the issue, but France appears in no mood to shut down the camp. Indeed it is reported to be planning to set up another camp close to a Channel port in what is seen as “proof” of French insensitivity to Britain’s difficulties on the issue.

There is a strong sense in Britain that

mean that they can stay on in the country on Government handouts for months. Also, the rate of deportation of those whose claims are finally rejected is said to be much lower than in other European countries most of which dispose of the applications much more quickly and act more swiftly to see that no one stays on illegally. Besides, Britain’s interpretation of who qualifies for a refugee status is more liberal than other European countries, making it a more attractive choice for “asylum shoppers”.

Mr. Daniel Vaillant has suggested that Britain bring its asylum regime in line with the policies in other European



Asylum seekers try to breach the Channel Tunnel... in search of El Dorado.

routinely caught attempting to sneak into the tunnel and taken back to the camp. Most have paid their lives’ earnings to “agents” to get them to Britain and find themselves stranded in France. A young Afghan refugee who arrived at Sangatte two weeks ago said he had already made seven attempts to jump on to a train or a lorry that would take him to Britain. Another said he had been badly hurt but would continue to try his luck until he succeeded. The place has become a haunt of professional smugglers of human cargo who charge thousands of dollars per person to guide refugees to the Tunnel entrance with no guarantee that they will be able to board a train.

A bitter row has broken out between Britain and France over the Sangatte camp which London wants closed down. The camp, according to Britain, is temptingly close to the mouth of the Channel Tunnel frustrating its efforts to check illegal immigration. Eurotunnel, the company which runs the Channel

France is not doing enough to discourage the Sangatte refugees from heading for Britain. The British media has been full of stories suggesting extremely lax security on the French side of the tunnel. The buzz is that France is “waving” the refugees on to Britain rather than making sure that they do not wander away from the camp. *The Times*, in a front-page splash, screamed: “Through the wire and not a policeman in sight”. Its reporter claimed that he did not see a single French police officer during the 30 minutes he spent around the Tunnel fence.

France, however, denies this and blames the great rush for the “El Dorado” on Britain’s soft policy. French officials say Britain must ask itself why refugees prefer it to any other country in Europe. The benefits — accommodation, subsistence allowance, health and education facilities — which Britain offers to asylum seekers are the most attractive in Europe, and inordinate delays in processing their applications

countries. “I say to my British friends and to the British Home Secretary... that they must also make an effort to harmonise legislation in order to make Britain less attractive.” Meanwhile, there is a move by the European Commission to evolve a common European policy on asylum and Britain which has hitherto chosen to go it alone has suddenly discovered the virtues of going with the herd.

But while this might help individual countries keep out the ugly foreigner, what about the refugees themselves? With every country slamming its doors on them, where do they go? Those blessed with the long view argue that the only answer is a more equitable distribution of the world’s resources so that everyone has enough and there will be no need to go looking for El Dorado. But the problem with the long view is that, like the bridge too far, it remains in the distance while corpses pile up. Any quick fixes, then, while the long view materialises?

France blames U.K. for refugee flood

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 7. The war of words between Britain and France over the controversial Sangatte refugee camp has intensified ahead of the Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett's "summit" with his French counterpart, Mr. Daniel Vaillant, in Paris next week. Annoyed by Britain's insistence that France close down the camp, which London regards as a source of illegal immigration, the French have hit back saying the problem is not the camp but the British Government's "soft" asylum policy.

French politicians and officials were today quoted as saying that Britain was unfairly blaming Paris for difficulties which were its own creation. The closure of the camp, they argued, would not help until U.K. tightened up its asylum rules harmonising them with those in European countries. The asylum seekers flocked to Britain because they knew they were going to get an "easy ride there with welfare benefits, housing and a lot of black market jobs," one official said.

"If the British Government changed its asylum policies so that

they were less favourable, this problem would be over within a month," said the immigration manager of a ferry company in Calais. Britain has the most lenient asylum regime in Europe, both in terms of the eligibility criterion and welfare benefits to which asylum-seekers are entitled pending a decision on their applications.

The camp, which houses over 1,000 refugees, mainly Afghans, Kurds and Iranians, is located a short walk from the entrance to the Channel tunnel and every day its inmates attempt to smuggle themselves into Britain by trying to get on to the trains passing through the tunnel. The British Government wants the camp shut down but so far France has shown no inclination with officials saying it was set up because the area was already crawling with refugees wanting to cross over to Britain. "It is not Sangatte that is attracting the refugees but British asylum laws," according to an official quoted in *The Times*. Mr. Vaillant told *Le Monde* that illegal immigration would stop only if Britain became "less attractive in the matter

of asylum rights and harmonises its laws with its neighbours."

While Mr. Vaillant is reported to be opposed to opening new refugee centres in the proximity of Channel ports, he has given no indication that he would oblige Mr. Blunkett by closing down the Sangatte camp.

Meanwhile, Tories have seized on the French criticism to claim that it vindicates their view that the Blair Government's asylum policy is in a shambles. The outgoing Tory chief, Mr. William Hague, accused the Government of "ducking" tough choices on the issue. In an article in *The Daily Telegraph* today, he said his party was accused of playing the race card when it raised the asylum issue during the election campaign but the row over the Sangatte camp confirmed the Tory charge that the Labour Government's policies had turned U.K. into a "soft touch" for illegal immigrants.

The liberal opinion is dismayed by the racially coded debate on asylum, and critics have attacked politicians and the media for "feeding" paranoia over the issue.

INDU

Tampa refugees ferried out, fate uncertain

JASON REED
CHRISTMAS ISLAND, SEPTEMBER 4

HUNDREDS of mostly Afghan asylum seekers headed for Papua New Guinea on an Australian navy ship on Tuesday after a nine-day standoff as a court sat to decide their final destination.

But while the fate of the 433 unwanted boat people remained uncertain, Australian Prime Minister John Howard was reaping voter support for his tough stance not to accept the asylum seekers in the face of intense international criticism.

"I didn't do this for poll reasons. I did it because I think it was right," Howard told local radio, reacting to opinion polls which showed his popularity had risen during the asylum ship crisis only months away from an election.

The boat people were stranded at sea for more than a week after

Aussie PM claims don't hold water but get him brownie points

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister John Howard will go to the polls this year boasting his economic credentials but his eight-day standoff over 433 asylum seekers will cost more than double their detention Bill for one year. While Howard defends his refusal to allow the asylum seekers to set foot in Australia as a stand against people smugglers, it does place a burden on a tight budget that was once sacred to his government's policy. "There is a cost, but there is also a cost if we had accepted them. I don't think it ought to be assessed just on bare cost considerations," Howard told Australian radio on Tuesday. "If we had accepted these people, taken them, the processing would be somewhere in the order of A\$22 to A\$25 million." The standoff has already cost an estimated A\$20 million, and as the asylum seekers sail on the next leg of their journey to a better life, the price for Australia will only balloon. Australia will cover the cost of processing 283 boat people on Nauru, which could take two to three months. Australian media has put the total cost at A\$70 million, with New Zealand bearing more than NZ\$1.0 million for its part in processing 150 of the asylum seekers. On top of the cost of moving the asylum seekers away from Australia's territorial waters, a three week "saturation surveillance" of the Indian Ocean by the Australian navy and aircraft to stop more boat people will push the bill up higher.

In total, the immigration department says Australia spent A\$211 million last year on detention, legal assistance, protection determination, review and litigation costs on unlawful arrivals, but not including capital and infrastructure costs.

—Reuters

acted unlawfully in refusing to accept the boat people. Australian government lawyers are arguing that the asylum seekers arrived on Australia's doorstep illegally by "hijacking" the Tampa by threatening to jump overboard if it did not sail to Christmas Island. Australia says Indonesia should have taken the boat people because they were rescued in its search and rescue area.

Federal Court judge Tony North has said he hoped to make his ruling before the *Manoora* reached the Papua New Guinea capital of Port Moresby in six to 10 days. The court is expected to adjourn later on Tuesday with a ruling later in the week. But even if Australia wins, any of the boat people found to be legitimate refugees could apply to return to Australia.

Australia charged four Indonesians on Tuesday with people smuggling. The Indonesians were charged on Christmas Island with trying to sail the 433 asylum seekers

from Indonesia to Australia on board the ferry KM Palapa, which sank in the Indian Ocean.

Australia's standoff in the Indian Ocean has already cost it an estimated A\$20 million, more than it would have cost to detain the refugees for more than a year. The incident has also stirred heated debate. Police were investigating packages containing bullets and detonators sent to three politicians critical of the government's stance against asylum seekers. The parcels were posted to the national parliament but never reached the politicians' offices.

The parcels, sent to Opposition Labor leader Kim Beazley, leader of the small Democrats party Natasha Stott Despoja and Greens senator Bob Brown, were intercepted during routine mail checks on Monday.

"Events like this show the issue of immigration has the potential to raise ugliness in the community," Beazley said on Tuesday. —Reuters

Court to decide on boat people

Unsure future for refugees

FROM JASON REED

Christmas Island (Australia), Sept. 3 (Reuters): An Australian troop carrier and its cargo of 433 unwanted asylum seekers prepared to leave Christmas Island today with its final destination uncertain.

The asylum seekers were transferred to the troop carrier from a Norwegian cargo ship today after a week-long diplomatic standoff and are due to sail to Papua New Guinea.

But a court case in Australia could yet force the government into a decision it has steadfastly avoided — that the mostly Afghani boat people can land in Australia after all. Four translators were expected to board the troop carrier *HMAS Manoora* tomorrow before it sails for the Papua New Guinean capital of Port Moresby.

From there, the asylum seekers will be flown to either New Zealand or the tiny Pacific Island of Nauru where their claims for refugee status will be processed.

They have been stranded off Christmas Island since their rescue from a sinking Indonesian boat on August 26 by the *Tampa*, a Norwegian container ship. Indonesia and Australia have refused to accept them.

The federal court, sitting in Melbourne, still has to rule in a case that may yet force the government of Prime Minister John Howard to accept the boat people.

A court agreement between Australia and civil liberties

lawyers stipulates that the boat people cannot be forced to leave the *Manoora* until the court decides whether Australia's rejection of them was lawful.

If the government loses, the refugees could still make it to Australia within days, although the government is expected to appeal against an unfavourable ruling.

Federal court judge Tony North said he hoped to make his ruling before the *Manoora* reached Port Moresby in six to 10 days. The case was adjourned until 10.15 am tomorrow, with a ruling not expected until Wednesday.

Stranded

On Sunday, Australia announced a South Pacific solution with Nauru agreeing to take 283 and New Zealand 150. Australia will bear the cost of Nauru processing them. UN secretary-general Kofi Annan said the plan to ship the asylum seekers to New Zealand and Nauru was acceptable.

Nauru said it could take three months to process the refugee claims. Legitimate refugees can then apply for settlement in another country, including Australia. New Zealand will house their intake in an Auckland refugee centre. Four Indonesian crew of the boat the asylum seekers were rescued from were taken from the *Tampa* to the Christmas Island police station today. A federal police spokesman said they will be charged with immigration law violations.

THE HINDU

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U.K.-French refugee row escalates

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT 3. The asylum row between Britain and France escalated today following reports that far from heeding London's request to shut down a controversial refugee camp close to the Channel tunnel, French authorities planned to open a similar centre.

The move came even as the Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett was trying to persuade the French to shift the Sangatte refugee camp which, because of its proximity to the entrance of the tunnel, has become a spring-board for illegal immigrants to enter Britain. British authorities fear that the new centre, likely to be located about 25 km from the town of Lile where Eurostar services stop on their way from Paris to London, would open up another "front".

There was a sharp reaction here with the media suggesting that a "political storm" could be brewing over the issue. "It is the first test of Mr. Blunkett as Home Secretary", one TV commentator said.

Both Labour and Tory leaders attacked France, saying the move to set up a second camp was likely to increase pressure on Britain's efforts to check illegal immigration. There were no takers for the official French view that the move was aimed at easing congestion at the Sangatte camp which holds 700 or more refugees, mostly Afghans, Iranian and Turks. The conditions at the camp, run by the International Red Cross, are said to be squalid and with winter approaching refugees are becoming desperate to get out — their preferred destination being Britain, partly because some of them already have relatives or friends here and partly because the only foreign language they know is English.

British MPs were reported to be angry over what *The Times* described as the "French inaction over the nightly incursions" into Britain by illegal immigrants held at Sangatte. The shadow Home Secretary, Ms Ann Widde-

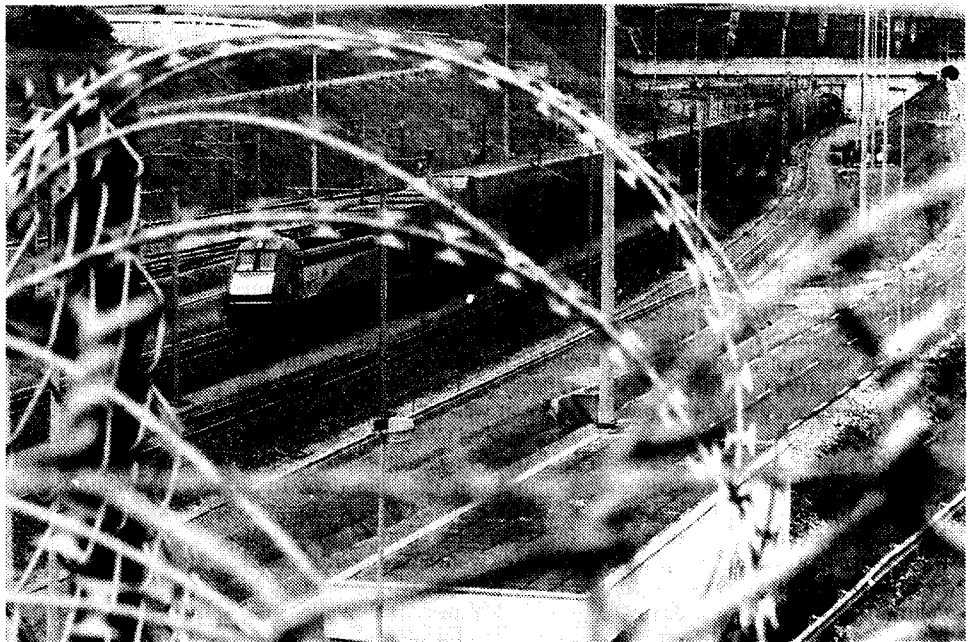
combe, accused France of trying to "pass the buck to us" and said there was "no basis for a second Sangatte."

She echoed the widely held view that the French Government should quickly process the asylum claims of those held at Sangatte, and deport those whose claims are rejected. "People are not being held at Sangatte while their asylum claims are processed. They are being held there while they make repeated attempts to enter Britain", she said.

A Labour MP said there was no evidence that the French authorities were taking action against those trying to sneak into Britain. Commentators pointed out that night after night, groups of refugees from Sangatte risked

their lives to cross the heavily-guarded tunnel and when intercepted they were simply driven back to the camp. Next evening, they were back at the tunnel to try their luck, they said arguing that there was nothing to "deter" them.

Meanwhile, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lubbers, has criticised European politicians for capitalising on "popular instincts" to oppose immigration. He called for a humane international solution to the problem, and said the West should give more assistance to countries such as Pakistan and Iran which were saddled with refugees from neighbouring regions.



The Eurotunnel train "Le Shuttle" passes behind razor-wire fencing at the Channel Tunnel entrance on Monday. — Reuters

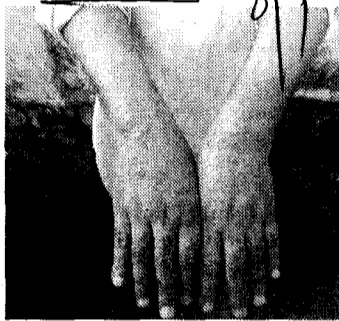
Papua New Guinea to take refugees

CHRISTMAS ISLAND, SEPT. 2. The Australia Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, said on Sunday Papua New Guinea would allow 438 asylum seekers stranded on a cargo ship off Christmas Island to be transferred to capital Port Moresby by an Australian warship before leaving for New Zealand and Nauru.

"An agreement has been reached with the Government of P.N.G. for the transshipment of the people from the Tampa through Port Moresby and then via aircraft to both Nauru and New Zealand," Mr. Howard told reporters in Sydney.

The troop ship HMAS Manoora, which can carry 450 troops, arrived at Christmas Island on Sunday, floating close to the Norwegian cargo ship, Tampa. Helicopters have been picking up pallettes at the Island's airport loaded by soldiers with water, rations, tarpaulins, life jackets and other supplies, and ferrying them to the troop carrier.

"I am told by the chief of the defense force, through the Defense Minister, that as I speak the Manoora is ready to take people on board," Mr. Howard said. The boat people — mostly Afghans — have languished since Monday on



A FIRST 'HAND' ACCOUNT: An Afghan refugee, being detained at Nusakambangan Prison Colony in central West Java, Indonesia, displays skin rashes on Saturday. The Afghans, whose boat sank in heavy seas on August 17, while attempting to go to Christmas Island, Australia, are complaining of poor sanitation and health care at the Indonesian facility. — AP/Reuters

the deck of the Tampa which rescued them from a sinking Indonesian ferry run by people smugglers. The current crisis erupted when Mr. Howard refused the Norwegian cargo ship permission to enter Australian waters. — AP

THE HINDU

U.K.-French row over refugees

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT. 2. A row has broken out between Britain and France over a refugee camp which has become a headache for British immigration authorities as they struggle to keep illegal immigrants at bay.

The Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett, is reported to have told his French counterpart, Mr. Daniel Vailant, to close down the Sangatte camp which because of its proximity to the Channel tunnel — barely a walking distance — has become a "sneaking point" for refugees desperately trying to enter Britain.

The Home Office said the British Government believed that the present location of the camp was "not helping" Britain's efforts to check the flow of refugees. It said Mr. Blunkett had discussed the issue with the French Interior Minister, but the statement made no reference to reports that he asked Mr Vailant in a telephone call to shift the camp and to deal more firmly with Britain-bound asylum-seekers found on the French side of the Channel.

In another development, Euro-tunnel, the company which runs the tunnel, has gone to court in France seeking closure of the controversial camp. The company also wants France to impose tighter border security controls at the entrance to the tunnel. This follows a warning by Mr Blunkett that it might be asked to pay a fine of £ 2,000 for every illegal refugee who sneaks into Britain through the tunnel. The company believes it is unfair as the responsibility for guarding the entrance lies with the French Government.

Mr Blunkett's intervention over the Sangatte detention centre follows months of loud, unofficial, protests over what here is regarded

as France's unhelpful attitude towards Britain's refugee problem. It is widely believed here that France is passively watching as hundreds of asylum seekers use its soil as a check-in point for entry into Britain and by locating a camp virtually next the entrance to the tunnel it is seen to have compounded the problem for the British Government already under domestic political pressure to get a grip over the asylum issue.

While right-wing groups have criticised it for being too "soft" on asylum-seekers, human rights activists have protested that hundreds of refugees have been hurled into in jails, often forced to live with convicted criminals. Almost every night groups of refugees from the Sangatte Red Cross camp attempt to get into Britain through the tunnel often risking their lives, the latest "assault" having taken place on Saturday night when about 100 asylum seekers were found inside the Eurotunnel compound.

Earlier in the week, 44 Afghan refugees were caught walking through the tunnel, and in another case, 80 were arrested when they trying to break into the compound. There are 700 refugees in the camp, mostly Afghans and Kurds claiming to be fleeing political persecution. Exhausted men and women, often with babies in their arms, waiting to find a way to get into Britain has become a common sight. Most have paid their lives' earnings to "agents" to get them as close to the British ports as possible and they say they are determined to "make it."

An Iranian refugee told a newspaper that he paid \$ 1,200 to get to the U.K., but was dumped at Sangatte. "I, like everybody else here, will do whatever I can to cross the English channel. If that includes risking my life by jumping on to a Eurotunnel train then I will do that", he told *The Independent on Sunday*. But for all the hype, few manage to cross into Britain. For most, it is an endless wait to nowhere.



NOWHERE TO GO: Refugees line-up inside a Red Cross-run refugee housing centre at Sangatte, northern France, near the French terminal of the Channel tunnel in this August 6 file photo.

THE HINDU

- 3 SEP 2001

UN stays off refugee screening in Pak

REUTERS

ISLAMABAD, Aug. 31. — The United Nations today suspended its participation in the screening of Afghan refugees in Pakistan saying the government had broken an agreement by taking refugees back to Afghanistan after saying they were going to a nearby camp. "We are temporarily suspending our participation in the screening process," Mr Yusuf Hassan, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, told Reuters.

"We consider this a clear breach of our agreement with the government," Mr Hassan said the UNHCR had confirmed reports that about 28 Afghan families had been lured on to government trucks on Wednesday by the promise that they were being taken from Jalozai — a makeshift refugee camp famed for its appalling conditions — to another well-equipped refugee camp.

The UNHCR official said they had confirmed that the approximately 145 people, many of them from northern Afghanistan that remains outside Taliban control, were handed over to Taliban authorities at the Pakistan border. The UNHCR-government agreement to screen Afghan refugees in Jalozai and other camps was reached in early August after protracted negotia-

TALIBAN MOVE

KABUL, Aug. 31. — Afghanistan's ruling Taliban today closed the offices of two Christian aid organisations on allegations that they had links to other aid workers jailed on charges of promoting Christianity.

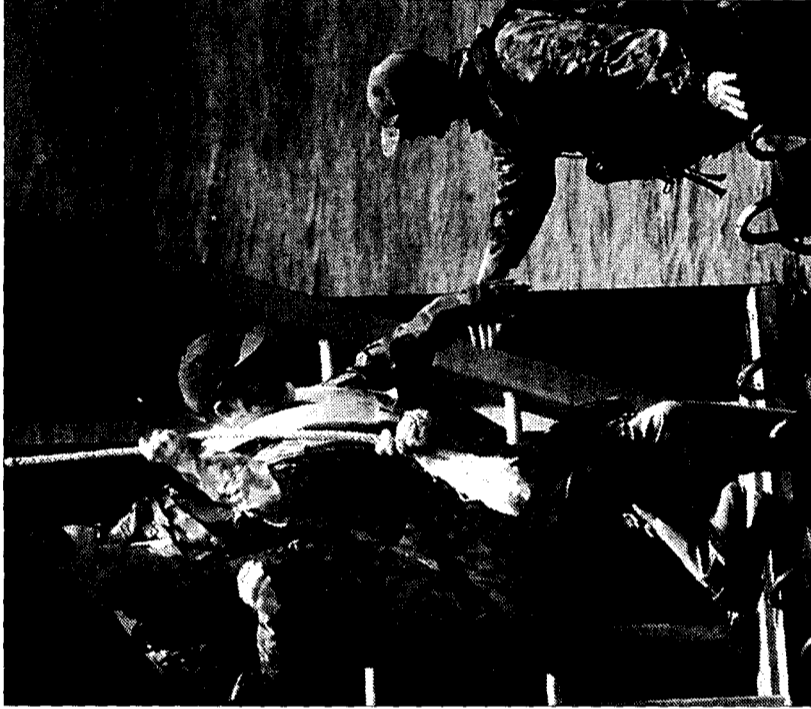
Taliban security fighters said they had closed the offices of International Assistance Mission and Serve on orders issued by the foreign ministry.

"No one is left here and we are not allowed to let any foreigners in. All foreigners left this morning after we closed their offices," said a Taliban guard.

Twenty-four members of the German-based Christian aid group Shelter Now International, including eight foreigners, were jailed early in August on charges of proselytising. — Reuters.

tions because of the conflicting goals of the two sides.

Pakistan, alarmed at the influx of about 2,000,000 Afghan refugees over the last year that has raised the total number of Afghans in the country to around two million, has refused to accept more and wants many of those already in the country to go home. The UNHCR, whose mandate is to protect refugees, wants to ensure that those with legitimate rights to seek refuge — such as fear of persecution —



The Norwegian ambassador to Australia, Mr Ove Thorsheim, is helped by Australian commandos to get on board a rubber boat that will take him to the refugee ship, Tampa, in Christmas Island on Friday. — APTI

are not returned to Afghanistan or had legitimate claims against their will.

Under the agreement, joint UNHCR and government teams were supposed to interview refugees to determine whether they wanted to return to Afghanistan. Their country has

ASYLUM ISSUE

OSLO, Aug. 31. — Norway will hold talks with Australia and Indonesia today about the fate of more than 400 asylum seekers crammed in the Norwegian cargo ship, Tampa. It has dismissed suggestions of the ship going to East Timor.

"We don't know if we'll reach a decision," foreign minister, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, said. Officials from Norway, Australia and Indonesia are scheduled to meet at the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva. New Zealand would also attend. Mr Jagland said Australia, which is refusing to let the Afghan refugees land, had primary responsibility to help them. He dismissed an offer of help by East Timor, a former Indonesian territory. — Reuters

been destroyed by more than two decades of war and in recent years, by drought.

The worldwide problems for Afghan refugees have been underlined by the continuing crisis over some 400 mostly Afghan migrants stranded aboard a ship in the Indian Ocean.

They are anchored off an Australian island on a Norwegian ship that rescued them from a sinking Indonesia ferry. Australia, Indonesia and Norway have refused to accept them.

119-16 Afghan refugees: stand-off persists

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, AUG. 30. The stand-off on board the Norwegian vessel, now believed to be carrying about 460 refugees, continued today with Australia remaining unmoved by international concerns that the asylum-seekers be allowed to land on Christmas Island. The Tampa Captain has refused to follow Australian orders to return to international waters and remains a few kilometres off Christmas Island.

A controversial Bill to arm the Australian Government with retrospective powers to forcibly remove the Tampa has fallen through with the Opposition Labour party, in a belated display of independence, refusing to support the Liberal coalition.

After sending crack commandos to board the Tampa yesterday, the Howard Government appears to have few ideas about

how to resolve the situation. While the commandos are in control of the ship, the Captain has shown no inclination to follow orders to move the ship from Australian waters.

Interestingly, while the Howard Government wants Indonesia to accept the refugees, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, has not been able to contact the Indonesian President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri.

In the meantime, Mr. Peter Dexter, regional director for Wallemius Wilhelmsen, the shipping line which owns the Tampa, has said that the ship was in no condition to sail.

"The vessel is uncertified to carry what is now 450 to 460 survivors, so the Captain is unable to move the ship....Clearly, the situation that the vessel is in at this point of time is that the vessel is not seaworthy to carry 450-odd survivors anywhere," Mr. Dexter said. In a sign that the Govern-

ment was running out of ideas, the Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, spoke to the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan on the crisis. "I briefed him (Mr. Annan) on discussions which have been under way with a number of countries. Clearly, this is an issue that has to be dealt within both a border-protection way and also a diplomatic way," he said. According to Mr. Howard, the U.N. had an over-arching responsibility for refugee matters.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Mary Robinson, said Australia should allow the Tampa to dock at Christmas Island.

Separately, Amnesty International, too, stated that Australia had an international obligation to allow the refugees to disembark and apply for asylum.

"The boarding of troops to stop the vessel from reaching the nearest port and the current Government proposal to introduce

retroactive legislation reportedly to allow the ship to be forced out of Australian waters, are deeply upsetting and in flagrant violation of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to which Australia is a State party," Amnesty said in a statement.

"With the ship currently in Australian territorial waters and with Australian troops on board, the Australian authorities are undoubtedly seized with the responsibility to examine the passengers' claims for protection in a fair and satisfactory procedure, in accordance with international obligations," the human rights' group argued.

"A failure to do so might not only result in a humanitarian tragedy for the passengers on the ship, but also in hundreds of the refugees being eventually forced back to face persecution in their home countries," Amnesty added.

UN asks Australia to accept refugee ship

REUTERS & AFP

LONDON/SYDNEY, Aug. 30. — The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights today urged Australia to allow the Norwegian cargo ship, Tampa, to dock at Christmas Island. Australia is still firm on its stand not to let the ship to dock at the island.

Ms Mary Robinson said UN human rights rules stipulate the migrants should be allowed to land at the nearest port. The ship, with 430 Afghan asylum seekers, is anchored in Australian territorial waters off Christmas Island.

"The UN convention (on human rights) provides that they should be accepted at the nearest port. I think this issue is a very serious one," she said.

Australia has refused to let the ship dock at the island.

Ms Robinson praised Norway for its role in rescuing the migrants who left Indonesia on a rickety wooden ferry more than a week ago and were rescued by the Tampa when the ferry began to sink.

"Norway has played a very responsible role and the Tampa has carried out a necessary humanitarian act in taking on board the refugees at risk of their lives," she said.

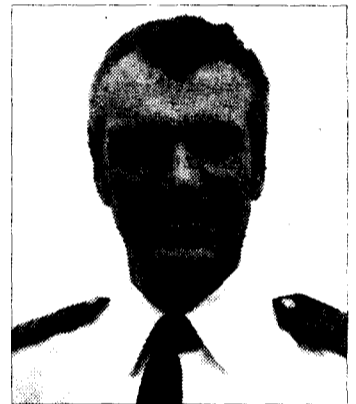
Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts were on to find a swift solution to the high seas standoff in the face of widespread condemnation of Australia's stand. The Amnesty International criticised Australia's decision, calling for urgent action "to avoid a

humanitarian tragedy."

The Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, said he would speak to the Indonesian President, Ms Megawati Sukarnoputri, on the issue and ask her to accept the boatpeople. "In the meantime, the government will continue to explore other options as well." There are reports that Canberra would offer funding if Jakarta took back the Afghani refugees.

Australian analysts said Mr Howard's attempts to coerce Jakarta into taking back the asylum seekers was diplomatically tactless. But domestically, his tough stance could win votes ahead of a close year-end election with growing public anger over illegal immigration.

Norway has threatened legal action if an attempt is made to



A file picture of Mr Arne F Rinnan, captain of the Norwegian ship Tampa. — AP/PTI

force the Tampa back to sea from its current location, four nautical miles from Christmas Island.

THE STATESMAN

31 AUG 2001

Fate of stranded refugees hangs in balance

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, AUG. 26. The fate of 434 Afghan refugees, stranded on board a Norwegian container vessel off Australia's Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, hung in balance as Canberra remained adamant in its decision not to allow the ship to dock.

Indonesia, which had hinted that it might allow the refugees in, today categorically ruled out the possibility as has Norway, the third party involved in what has turned into an international row.

Many of the refugees on the Tampa have begun a hunger strike and threatened to jump overboard in case the freighter decides to turn away from Christmas Island.

"They will jump overboard as soon as we turn around from Christmas Island and they will go crazy, whatever that means," the Tampa master, Captain Arne Rinman, was quoted as saying. "The tension is increasing down there. As long as they see Christmas Island they are behaving quietly... at the first sign of violence we will

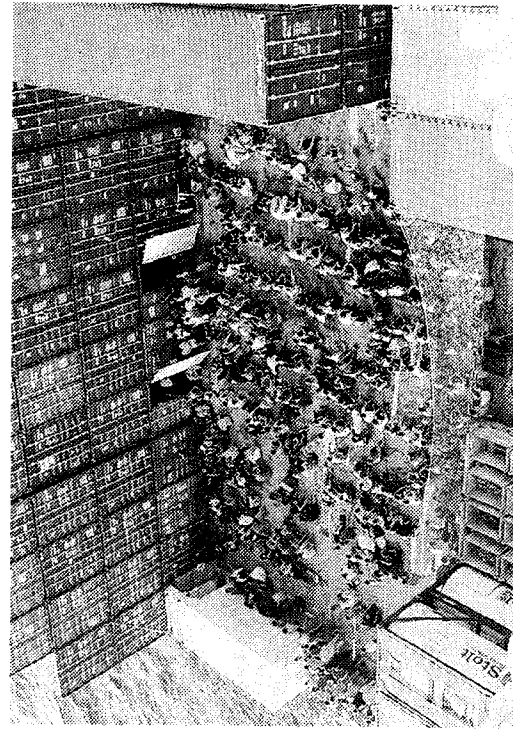
lock ourselves in the accommodation. We are seamen, not fighters. We have no weapons on board. This is not a warship," the Captain was quoted as saying.

In a related development, Mr. Mohammed Ali, one of the refugees, was quoted in agency reports as saying that tension was high on board the Tampa. "A lot of people have been in prison and persecuted in their country and do not have any hope... all the people here are educated people and they have political problems in Afghanistan," Mr. Ali added.

Some of the refugees were said to be sick and were treated by a team of Australian doctors who were taken by helicopter on board the Tampa.

Australia, a nation made up of immigrants, continues to cite international law, while remaining adamant that these "boat people" will not be allowed to land on the country's shores.

In Jakarta, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mr. Hassan Wirayuda, said today: "We already have experience with these refugees



Some of the more than 400 refugees who were rescued from an Indonesian ferry stranded in the Indian Ocean stand on board the Norwegian cargo ship "Tampa", some 120 km off Christmas Island on Monday. — AP

who are illegal immigrants. Should we accept them? Our law will not allow this.

"For that matter, I don't see it is in our interest to land the ship in

tained. According to reports, a vast majority of the refugees were Afghans, had crossed the land border into Pakistan, taken a flight to Malaysia, and then taken a boat to Indonesia's Java and Sumatra Islands. Finally, they had attempted to reach Australia, only to find their ferry sinking and then being rescued by the Tampa on Sunday evening.

In Oslo, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Norway wanted the Australian Government to accept the boat people.

"This is definitely the solution we would prefer, based on the fact that the ship took action (to rescue the refugees) based on a request from Australian rescue authorities," the spokesman said.

"We regard this as a very complicated matter and we cannot let the countries in the region shy away from their responsibilities. According to international law, Norway does not have any responsibility in giving these people asylum. But sooner or later, this case has to be solved," he said.

an Indonesian port... for Indonesia, as a matter of fact and law, is not involved. For that matter, we should not be — as mentioned by some — responsible for the situation," Mr. Wirayuda main-

Nepal, Bhutan to discuss refugees

HC-11 *2118*
Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, August 20

NEPAL IS set to ask Thimphu to expedite verification and repatriation of Nepali-speaking people from Bhutan living in UN High Commission for Refugees-run camps since 1990. There are over one lakh refugees in seven camps located in the eastern Nepalese districts of Jhapa and Morang.

A three-day ministerial-level meeting between the two landlocked kingdoms is due to begin in Thimphu today. Nepalese Finance Minister Ramsharan Mahat will lead the Nepalese delegation at the meeting, 11th since 1994. At the moment, Nepal does not have a Foreign Minister.

Bhutanese Foreign Minister Jigme Y. Thinly is likely to head his country at the meeting. A

Nepalese official said, "We want to finish verification and repatriation work as early as possible." He expressed dissatisfaction at the slow progress of verification work being carried out by the Bhutan-Nepal Joint Verification team set up in March last. So far, the team has interviewed only about 5,500 people.

Verification work was started primarily because Bhutan refused to accept Nepal's claim that all refugees are Bhutanese nationals. The Coalition of Bhutanese Refugees' NGOs here asked both Nepal and Bhutan to make public the status of the people so far interviewed by the joint verification team. It said bilateral meetings would be meaningless if the refugees were not sent back to Bhutan after verification.

THE ASIAN AGE

21 AUG 2001

Orissa tribal killed in clash with Bengali refugees

Sandeep Mishra
Bhubaneswar, June 26

A TRIBAL was killed and six Bengali refugees seriously injured in a group clash over a plot of Government land at Jamadora village in Raigarh Block of Nowrangpur district, on Sunday evening.

The deceased has been identified as one Kailash Singh. Unofficial sources put the number of injured at around 15. No arrests had been made till reports last came in. Five platoons of police and senior officials have been deployed in the village.

State Director General of Police K D Bajpai informed that there has been tension between tribals and Bengali settlers in the region over land for quite some time now. On Sunday, Bengali settlers at Jamadora village objected to ploughing of a piece of Government land by tribals, thus leading to the clash.

The Bengali refugees, settled at Nowrangpur and Malkangiri districts since the early 70s, were protesting on the ground that while last year the district administration had prevented them from ploughing on a piece of disputed land adjacent to the one which led to the clash, tribals were being allowed to plough on a patch of Government land.

They tried to desist the tribals from ploughing the land.

Following the protest, police and revenue officials had visited the village, about 110 km from the district headquarters, during daytime. They tried to convince the agitated groups not to resort to violent means and allow the administration to solve the issue legally.

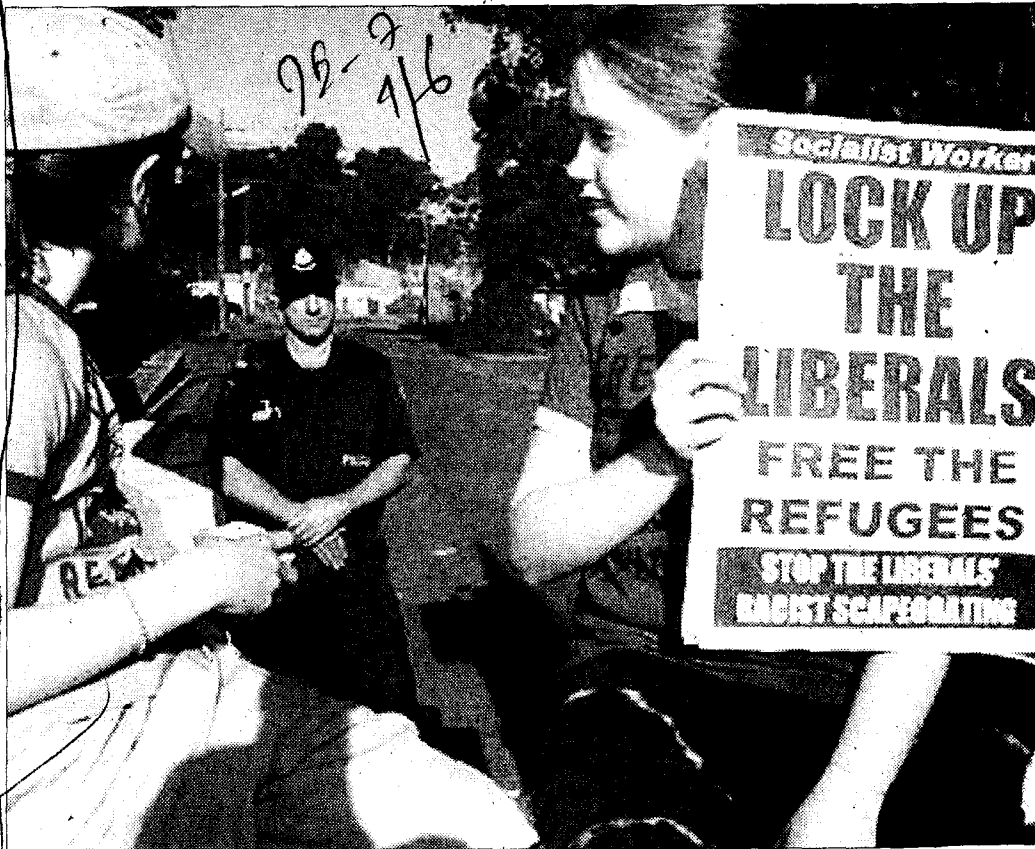
While the refugees refused to buy the idea, demanding instead that the matter be resolved immediately, the tribals returned to their village. Consequently, the officials too returned to their offices.

Soon, however, around 150 to 200 tribals returned to the spot and attacked the refugees. According to senior police officials, no arrest have been made.

A number of clashes between the two groups have taken place in the past and of late an underlying tension always exists between the two communities.

The district collector and superintendent of police were on the spot and not available for comment, while Raigarh police refused to disclose details.

Australians rally against detention of refugees



2 young protesters sit on a fence near the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney where illegal immigrants are held as a police officer keeps watch on Sunday. A protest was held outside the facility organised by the Refugee Coalition, and is part of a national day of action to demand fairer treatment for asylum seekers in Australia - Reuters

REUTERS
MELBOURNE, JUNE 3

THOUSANDS of people rallied in Australia's major cities on Sunday to urge the Federal Government to close controversial refugee detention centres condemned as a breach of human rights.

More than 2,000 people rallied in Melbourne's city centre, while in Sydney up to 1,000 people marched to the Villawood Detention Centre. Smaller protests were held in other major cities.

"Australia's system of mandatory detention is a clear breach of international law. We are the only western nation to have such a harsh policy," Amnesty International Victorian Refugee Team spokeswoman Annie Davis told the Melbourne protest.

The rallies follow more than six riots at detention centres over the past year, including a rampage on Friday at the Curtin

Detention Centre, near Derby in northwest Australia, where tear gas was used to restore calm.

The conservative government and opposition Labor have both backed the policy of locking up all illegal asylum seekers, including children, in remote outback camps while their claims are processed.

A small trial release of up to 25 women and children is planned from the outback Woomera detention centre into a nearby town, possibly this month.

Refugee Action Collective spokesman Ian Rintoul said Sunday's rallies highlighted rising community concern about the camps, condemned by Amnesty International and other non-government organisations.

"The shifting community opinion is starting to have an impact on the politicians and that is what we want to see," he said.

Refugee groups want asylum seekers quickly processed at reception centres and then re-

leased into the community while their applications are considered.

Refugee groups said on Sunday that about 4,000 people, many from Iraq and Afghanistan, were held in the camps but far greater numbers of illegal western immigrants lived in the community.

Refugee Action Collective spokeswoman Judy McVey said the Coalition, which faces an election this year, wanted to win the vote of supporters of the right-wing xenophobic One Nation Party "Refugees are not a threat to the Australian people. We have to welcome the refugees and fight back against racism," she told the protest. Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock on Saturday rejected calls for an investigation into the detention centres.

"I am not going to weaken in relation to those matters. It would not serve the interests of the Australian people as a whole," he said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 4 2002

China does a balancing act on Korea refugees

BEIJING, JUNE 30. In permitting seven North Korean asylum seekers to leave the country on Friday on medical grounds, China sidestepped a difficult question.

Are the hundreds of thousands of illegal North Korean immigrants who are living in China political refugees who deserve protection from persecution in their homeland or are they simply poor people in search of a better life who should be forcibly returned? China has steadfastly maintained that they should be returned, and it has sent thousands of what it calls economic migrants back to North Korea in the last few years. "Judging from international law and the purpose of their entry into China, they are not refugees," a spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry, Zhang Qiyue, said this week. She was referring to the North Korean immigrants in general, not the seven who took refuge on Tuesday in the Beijing office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

But after interviewing the seven, U.N. of-

ficials concluded that they, at least, qualify as political refugees. The officials could not answer the larger question of how many other North Koreans might qualify for a similar status, because China has never let U.N. inspectors travel to the border area where most of them live to do the research to determine that.

Since North Koreans starting streaming into China several years ago, many driven by severe food shortages, U.N. officials have quietly protested the lack of access. But the bold action of the seven this week brought new attention to the situation, for which has highlighted the problems of North Koreans, will lead to a new dialogue with Chinese authorities, so we can properly address the plight of North Koreans in China, especially those who left for refuge-related reasons," Mr. Ron Redmond, the spokesman for the refugee agency, said on Friday in Geneva.

Although most of the North Koreans in

China came originally in search of food, many people say those who have fled their homeland are branded traitors and often jailed if they return, especially if they are known to have made multiple trips across the border. Indeed, the seven North Koreans who presented themselves at the office here were part of an extended family of 17 that came to China in 1999. Five family members were picked up by Chinese authorities and sent back, and two are in North Korean jails, a journalist who accompanied the seven said.

The family, which arrived on Friday in the Philippines after flying from Beijing to Singapore, was reportedly under guard at the international airport in Manila. They were expected to fly to South Korea on Saturday. Aid groups that help North Koreans in the border region say many if not most of the North Koreans in China would qualify for refugee status if U.N. representatives were allowed to interview them freely.

U.N. officials and foreign diplomats here

have until now avoided pressing the Chinese on the issue, fearing that it would prompt the Government to seal a lightly patrolled border that provides a lifeline for North Korea's hard-hit northern provinces. Government food distributions have virtually stopped in the area. Although some North Koreans choose to stay in China, more probably make short trips back and forth for food and supplies, experts said. Though China insists that the North Koreans should be returned if caught, in practice the large ethnic Korean population in north-eastern China generally offers them help, hiding them and finding them jobs.

But experts here who are concerned by the North Koreans' plight, acknowledged that China was involved in a delicate balancing act. Its long-time ally North Korea wants its citizens returned. And Beijing fears that if North Koreans believe that they can easily win free passage to South Korea by entering China, thousands more would enter China. — *New York Times*

THE HINDU

Refugee tide resumes as Albanians flee homes

TABANOVCE (MACEDONIA), MAY 26. Thousands of dirty, hungry and weary ethnic Albanians who have spent three weeks living in cellars in northern Macedonian villages began to flee their homes on Friday.

The exodus came as the Macedonian Government intensified artillery and helicopter attacks, promising a policy of "no mercy" to ethnic Albanian rebels. More than 1,000 men, women and children from the battered village of Vaksince arrived on Friday near a

railway station after walking terrified for hours through the fields. As a storm broke above their heads, they were separated into groups of men and women by Macedonian special police wearing bullet-proof jackets.

The men, who had several days' stubble on their unwashed faces, told of desperate weeks huddled together in basements as shells and mortars crashed into their village. "We didn't know anything about what was happening outside our cellar," said Hasan, a 50-

year-old farmer. "For the last two weeks we have been surviving on a little flour each day."

Fifty yards away women wearing traditional head-scarves sat with babies and young children as the downpour began. One held a large, dirty blanket over her children to try to shield them. Later they were loaded on to buses and taken to the regional capital, Kumanovo, where they were given mineral water and food. As the buses pulled out of the station husbands and wives waved des-

perately to each other and children cried.

The police assured the men that they would not be harmed, but few ethnic Albanians trust the promises of what they see as a hostile government. "There is nothing left of our village now," one man said sadly. "We didn't want to leave, we had to leave everything behind — our cattle, our parents and our homes. But the shelling was so bad we had no choice." The military hardware used with punishing effect against the villages was in action once again on Friday. Russian-built helicopters swooped low over cornfields dotted with poppies, firing salvos of rockets. Heavy mortar positions lobbed shells across the main regional railway line into houses in the villages. From closer in, tanks pounded individual houses. The attacks made an incongruous impression in a country which to all appearances is settling into a lazy Balkan summer. — ©Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2001.

Rebel leader surrenders

AP reports from Pristina:

A top commander of ethnic Albanian rebels in southern Serbia has surrendered to NATO-led peacekeepers and handed over a large cache of weapons, U.S. military officials said today.

Shefket Musliu surrendered yesterday while returning from the funeral of another rebel commander, Ridvan Qazimi, who was killed on Thursday by Yugoslav troops. Musliu and two top associates were released after they promised not to fight anymore, said a statement from the U.S. peacekeepers in Kosovo.



Ethnic Albanian women refugees from the rebel stronghold village of Vaksince help a refugee who collapsed, just after they arrived at a shelter in the border village of Tabanovce, Macedonia, guarded by Macedonian policemen, after fighting between Albanian rebels and Macedonian security forces, on Friday. — AFP

THE HINDU

27 MAY 2001

India ready to accept Afghan refugees: Jaswant

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 28. India today announced that it was ready to accept refugees from Afghanistan in case they feared persecution by the Taliban regime.

Asked to comment on reports about the Taliban's decision to discriminate against Afghan Hindus, the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, said that India would provide food and shelter to those who wished to leave Afghanistan. Mr. Singh, who made these observations at a press conference today, said India had already accepted a large number of Afghan refugees. The Taliban's move to discriminate Hindus had "deeply troubled" not only India, but the entire world. The Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas had not gone unnoticed across the globe, he added.

The Minister rejected the insinuation that India was hardening its stance towards China at Washington's behest. Indo-U.S. relations were not "hyphenated" with any other country, he said. "India will not be used as an instrument to promote someone else's foreign policy interests."

Elaborating on some aspects of the Indo-U.S. ties, Mr. Singh pointed out that military contacts between the two sides were developing and the Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Henry Shelton, would be on a first ever visit to India by the month-end. The existence of U.S. sanctions on India howev-

er, ruled out the possibility of any military hardware negotiations.

India and the United States had also worked out some common ground on the issue of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD). India, he said, supported three aspects of the existing U.S. formulation on BMD, the new name for National Missile Defence (NMD). One was related to the U.S. decision to cut back its nuclear arsenal. Second, India also endorsed the U.S. view that nuclear missiles should not be kept in ready-to-fire position, but maintained in a state of "de-alert." Third, the BMD issue was an expression of a evolution through consultations of a new international security framework beyond the cold-war era.

To a question, Mr. Singh said he would be visiting Russia from June 3 in his capacity as Defence Minister to participate in the Indo-Russian working group on military-technical cooperation. The Defence Ministry had set up a high powered committee to study the two reports on the possible purchase of the Russian aircraft carrier, Admiral Gorshkov. The visit to Russia would also help in working out the details about the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee's proposed visit to Moscow.

To a query on the Tehelka episode, the Minister said the report submitted by Lt. Gen. S.K. Jain was submitted to Western Army Command. It would be forwarded to Army headquarters, which, after suitable recommendations would send it to him.

THE HINDU

29 MAY 2001

110-16
1875

Welcome no more

ONCE HAILED as warriors of the faith and revolutionaries, the people of Afghanistan today find aid hard to come by. Having used them as fodder in its proxy war against the erstwhile Soviet Union, the United States and its allies were the first to shun them. The support in kind and cash that poured in from the West for ten years during the Soviet invasion disappeared into thin air as the USSR disintegrated. The image of an Afghan, in the eyes of the western world, turned from that of a fighter into a potential troublemaker.

As the Soviets withdrew and Afghanistan plunged into a civil war, the people were left to fend for themselves. The much-awaited peace never returned. Actually the internal situation became worse forcing thousands of Afghans to flee their country in search of safety and livelihood.

Neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, which accommodated huge refugee populations during the Afghan war, were flooded with new arrivals in the post-Soviet era. It is over 12 years since Afghanistan was 'liberated' but thanks to the unending war between the rival factions, there has been a steady increase in the refugee population. Pakistan alone has two million refugees from Afghanistan. And this is the official figure. The unofficial count is much higher. Likewise, the official estimate of Afghan refugees in Iran is 1.5 million.

Pakistan prided itself as a frontline ally of the United States during the cold war and was only too happy to play host to the hundreds of thousands of Afghans fleeing the country. It got rich dividends in the process. Millions of dollars of aid poured in along with the most sophisticated military equipment and everyone was happy.

But things changed. First, the Soviets decided to pull out of Afghanistan and then followed the tumultuous events leading to the disintegration of the superpower. The events were bound to leave their imprint on Pakistan particularly vis-a-vis Afghanistan. The repercussions are beginning to be felt.

In a way Pakistan has been left holding the baby. In recent weeks, the military establishment has sought to make a fundamental shift from the policies of the past at least on the refugee front. But at every step it is confronted with obstacles.

As friend, philosopher and guide of the Taliban regime, the Pakistan military establishment faced a delicate task in taking a forthright



Afghan refugees camp under the open sky near Herat... an unfolding tragedy.

stance on the ever-growing refugee problem. But the civil unrest in the provinces where Afghan refugees have settled down and the severe resource crunch forced the Pakistan Government to close its borders to prevent further inflow of refugees.

The presence of such a huge number of refugees in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) has indeed triggered serious socio-economic problems for Pakistan. It is not just the pressure on the limited economic resources but the ills of drugs and crime that forced the Pakistan Government to review its policy towards refugees.

But the decision to close the border made little difference to the desperate Afghans fleeing the worst drought in the last several decades and the continuing fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance Opposition forces. So the refugees keep pouring.

A cursory glance at cold figures is enough to understand the compulsions of the Pakistani Government as well as the Afghan refugees. According to U.N. estimates, 12 million out of Afghanistan's 22 million population is affected by the severe drought. Pakistan's limitations in hosting the unending stream of visitors from across the border is evident

Once the toast of the West, the people of Afghanistan today find aid hard to come by.

B. MURALIDHAR REDDY
reports on the refugee crisis.

from the simple fact that in 2000 while the U.N. made an appeal for an assistance of \$229 millions, less than \$18 millions was pledged. The international community is just not responding to the repeated pleas for more help. The U.N. agencies call it 'donor fatigue' syndrome.

Can Pakistan then be blamed for being afflicted by 'host fatigue'? The military Government insisted on not allowing any fresh registration of refugees. The policy landed the military Government in a row with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other U.N. agencies. The new refugees were all huddled up in a camp near Peshawar that is legally and technically out of reach of the U.N. as they cannot be treated as refugees as they have not been registered.

Ever since the U.N. Security Council imposed fresh sanctions on the Taliban regime in January this year, the Pakistan Government has been pleading with the U.N. and its agencies to open camps within Afghanistan so that the refugees are not forced to cross over. The contention of the UNHCR is that its mandate is to help refugees and not to set up relief camps inside a country.

The camp where about one lakh unregistered Afghan refugees are huddled is the focus of much attention by the international media and the U.N. agencies. The UNHCR has sought permission for screening the refugees to enable it to render what help is possible, but the Pakistan Government pleads helplessness. The case of the military establishment in Islamabad is that screening of the refugees amounts to granting recognition to people who are essentially 'economic migrants'. Screening would only mean inviting more refugees from across the border. The debate goes on.

As things stand, there appears to be little hope for any solution to the problem. The ideal situation would be for the warring factions to agree to a broad-based government in Afghanistan. But at the moment, neither side is in mood to listen.

FD-12
6/5

Afghan refugees' plight shocks Lobbers

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, MAY 5. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lobbers, has called for the need to delink the rehabilitation agenda for the displaced persons in Afghanistan from the political agenda.

Mr. Lobbers, who has just returned from an extensive tour of Afghanistan, had a long meeting with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Abdul Sattar, here this evening. In the course of his discussion he covered a wide-range of issues including the plight of the displaced persons on account of the worst drought being experienced in Afghanistan and the continuing war.

He also called for reactivation of the tripartite commission between the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the UNHCR to devise an effective strategy for the repatriation of Afghan refugees.

He took the opportunity for cessation of hostilities between the warring factions. At the end of his visit to Afghanistan he had urged the Taliban and the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan to observe a six-month cease-fire to facilitate humanitarian assistance and reconstruction of the war-ravaged country. The suggestion of Mr. Lobbers, who arrived here on Thursday night after a tour of Afghanistan, was promptly turned down by the Taliban on the plea that the Northern Alliance has never honoured such com-



The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lobbers, speaks to Afghan refugee children at Jallozal refugee camp in northwestern Pakistan on Saturday. Tens of thousands of refugees who fled fighting and drought are living in miserable conditions at camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Mr. Lobbers said that assistance was needed urgently. — AP

mitments. The U.N. and Pakistan have also been involved in controversy over the fate of the refugees currently in Pakistan and the displaced persons in Afghanistan wanting to cross over to Pakistan.

The Pakistan Foreign Minister took the opportunity of his meeting with Mr. Lobbers to complain about what he termed as "unfair media criticism" against Pakistan regarding the Jalozaï refugee camp. He told the UNHCR chief that Pakistan had not obstructed the U.N. and other international agency workers from reaching out to the refugees.

On Friday Mr. Lobbers had a

long discussion with the Pakistan Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas, Mr. Abbas Sarfraz Khan, on his visit to Afghanistan and the situation prevailing there.

The Minister took the opportunity to reiterate the view of Pakistan on the need for the UNHCR to enhance their assistance for Afghan refugees and for rehabilitation of basic infrastructure within Afghanistan. The Minister told the UNHCR chief that due to resource constraints, Pakistan had decided not to allow fresh influx of Afghan refugees into the country.

THE HINDU

30 MAY 2001

HD-12
875

UNHCR criticises Pak. on Afghan migrants' deportation

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, MAY 7. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Mr. Ruud Lubbers, today bluntly told the Pakistan military Government that his organisation did not approve of its recent decision to deport migrants from Afghanistan and close down its borders to new refugees.

He was addressing a news conference here after an extensive tour of the refugee camps in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and after discussions with all the authorities concerned.

The UNHCR left no one in doubt that his organisation was unhappy over the change in the attitude of the Pakistan Government towards the refugees and said it was not the best way to tackle the humanitarian crisis.

Pakistan has of late been engaged in a war of words with the U.N. over the plight of the new refugees from Afghanistan in the camps in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). The U.N. had accused the Pakistani authorities of not allowing the relief agencies from reaching out to the displaced persons. The military Government reacted very sharply to the charges.

For the last several weeks, the Musharraf Government has been urging the U.N. to shift its focus to relief and rehabilitation within Afghanistan by setting up camps there. The UNHCR told the Pakistani authorities in categorical terms that it was not the mandate of his organisation to set up camps within the affected country.

"We are certainly prepared to help in relief and rehabilitation of the displaced persons from Afghanistan in co-operation with the Government of Pakistan. But let it be clear that it is not our job to establish camps inside Afghanistan," Mr. Lubbers said.

The UNHCR chief said that while he appreciated Pakistan's concerns in accommodating the ever-growing number of displaced persons, it did not approve the policy of sending them back. "There is a perceptible change in the hospitality of Pakistan towards Afghan refugees. While we understand the reasons behind the change, in our opinion it is not good for the overall situation."

Earlier, he met the Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and briefed him about his visits to Afghanistan and Iran and discussed the need for humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan and relief efforts for the refugees in Pakistan.

The Chief Executive agreed with the UNHCR on the need for cessation of hostilities and restoration of peace in Afghanistan. The Chief Executive emphasised that all countries should join hands to promote peace in that country and discourage war efforts either by the Afghan Government or the Northern Alliance. Mr. Lubbers said that an end to fighting would be conducive to international efforts for undertaking humanitarian and economic projects inside Afghanistan which would not only help the Afghan people but would also facilitate repatriation of refugees.

He mentioned a two-pronged approach of relief efforts to help the Afghan refugees and to take measures inside Afghanistan to facilitate repatriation.

THE HINDU

8 MAY 2001

Cong. will oppose repeal of Illegal Migrants Act: Sonia

By Shankhadeep Choudhury
The Times of India News Service

NALBARI: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Monday reiterated that the Congress would "never allow" the repeal of the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act (IMDT) in the



Sonia Gandhi

state. "The IMDT Act is one legislation which ensures that genuine Indian citizens are not harassed in the state. The Asom Gana Parishad-Bharatiya Janata Party (AGP-BJP) combine has been trying hard to repeal the Act, and had it not been for the Congress, the Act would have long been repealed," Ms Gandhi said at an election meeting at the College grounds here, amidst a thunderous applause by the 12,000-odd crowd.

The Congress president, who landed right in the meeting venue

with her fleet of three helicopters, pointed out, "However, we maintain that strict vigilance should be kept at the borders so that foreign nationals are not able to enter the state." At a time when the Congress has been accused of "colluding and instigating" the banned United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to gun down AGP-BJP workers, and as many as six AGP workers were killed right in this district on Friday night, Ms Gandhi steered clear of controversy by entirely bypassing the issue.

"We condemn all kinds of violence. In fact, more than anybody else, our people have suffered the most in terrorist violence. We condoned all deaths that the state has suffered in the run up to the polls", she pointed out, avoiding condemning the ULFA — a stance which the AGP-BJP combine says smacks of collusion. The meeting, however, observed a minute's silence in memory of more than 50 people who have lost their lives

since the poll process began in the state. Ms Gandhi hit out at the AGP, saying that she was aghast at what the party has done to the state in the five years that it was in power. "I feel disturbed at what the AGP has done to this beautiful land of yours. The party has no vision — the only vision they have is of grabbing power."

She continued with her tirade, saying, "When it had come to power, it had promised a lot to the people of Assam. However, nothing has been done — an atmosphere of fear prevails in the length and breadth of Assam, and progress and development has come to a total standstill. What is the use of having such a government?"

Assuring that the Congress — "once it comes to power" — will protect all sections of the people, Ms Gandhi pointed out, "We will try to fulfil our promises. Our special emphasis would be on the weaker sections, the youth and the women."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

8 MAY 2011

11-10 Work to Rule 9/15

Prime Minister Vajpayee's announcement that the Union government would consider issuing work permits to Bangladeshi immigrants is hopefully an indication that New Delhi will address the issue of regional migration in a humane and rational manner. For too long, Bangladesh immigration to India has been an emotionally charged issue, with political parties and leaders encouraging communal and linguistic chauvinism by stoking fears of irreversible demographic transformation. Thanks to the sangh parivar, the misleading term 'infiltrator' is regularly used by sections of the media to describe those who come across illegally from Bangladesh to India in order to earn a living. The aim is to suggest that Bangladeshi emigration has sinister dimensions and is not purely economic. Though the numbers involved are obviously greater, Bangladeshi migrants are only replicating locally the process of illegal labour flow that takes tens of thousands of Indians to Europe and North America every year. Indian emigrants living and working illegally in the US or Britain are no more 'infiltrators' than Bangladeshis working in India. That is why it is a matter of deep national shame that some politicians here feel no compunction in echoing the rabid anti-immigrant propaganda of racist and fascist groups abroad like the National Front. What is worse, a not-so-subtle distinction is often made between Bangladeshi immigrants on communal grounds: Hindu Bangladeshis are called 'refugees' and are generally welcomed, while Muslim Bangladeshis are labelled 'infiltrators' and sought to be expelled.

As the largest and fastest growing economy in South Asia, it is inevitable that India will be a magnet for migrant workers from its poorer neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Rather than treating such labour flows as a problem — or a 'national security threat' — the Union government must put in place mechanisms to regulate, regularise and even harness immigration. That way, immigrants can make their contribution to the economy and society of India, without, at the same time, affecting its political contours in any way since the franchise would still depend on citizenship. In the absence of a proper regulatory framework, tension can develop between immigrant and host communities, particularly in states where land resources may be scarce or fears of cultural domination acute. Worse, unscrupulous politicians can play on the perceived vulnerability of both immigrants and locals, something that has happened in Assam over the past few decades. There, the Congress turned the Bangladeshi immigrant communities into a hostage vote-bank, promising to protect them from expulsion if they voted for the party. A work-permit system would offer immigrants all the protection they need in law without forcing them to seek security in the bosom of this or that party. Since some leaders in Mr Vajpayee's extended parivar have already expressed the hope that the envisaged work permit system will provide the authorities with information that could then be used to identify and deport Bangladeshi migrants, it is imperative the prime minister clarify that this is not his intention. India's immigration laws are desperately in need of modernisation. Politics and chauvinism should not be allowed to interfere with this task.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

11-10-2001

Delhi remembers refugees

OUR BUREAU

March 21: Having lost Mamata Banerjee, the BJP is seeking refuge in settlers from East Pakistan. With elections in Bengal round the corner, the Union Cabinet today announced a rehabilitation scheme for those who came over to the state from East Pakistan.

Parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan was quick to deny any political motive behind the scheme which the Cabinet cleared yesterday.

The plan is to develop 11,699 plots in urban colonies in 15 districts of West Bengal to resettle families which migrated to Bengal before the Bangladesh liberation war. So, only those who crossed over till 1971 will be eligible for the scheme.

Mahajan said work will begin this financial year itself. The government has sanctioned Rs 6.5 crore for work till March 31.

Opposition parties linked the Centre's urgency to get the project started with the approaching elections in the state. They feel the BJP believes it can improve on its 10 per cent vote bank in the state with this scheme.

The plots will be developed in Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur,

South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Siliguri, Darjeeling, Malda, Nadia, Howrah, Midnapore, Murshidabad, Burdwan, Hooghly, South 24-Parganas and North 24-Parganas. Purulia and Bankura have been left out because there aren't many settlers in these districts.

Without condemning it, the state CPM saw little merit in the Centre's scheme. Kanti Biswas, Bengal's minister for refugee rehabilitation, said it was "a virtual eyewash and grossly inadequate".

"The Centre had spent a lot of money on refugees who were displaced from West Pakistan but had done injustice to those who arrived from East Pakistan after the Partition," said Biswas.

"However, the Centre's gesture is good. It has at least done something — however little it might be. A working group set up by the state government in 1993 had said that Rs 1,670 crore would be required to rehabilitate refugees staying in over 2,000 refugee colonies in West Bengal. The amount of Rs 6.5 crore is a meagre sum. We need much more," Biswas said.

Former refugee rehabilitation minister Prasanta Sur said it was "politically motivated and a fruitless effort on the eve of the Assembly elections to win over 12 million people who had come to West Bengal as refugees".

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THE TELEGRAPH

22 MAR 2001

100 (10) Annan promises aid to Afghan refugees 529 1373

REUTERS

SHAMSHATU (Pakistan), March 12. - The UN Secretary-General promised aid to Afghan refugees in a border camp today before flying over a squalid field jammed with 80,000 refugees without landing because of security fears.

Mr Kofi Annan discussed with Pakistani authorities their ban on admitting more refugees fleeing war and famine in Afghanistan or allowing a new refugee camp inside Pakistan, but neither side reported any progress on the dispute.

"What I want to tell you is that we are going to do our best... to get as much assistance to you as possible, in Pakistan and in Afghanistan, for those who are in need and are displaced," Mr Annan told refugees in Shamshatu camp.

He arrived in a convoy of three military helicopters but after he began moving through the dusty camp in a motorcade, some stones were thrown at vehicles behind him. Pakistani police intervened to halt the protest by several hundred Afghans.

A village elder said the 52,000 refugees in Shamshatu - which has filled since last September - faced shortages of food, water, medicine, schools and shelters.

But conditions are good at Shamshatu, an official UN refugee camp, compared to the field at Jallouzai, where an estimated 80,000 Afghans are living under plastic sheets with little help.

The UN had to abandon efforts to move refugees from Jallouzai after Pakistan refused earli-



Mr Kofi Annan administers polio drops to a child at Shamshatu refugee camp on Monday. - AP/PTI

er this year to allow the opening of another refugee camp. Since then it has been difficult to provide any aid, with crowds enveloping those coming to help.

Although the UN had talked of Mr Annan visiting Jallouzai, Pakistani authorities warned they couldn't provide security. Instead, UN officials in Shamshatu said Mr Annan was flying over the refugees stranded at Jallouzai in a helicopter. Mr Annan was scheduled to return to Islamabad in the afternoon and leave on his private plane for Nepal.

Unabated influx of Bangladeshis poses threat to country's security, says SC

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The supreme court has expressed fears that the unchecked migration of Bangladeshi citizens to India might pose a threat both to the economy and the security of the country.

"They are eating into the economy of the country and, to a large extent, become a security threat," a bench comprising Chief Justice A.S. Anand, Justice R.C. Lahoti and Justice Brijesh Kumar said during the hearing of a public interest petition filed by lawyer O.P. Saxena, seeking a direction to the government to stop the menace of illegal migration of foreign citizens into the country.

The bench said the government needed to take exemplary steps like deporting some of the illegal migrants. Till such steps were taken, there would be no stop to this kind of migration from the neighbouring country, it added.

The bench also ridiculed the Union gov-

ernment for being indifferent to the problems of illegal migrants. The government had not taken any step to curb the influx, the court added.

"If this is not checked, the problem will go on aggravating," the court observed, while solicitor-general Harish Salve said that the main stumbling block was the Illegal Migrants (Determination Tribunals) Act, 1983, operating in Assam which gave a long rope to the migrants to stay on in India.

Mr Salve said though both the state government and the Centre were of the opinion that the Act was discriminatory and had to be repealed, there was a lack of political consensus between the two. Thus the Act could not be repealed. The court could examine the Act and if found discriminatory, quash it, he added.

Opposing this, Congress MP and senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the general secretary of the Assam unit of the Congress, said once the government felt that it was to be repealed, necessary steps

should be taken in Parliament and the court should not step in. The court then adjourned the matter.

Mr Saxena contended that the Indian border with Bangladesh was so porous that unless effective fencing work was done, there could not be an end to illegal migration. However, the Centre had decided to fence the entire length of Indo-Bangladesh border, which is scheduled to be completed by March 2007. The fencing was complete only in respect of 841 km.

Former president of the All Assam Students Union, Sarbananda Sonowal, has also challenged the constitutional validity of the IMDT Act, while the Jamait Ulema-e-Hind's has said in a petition that the Act was a very good piece of legislation which needed to be implemented all over the country.

When the legality of the Act was being argued, Mr Salve said he was ready to make a statement: "In the absence of a political consensus, repeal of the Act is not possible."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

27 FEB 2001

Week-long violence kills 210

Refugees flee Borneo mobs

Sampit (Indonesia), Feb. 24 (Reuters): Thousands of petrified refugees crammed onto Indonesian navy ships today to escape mobs roaming through a Borneo town, as officials said the death toll from a week of ethnic slaughter had reached 210.

Raising the spectre of fresh bloodshed, one official said the 2,000 soldiers and police in Sampit had not fanned out through the town to patrol streets stained by a week of violence between indigenous Dayaks and immigrants from Madura island off Java.

Witnesses said 10 trucks packed with spear-carrying Dayaks were heading to the river town in central Kalimantan province. The Dayaks — once fearsome headhunters — wore red headbands symbolising ancient tribal wars and had painted their faces. "They (security forces) have not been seen patrolling the streets (in general)," the local government official said from Sampit, 700 km northeast of Jakarta.

"They have not been ordered to disarm those carrying spears, chopping-knives and other traditional sharp weapons." The official said security forces had only been ordered to protect buildings and makeshift camps housing refugees, who are mainly Madurese and numbered 24,000 in total. He did not say why. Witnesses said troops also protected routes to the river dock.

Officials from the military, which has long been blasted for

failing to curb violent unrest across the world's fourth most populous country, were not available to comment.

The latest Kalimantan violence underscores Indonesia's volatility and flared as embattled President Abdurrahman Wahid left on a trip to West Asia and Africa this week, leaving behind a fragile country in desperate need of leadership.

Before flying out, Wahid dismissed fears of an explosion of unrest, comments that now ring hollow.

Witnesses and officials say the Sampit violence began as fighting between the long-time rival groups broke out, but has since shifted into one-sided Dayak attacks on Madurese.

Another official said the only way safety could be restored was if the Madurese left. "It is better that the Madurese leave. This area will be safe then," said the official, who declined to be identified. No fresh attacks were reported today, but officials have been gradually revising up the death toll as more bodies are discovered.

Some victims have been beheaded and their heads paraded through town. Others have been burned to death. Numerous homes and buildings in Sampit have been torched. "According to the data we have, the number of dead is 210. The condition in the town is improving but is still a bit tense," government spokesman Jauhar Pauzni said.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 FEB 2001

Foreign aid and hope now dry up for Afghan refugees



JACK REDDEN

95 2/21/2

A visitor passed an Afghan currency note worth a few cents toward the outstretched hand of a destitute woman standing by his truck in this ancient caravan city. The gesture triggered an enveloping rush by men, women and children desperate for anything that might buy a piece of bread.

After 21 years of war and two years of drought, the most alarming fact is not the poverty gripping Afghanistan, or the half million people who have been forced from their homes in search of survival. It's the expectation that conditions will get worse in the next few months.

"Most Afghans have lost everything. To survive in the last couple of years, they have had to sell all they had.

They are at rock-bottom," said Erick de Mul, the Islamabad-based coordinator of all U.N. humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan.

The problems are foreshadowed by the enormous hardships aid workers already face.

In Herat alone, 80,000 Afghans in emergency camps have trekked from villages across the barren mountains since the failure of their last crop.

Fresh graves — piles of stones

usually the size of a child — continue to spread around the six dusty U.N. camps for the IDPs, the internally displaced people who are not official refugees because they did not cross an international border.

The exact number of those who died in bitter minus 25 Celsius temperatures at the end of January will never be known, but U.N. officials say a conservative estimate was 150 in three nights, 90 percent of them children.

But even on normal nights, thousands of families at Herat face sub-zero temperatures in shelters with mud floors, light provided by kerosene in an old bottle and heating from a few glowing lumps of charcoal.

To the North, 10,000 Afghans fleeing the war between the ruling Taliban and their last major opponents are trapped on islands in the Amu Darya river, the Oxus of classical history, blocked by Tajikistan from crossing to the safe side.

In Pakistan, bordering Afghanistan to the East, 170,000 Afghans have flooded in since last September — the greatest influx since the early 1990s and proof that a refugee problem the world had forgotten is growing instead of disappearing.

Pakistan, complaining it already hosts two million Afghans with lit-

tle outside help, wants to block fresh arrivals, and has refused to allow a new refugee camp. In a field in Jallouzai, just inside Pakistan, 80,000 Afghans are jammed in without proper shelter, sanitation or water.

U.N. officials are torn between the need for emergency aid and the fear of drawing more people to a spot where services can never be provided.

"The fact that they are exposing themselves and their children to these conditions shows they are desperate," said Yusuf Hassan of the U.N. refugee agency. "Pakistan was the best chance to survive."

United Nations officials fear the resilience of Afghans is reaching breaking point. "It is very hard when you see a man of 50 or 60 standing in front of you crying," said Naeem Durrani, a U.N. official in Pakistan.

"I had never seen Afghans crying. They are a very proud people." Those who fled villages have left behind people who may be even worse off.

In a land that bakes in summer and freezes in winter, the most destitute may be blocked behind snow-covered passes.

The number arriving in Afghanistan's third biggest city of

Herat tapered off from 600 people a day as snow fell, but when spring approaches and remaining food is exhausted, a new flood is expected.

Even if rain returns to normal after the worst drought in 30 years, the coming harvest is in doubt. Many did not plant last fall, driven by hunger to eat their seed.

The UN is faced with a classic dilemma: give seed to famished people in the countryside and they will probably eat it; distribute seed in refugee camps as an incentive to go home to plant and it could instead attract more refugees.

In any case, many have fled not just drought but war — the vast majority came from areas where the Taliban and their opponents stepped up fighting last September.

The world seems exhausted with U.N. requests for aid to Afghanistan.

This year, the UN received only \$14 million of \$229 million sought. However, aid officials not only want more for the current crisis but for the future, in the unlikely event that both war and drought disappear. Farmers will take years to replace livestock and orchards lost in the past year. To reach safety in the cities, families sold even the poles holding up the mud roofs of their houses. (Reuters)



Families arrive at the Afghan capital Kabul from Baghlan province, 200 km away, on Friday. Afghanistan, impoverished after two decades of civil war, has been hit by its worst drought in 30 years. Thousands of displaced people are living in camps within Afghanistan, and hundreds have died of cold and hunger this month. — AP

Afghan refugees' plight: Pak. appeals for urgent aid

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 10. Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Mr. Inam Ul Haque on Friday briefed the heads of missions of member-countries of the Afghan Support Group and representatives of international humanitarian agencies based here about the Afghan crisis and the increased influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan.

Referring to the recent deaths in refugee camps, Mr. Haque said if timely relief was not rushed to Afghanistan, many more such deaths could occur.

Last week, on the night of January 29 alone, 115 people died of extreme cold in a camp in Herat. The Pakistani Foreign Secretary told the envoys that the situation in Afghanistan had been deteriorating for the last couple of years mainly due to the unprecedented drought, internal strife and destruction of physical infrastructure.

According to U.N. estimates, half a million Afghans have left their homes in the past few months. The grim situation in Afghanistan appears to have worsened after the U.N. imposed fresh sanctions in the third week of January.

The magnitude of the problem is reflected in the increasing number of Afghans on the Pakistan border wanting to cross over.

According to Mr. Haque, since September last, an estimated 1.5 lakh refugees have arrived in Pakistan in addition to the nearly two million already here.

Alarmed at the continuous inflow of refugees, Pakistan's military ruler and Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, appealed to the United Nations to launch a programme to provide relief assistance inside Afghanistan.

Mr. Haque said the refugee influx had strained the limited resources of Pakistan. The condition of millions of people in Afghanistan was so pathetic that even the World Bank deemed it necessary to take note of it and appealed to the world community to do something to mitigate their plight.

"It is very frustrating for me to watch this terrible situation develop without a mandate to respond. Although the World Bank is not a relief agency, I want to add our voice to the many that are speaking about this tragic situation," Mr. Johan Wall, World Bank Country Director for Pakistan and Afghanistan said in a press statement.

THE HINDU

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49-17

Move to regulate flow of refugees 9/2

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 8. Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to constitute a joint commission to regulate the inflow of people from across their common border.

The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoting the Taliban officials has said that an agreement on the joint commission has been reached between the visiting Pakistan Interior Minister, Lt. Gen. (retd.) Moinuddin Haider, and his Afghan counterpart, Mullah Abdur Razaq.

According to reports from Kabul, the Taliban authorities have also promised to cooperate with Pakistan in identification and extradition of persons accused of involvement in sectarian violence.

Pakistan is believed to have submitted to the Taliban regime a list of wanted persons in connection with sectarian violence. Most of those who figure in the wanted list of Pakistan belong to anti-Shia fundamental groups.

The continuous flow of refugees from Afghanistan in view of the severe drought and civil war is a matter of serious concern to Pakistan. In recent weeks, Pakistan has tried to enforce a ban on entry of new refugees but with little success.

There are already an estimated 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. A majority of them have settled in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan. The presence of refugees in such a big strength has led to socio-economic tensions in the provinces.

Pakistan has submitted a list of six crossing points in the two frontier provinces bordering Afghanistan and the Taliban regime has accepted the proposal in principle.

The Pakistan Minister told a news conference in Kabul on Wednesday that the Taliban regime has promised to cooperate in extradition of Pakistanis involved in sectarian violence.

THE HINDU

- 9 FEB 2001

Afghans suffer in crowded Pak camps

BY JACK REDDEN

Refugees

Jalozai (Pakistan), Jan. 30: At least 70,000 ragged men, women and children are jammed under plastic sheeting in this squalid refugee camp, the latest wave to flee the deepening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

"I have been in humanitarian work for 23 years and I don't think I would be exaggerating saying that I haven't seen anything as bad as that — and that has included quite a number of disasters," said a visibly shocked Hasem Utkan, head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Pakistan.

Thousands of people are living under shelters of poles covered by ripped cloth or plastic peppered with holes, with barely enough space between them to walk. There are no toilets and choking dust obscures the edges of the camp.

No food aid is provided so almost all are hungry; tankers from the medical charity Medecins Sans Frontiers provide the meagre supply of water. "The sea of people, the degree of misery, the despondency that we humanitarian agencies are facing in such a situation, it's just very moving," the Turkish-born UN official said on Monday. The United Nations had been warning for months about a new refugee crisis emerging from Afghanistan, where the horrors of

21 years of civil war have now been compounded by a potential famine triggered by the worst drought in three decades.

But the flood of refugees into Jalozai, 30 km southeast of Pakistan's major frontier city of Peshawar, has stunned even UN officials. An earlier group of 18,000 arrivals at the site — which is not officially a refugee camp and has no facilities — had been entirely cleared and moved by January 12 to an existing site at Shamshatu. But within days even larger numbers, arriving with only what family members could carry, poured in to cover the barren sun-baked fields. A survey last week counted 12,000 families, each with an average of six members.

Although word of the appalling conditions has spread and the Pakistan Army has been ordered to seal the border against further entries after previous attempts by the police failed, UN officials believe up to 400 people a day are still struggling. "This is a health hazard," said Mohammed Adar, a Geneva-based emergency coordinator for UNHCR, as he looked across the dust-shrouded makeshift tents teeming with children. UNHCR spokesman Yusuf Hassan said 18 children had died since early December, mainly from night temperatures that fall below freezing. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

31 JAN 2001

Barak refuses to send Palestine refugees home

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, JAN 5

I SRAELI Prime Minister Ehud Barak says his country's refusal to allow the return of Palestinian refugees is absolute, leaving little room for compromise on a key peace plan point that has Arab nations pressing Yasser Arafat to hold firm.

Barak underscored the no-return position after Arab foreign ministers meeting yesterday in Cairo called Palestinian refugees' return a "sacred right."

Arafat had submitted US proposals for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks to the Arab ministers for their review, on his way home from a Washington meeting with US President Bill Clinton in which Arafat conditionally accepted the terms as a basis for negotiations.

Clinton's proposals call for Palestinians to give up their demand for the resettling of millions of Palestinian refugees and descendants in Israel. In turn, Israel would cede control of a disputed Jerusalem holy site. "We will not

Sharon behind all ills of Israel: Barak

ISRAEL: In the pre-election rumblings, the Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Thursday launched a gloves-off attack on his challenger Ariel Sharon, accusing him of being the root cause of Israel's current troubles.

"All the troubles an entire nation is struggling so hard to solve can be traced to an entire camp, and foremost to one man," Barak said in a fiery speech to his Labour Party, referring to the right-wing Likud faction and its leader, Sharon. "We have to ask ourselves seriously if we want to put Israel's future in the hands of this man," Barak said in his strongest attack yet on Sharon in the campaign for the prime ministerial election on February 6.

accept under any circumstances Thursday night, adding that Israel the right of return to Israel," Barak would never cede sovereignty of told an election rally in Tel Aviv the holy site to Palestinians.

Despite his uncompromising tone, Barak has not explicitly ruled out allowing third-party sovereignty over the holy site, known to Jews as Temple Mount and to Muslims as Haram es-Sharif.

Israel's chief negotiator is in Washington seeking more details on the terms of Arafat's acceptance. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat today said they would not think about sending a team to Washington for any talks until they learn outcome of those Israeli-US contacts in Washington.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Afghan war refugees prey to cold

Islamabad

9/11 11-13
FREEZING TEMPERATURES are killing some of the 18,000 newest Afghan refugees to Pakistan, many of whom have nothing but plastic sheets to pull over themselves, the United Nations said on Monday.

The spokesperson of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees office in Pakistan said he watched a three-month-old baby die on Saturday in one of the refugee camps. Seven other refugees died last weekend in a makeshift camp on the outskirts of Jalozai, the *Jang* newspaper reported.

"They are living out in the open," Hasan said. "The conditions are appalling. Some of them are wrapping themselves in plastic sheets and in bits and pieces of old clothes to try to keep warm." The UN says 18,000 Afghans slipped across Pakistan's border in recent weeks to flee fighting.

Pakistan already has 2.2 million Afghan refugees. Pakistan's closed its borders in November but failed to stop refugees, most of whom are ethnic Tajiks from northern Afghanistan. The Afghan opposition said on Monday it had lost the strategic town of Yakawlang in the central province of Bamiyan to the Taliban after heavy fighting.



Refugees at a camp near Peshawar in Pakistan on Sunday. Photo: AFP

Death decree

THE TALIBAN regime has decreed death for any Afghan Muslim who changes his or her faith, the official Shariat radio, reported on Monday. Anyone caught selling literature promoting Christianity or Judaism or degrading Islam and its personalities will be imprisoned for five years, said the decree issued by Taliban chief, Mullah Mohammad Omar. The Religious Minister Qudratullah Jamal said the decree is a precaution against people leading Afghans away from Islam with offers of money. No one has been arrested for converting to Christianity or Judaism, he said.

DPA, Islamabad

AP. Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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