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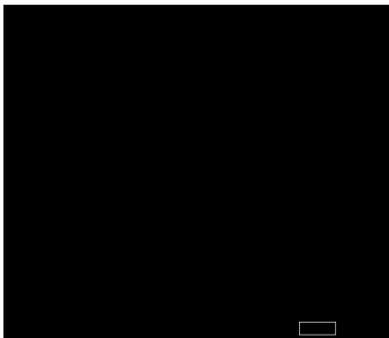
Directorate of Intelligence

Near East and
South Asia Review



30 October 1992

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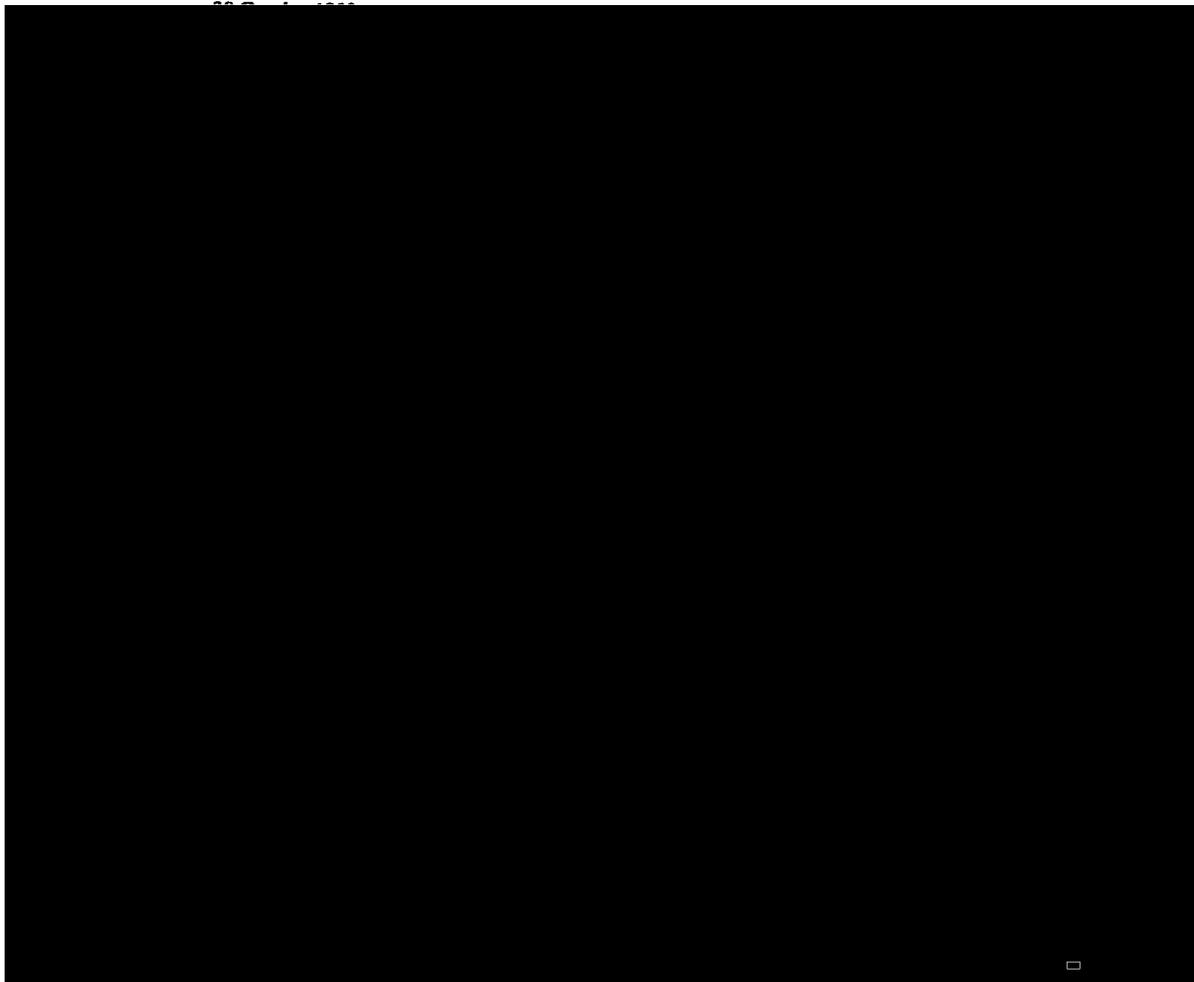
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Near East and
South Asia Review



South Asia: Refugee Burden Widespread

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Worsening refugee situations in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are placing a substantial extra burden on the economies of these countries and increasing political instability in the region. Aid from the UN High Commission for Refugees has been inadequate to prevent deteriorating conditions in some camps, and deaths among refugees are increasing

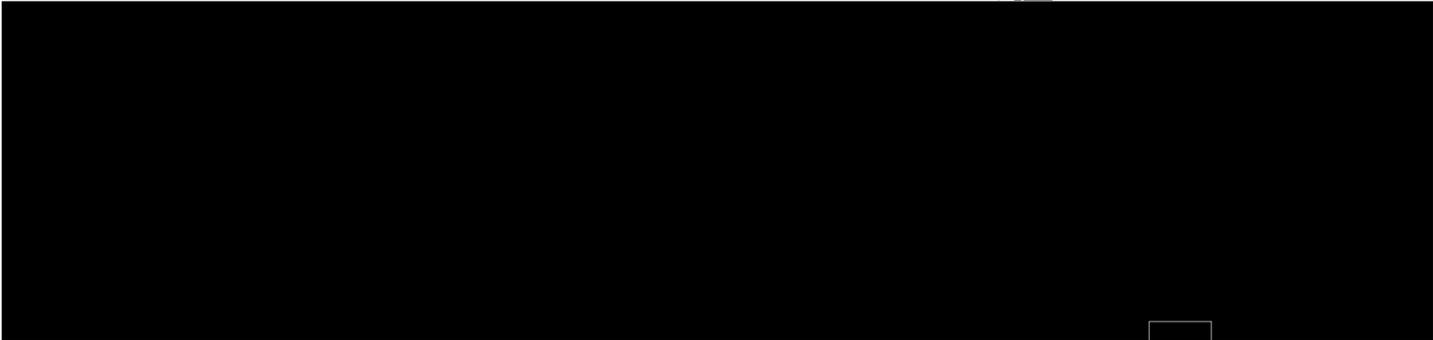
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South Asia: Refugees Burden Smaller States

Worsening refugee situations in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are placing a substantial extra burden on the economies of these countries and heightening tensions in the region. Aid from the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)—although significant—has been inadequate to prevent deteriorating conditions in some camps, and deaths among refugees are increasing. Efforts to negotiate settlements to the disputes sparking the refugee flows are making little headway.

The Roots of the Problem

Several South Asian countries are plagued with swelling refugee populations. Most of the refugees are fleeing oppressive governments or internal fighting in their home countries:

- Nepal has taken in about 70,000 ethnic Nepalese from Bhutan who are fleeing government persecution. They are arriving in Nepal at the rate of 300 to 400 a week.
- In Bangladesh nearly 300,000 Rohingya refugees—ethnic Bengali Muslims from Burma's Arakan State—have arrived since the end of 1991 because of continued persecution by Burma's insurgent camp in Bangladesh in December 1991 heightened tension between the two countries and caused a substantial increase in the number of refugees flowing into Bangladesh.
- Sri Lanka—which already has many internal refugees because of its civil war—is resettling the more than 175,000 Tamils who fled to India during fighting between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government over the past decade. New Delhi negotiated a deal with Colombo in January 1992 to repatriate these refugees from southern India. As of September 1992, more than 23,000 of the refugees had been repatriated,

International Efforts and Reaction

The UN High Commission For Refugees is the largest participant in the refugee relief effort in South Asia and gets its money mainly from contributions from the United States, Japan, Canada, and Western Europe. Bangladesh is among its top three countries for funding, and the UNHCR has requested over \$27 million for the Rohingyas for the next six months. Additional aid for the Rohingya refugees comes from the European Community, which announced an emergency grant of \$620,000; the United States, which approved \$5 million in aid; and the Thai Government, which contributed \$30,000 in food aid in response to an international appeal from the World Food Program. The UNHCR upgraded Nepal to "emergency" status in June 1992, and it recently allocated more resources to that effort. Once India agreed to UNHCR involvement in the resettlement of the Tamils, the United States, France, and Canada collectively pledged \$1 million as part of the UNHCR's relief program in Sri Lanka, according to press reports.

The Burden Grows

These countries—among the world's poorest—are ill equipped to handle the flood of refugees and are looking for international aid to fund relief efforts. Although data on the cost of the refugees are lacking, the UNHCR has been the primary source of funds for most of the relief efforts.

Nepal—one of the world's poorest countries with a per capita GDP of \$160 a year, no substantial marketable natural resources, and persistent food shortages—has few funds available to support the refugees from Bhutan. Nepal originally relied on its own resources to fund its relief program, but, as the number of refugees grew, Kathmandu turned to the UNHCR and nongovernmental organizations to fund the program. Kathmandu is also constrained by demands from its own citizens, many of whom lack adequate housing

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and shelter [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the government is looking for additional sites to house the refugees but pressure from local populations often forces it to reject new camp sites.

[REDACTED] Bangladesh, which relies heavily on foreign aid, is also not prepared financially to shoulder the burden of refugee inflows. With a per capita GDP of \$204, Bangladesh has trouble providing for the basic needs of its 116 million citizens. Bangladesh began its relief effort independent of international aid, but, as the problem escalated, it began to rely more on the UNHCR. Bangladeshis in the vicinity of the refugee camps have been concerned that building adequate shelter to house the refugees would spur deforestation and create food shortages, but the UNHCR is working with the local population to resolve the issue. [REDACTED]

Sri Lanka—despite having a per capita GDP of \$465 a year, one of the highest in the region—has hit some economic stumblingblocks this year and was forced to cut food rations to the refugees drastically for budgetary reasons. Sri Lanka's resource constraints stem from the loss of revenue associated with the decrease in expatriate remittance and trade opportunities with Middle Eastern countries during the Gulf war, continued fighting in the northeast, and losses in the tea industry. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Sri Lanka has received some funding from the UNHCR but has relied primarily on its own budget to resettle the Tamil refugees. Sri Lanka's refugee-related expenditures exceeded \$75 million in 1991, but Colombo allocated only \$22 million for this purpose during the 1992 budget session. Food rations and other entitlements for the refugees are likely to diminish further as a result of this funding gap. [REDACTED]

Deteriorating Conditions

Epidemic disease, malnutrition, and deaths are increasingly common in the refugee camps, especially in Bangladesh and Nepal. Bureaucratic obstacles, bad weather, cramped conditions, and inadequate resources are contributing to the mounting medical problems in some camps. [REDACTED]

Camp conditions in Nepal have deteriorated in large part because of overcrowding caused by the lack of

available land. According to press reports, at least 900 refugees in the camps have died. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] suggests that there is a substantial lack of medical facilities in the camps. Despite UNHCR relief programs, as of June 1992 daily mortality rates were 19.3 per 10,000 for children under 5 and 5.5 per 10,000 for adults—dramatically higher than Nepal's mortality rates, which total less than .5 per 10,000 per day. [REDACTED]

Camp conditions are poor in Bangladesh due to tensions between Dhaka and the nongovernmental relief organizations and have been worsened by heavy monsoon rains. Bangladesh officials have accused the organizations—a major source of refugee aid—of corruption and political meddling and claim they are threatening Dhaka's sovereignty. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 1,200 refugees have died of malnutrition and disease, and 25,000 children are estimated to be malnourished. Sixty thousand refugees lack shelter. The government bureaucracy has caused significant delays in building more feeding centers and sanitation projects. [REDACTED]

Conditions in the Sri Lankan repatriation camps, in our judgment, appear better than those in Nepal or Bangladesh. Nonetheless, the substantial increase in returnees from India is straining resources. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] more than 2,000 Tamils a week are being repatriated from India. There is overcrowding in some camps as refugees wait for Army permission to cross into LTTE-controlled territory. [REDACTED]

Regional Tensions

The presence of the refugees has heightened tensions in the region. Fighting is common in some refugee camps, scarce resources have caused friction with local populations, and Nepal and Bhutan are arguing over the origin of the refugees in Nepal. [REDACTED]

Clashes between Rohingya insurgents and native Bangladeshis have increased tension in the areas around the camps in Bangladesh. The insurgents oppose Bangladesh and Burmese efforts to repatriate the refugees and have mobilized some refugees to fight against Bangladesh camp personnel and other refugees who support repatriation. During the past few months,

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13 refugees have died, more than 200 have been injured, and roughly 400 are in prison as a result of fighting over the repatriation issue, according to press reports:

- Three Rohingyas were killed when police fired on a crowd at a refugee camp in late July 1992 after antirepatriation insurgents had attacked camp officials. According to press reports, Rohingya insurgents attacked Bangladesh camp officials, injuring five officials and at least three security guards at the Shailerdoba camp on 31 August 1992.
- On 30 August 1992 insurgents kidnapped 10 Rohingyas from the refugee camps and threatened more violence if repatriation continued.
- Local residents, outraged by the presence of the Rohingyas, set up roadblocks in early September to prevent food and aid from reaching the refugees.

██████████ We believe Rangoon's opposition to complete UNHCR monitoring will limit repatriation efforts in the near future. Rohingya refugees began returning to Burma in small numbers in late September, but Burma's refusal to allow the UNHCR to monitor the return of the first 49 refugees caused significant international criticism. The UNHCR was allowed to conduct predeparture interviews in Bangladesh with the second set of 63 returnees before their return to Burma in early October. ██████████

Nepal and Bhutan continue to disagree over the origin of many of the refugees in Nepal. The conflict is stalling negotiations, and Kathmandu is moving from quiet diplomacy to a more aggressive policy of internationalizing its refugee issue. ██████████

██████████ Bhutan argues that it will resettle only a fraction of the refugees because it believes many of them are not Bhutanese—arguing that some came directly from the Indian states of Assam or West Bengal—while Kathmandu argues most should be repatriated. ██████████

India's Position

All South Asian countries must take India's interests into account because their economic well-being depends on good relations with New Delhi. So far,

New Delhi has not played a major role on refugee issues. ██████████

India has made some concessions on Sri Lankan resettlement. In July 1992, India agreed to allow the UNHCR limited access to the Tamil resettlers to determine whether the refugees are returning voluntarily. ██████████

██████████ UNHCR involvement has legitimized the repatriation and reduced international pressure on India, which was mounting because of rumors of forced repatriation. ██████████

India is taking a hands-off approach to both Bangladesh's Rohingya problem and Nepal's refugees from Bhutan. Dhaka—which has received substantial financial and negotiating support from the international community—has not asked for New Delhi's help. In contrast, Kathmandu has put substantial pressure on India to mediate with Bhutan, but New Delhi argues that Thimphu and Kathmandu must resolve their differences bilaterally, according to the US Embassy in New Delhi. India's position on the issue probably reflects its longstanding friendship with Bhutan and Thimphu's unwavering loyalty to New Delhi with respect to China. New Delhi's relations with Kathmandu are more strained, making the Indians less receptive to Nepalese entreaties. ██████████

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Outlook

We doubt that the repressive policies of Burma or Bhutan will improve substantially in the near term or that the fighting in Sri Lanka will cease. More refugees are likely to arrive—especially in Nepal and Bangladesh—and few of those in camps are likely to be repatriated. The threat of widespread disease and malnutrition is likely to persuade foreign donors to make more substantial contributions to the refugee efforts in the region. With added funding and continued international pressure to overcome bureaucratic obstacles, camp conditions are likely to improve slightly but will remain far below acceptable standards in the near term. As a result, the outlook is for more squalor in the refugee camps and more pressure on the budgets of international relief organizations in South Asia. ██████████

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