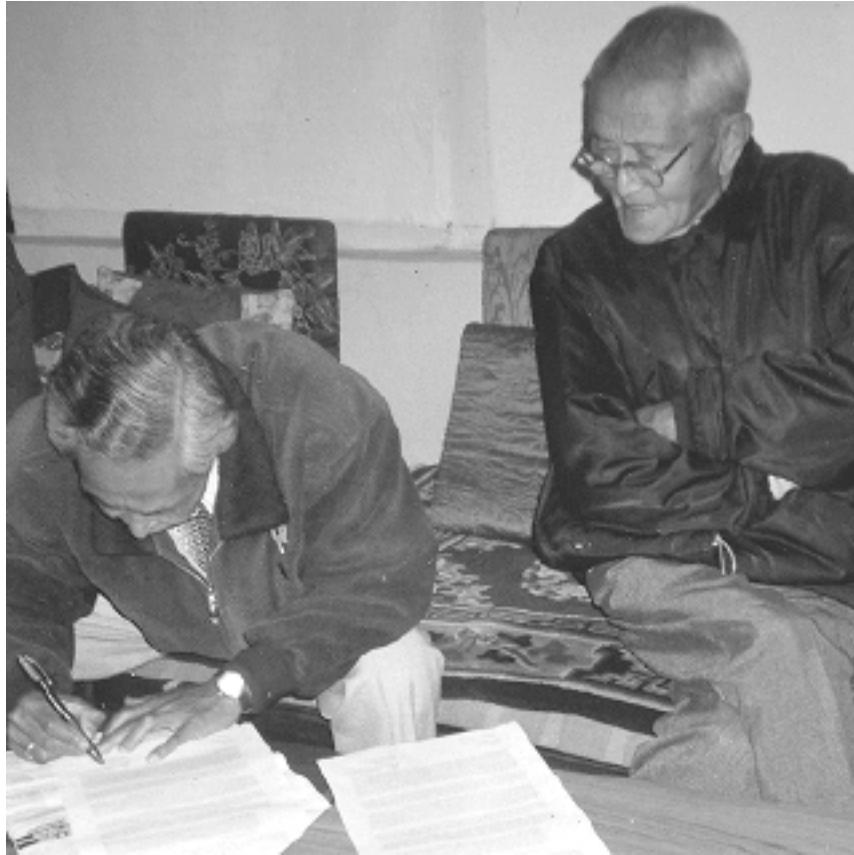


Retraction of the Merger Architects



Press Statement - January 28, 2003

The role played by the two of us in establishing the democratic institution in the erstwhile Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim is too well known for us to expatiate upon. We should just like to quote a paragraph from an Agreement that we signed with Government of India and Chogyal on May 8, 1973. The Agreement, which has been described as 'historic', became the milestone in the political development of Sikkim. The Article 371 F of the Constitution, which provides special safeguards to the three ethnic communities of Sikkim was based on the basic spirit of the May 8 Agreement.

The Agreement reads:

"The system of elections shall be so organised as to make the Assembly adequately representative of the various sections of the population. The size and composition of the Assembly and of the Executive Council shall be such as may be prescribed from time to time, care being taken to ensure that no single section of the population acquires a dominating position due mainly to its ethnic origin, and that the rights and interests of the Sikkimese of Bhutia-Lepcha origin and of the Sikkimese of Nepali, which includes Tsong and Scheduled Casts, origin, are fully protected ..."

In the above terms of agreement, phrases like “no single section of the population acquires a dominating position due mainly to its ethnic origin” are so comprehensive and so pregnant with meaning that they sum up the importance of maintaining ethnic equilibrium in the matter of reservation in order to safeguard the political rights of the Bhutia-Lepcha of Sikkimese origin and Nepalese of Sikkimese origin.

Tumultuous changes have taken place since the signing of the May 8 Agreement. These changes are of such awesome and dramatic nature and character that the present profiles resemble nothing of the old system. Everything of the past has been overturned and is beyond recognition. These changes have surpassed all the earlier events.

It is surprising to find that socio-political framework which firmly adhered to the system of reservation agreed upon by us that led stress on the BL minority and the Nepali majority of the Sikkimese origin apparently has no qualm to openly denounce the fragmenting Sikkimese society. As for instance, the Nepalese have now been divided into four socio-economic groups - Kamis and Damais as Scheduled Caste, Limbu and Tamangs and Scheduled Tribes, Rais, Magers, Gurungs, Sunwars as Other Backward Classes and Bahuns, Chettris and Newars as ‘Non Backward Classes’. Under the continuing shadow of such divisions, we wonder, how best one can serve for the greater unity of the Sikkimese people. With such ethnic divisions in our society, the issue of reservation has become a very delicate and of utmost importance having wide ramifications. The issue should neither be taken in a casual manner or under duress nor can it be merely a decision with political intent to appease a particular section of the Sikkimese community. Policies of such magnitude should be discussed and get the nod of as many sections of the populace as possible.

We appeal to the Government of India and Government of Sikkim that safeguards provided to the minority BL community in the Sikkim Assembly need to be guarded against. There is utmost need to remove the lacunae appearing in the Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribe Order, 1987, which has not only distorted the original identity of ‘Bhutia’ community but provided grounds to ‘Non-Bhutia’ communities to contest elections from BL reserved constituencies. The demography of Sikkim has changed considerably over the last three decades and the number of non-Sikkimese Nepali has increased significantly. The interest of the majority Nepali community including Tamang and Limbu of Sikkimese origin need to be protected by providing reservation for them. Any casualness on the issue of reservation may prove perilous for the future of Sikkim.

L.D. Kazi
Former President
Sikkim National Congress

K.C. Pradhan
Former President
Sikkim Janata Congress