

Amnesty International Reports: 1997

A prisoner of conscience spent his seventh year in prison. Fifty people, most of whom were of Bhutanese origin living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, were briefly detained by police while attempting to cross the border at Phuntsholing.

In April, a seventh round of talks between the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal took place in Kathmandu on the fate of more than 90,000 people living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, most of whom were Nepali-speaking people from southern Bhutan. The process of joint verification of the status of the people in the camps agreed by the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal in April 1994 was further delayed (see *Amnesty International Reports 1994 and 1995*). By the end of September, over 100 more people had left southern Bhutan to seek asylum in Nepal (see *Amnesty International Reports 1995 and 1996*). Hundreds of camp residents participated in peaceful marches and a cycle rally in northeast India aimed at publicizing their plight. Hundreds of them were detained by the Indian authorities but later released (see **India** entry). Several incidents of armed robbery in southern Bhutan were attributed by the government to people returning to Bhutan from the refugee camps in Nepal.

Delegates of the un Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited the country in April and May to check, among other things, on the implementation of the 15 recommendations made after their 1994 visit (see *Amnesty International Report 1995*). The Working Group reported that its recommendations had generally been implemented but urged that a new Code of Criminal Procedure should be adopted and that the institution of the *jabmi* (a person conversant with the law) be strengthened.

Tek Nath Rizal, a prisoner of conscience, spent his seventh year in prison (see *Amnesty International Report 1994*). The un Working Group had earlier decided that his detention was not arbitrary. After visiting the country, the Working Group declared that he had been arbitrarily detained for the period from his arrest in November 1989 until his appearance before the court in December 1992, but added that his detention since that time was not arbitrary.

Fifty people, most of whom were of Bhutanese origin living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, were arrested in August by the Royal Bhutan Police when they tried to cross the border from India to Bhutan at Phuntsholing. They were detained overnight at a local administrative office in Phuntsholing and then taken to the Indian national highway in Jalpaiguri district where they were released, some by being pushed out of moving vehicles.

In July, the government reported that 89 people had been imprisoned under the National Security Act. When the un Working Group visited Bhutan in May, it was reported that 153 political prisoners were serving sentences at Chemgang detention camp, while 52 were detained at Thimphu prison.

Amnesty International continued to appeal for the release of Tek Nath Rizal and for fair trials for political prisoners.