**03KATHMANDU286**

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This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000286 SIPDIS STATE FOR SA/INS AND PRM LONDON FOR POL - REIDEL GENEVA FOR RMA E.O. 12958: N/A TAGS: PREF PREL EAID BT NP IN SUBJECT: NEPAL: BHUTANESE REFUGEES CRITICIZE REPATRIATION PLANS REF: A. KATHMANDU 228 [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#parB) B. KATHMANDU 90 [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#par1) 1. Summary: On February 12, PolOff met with respresentatives of the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), a political group composed of Bhutanese refugees living in UNHCR-administered camps in Nepal, to discuss the results of the 12th round of ministerial talks on the refugee issue (ref A). While reiterating the desire of the majority of the refugees to return to Bhutan, the representatives voiced concerns about possible post-repatriation complications. They also expressed suspicion that Bhutan might be "behaving properly" only as a tactic to polish its image just before donor meetings in Geneva, and encouraged the US to pressure India and other donors to help find a lasting solution to the crisis. Recent editorials and reports in the local press have echoed the skeptical tone, contending that "Nepal has been duped once again." End summary. [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#par2) 2. In a Feburary 12 meeting with PolOff, representatives from the Bhutan National Democratic Party, Dr. Das Dhakal and Chhabi Lal Timilsina, warned that even if refugees currently residing in eleven UNHCR-administered camps in Eastern Nepal are allowed to return to Bhutan, problems would continue to arise after repatriation. The representatives expressed concern that no assurances have been forthcoming about citizenship for the refugees in their former homeland, nor any guarantees that their human rights would be protected, and suggested that an international monitoring body would be necessary for an indefinite period following the return of any refugees to Bhutan. [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#par3) 3. Despite possible problems, the representatives said that 90 percent of the refugees would go back to Bhutan if offered the chance. Even though most are aware that their homes and farms likely will not be waiting for them, "if Bhutan makes them eligible," Timilsina said plainly, "all but a few of them will go in a minute. And if the king (of Bhutan) has had a real change in his heart, it will be no problem at all." However, regardless of the GOB's recent apparent cooperation with the GON in finding a solution, the GOB is unlikely to agree to the return of large number of refugees, they insisted. [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#par4) 4. Both representatives attributed Bhutan's current attitude to a desire to "look good for the donors," rather than any intention to allow the refugees to return in large numbers, and encouraged the US to exert whatever pressure it can on the GOB. Without international pressure, according to Dhakal, "Bhutan will try to make as many people as possible ineligible." The representatives singled out India as the best target for US influence, stressing that India could easily make up any shortfalls in other international assistance. "India is key, because it can bail out Bhutan," Dhakal said. [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#par5) 5. Reaction by other refugee groups to the outcome of the 12th round of ministerial talks, reported in the local press, echoed the Dhakal's skepticism. The Bhutan Peoples Party said that the GON had "demonstrated inferior diplomatic skills," while the Association of Human Rights Activists - Bhutan accused the GON of "playing into the hands of the Bhutanese regime." The Druk National Congress said that the Bhutanese government is continuing the talks as part of a plan to deceive donor countries, and the Bhutanese Repatriation Committee demanded "the internationalization of issues relating to the refugees." [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#par6) 6. The reaction of the Bhutanese Refugees Repatriation Support Group, whose members include several former GON ministers (ref B), was split. While one member stated that the agreement reached between the GOB and GON "can be taken positively," former foreign minister Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay was entirely less sanguine in his comments to reporters, saying "Nepal has been duped once again." In a commentary printed in the English daily The Himalayan Times, Upadhyay called for a definite timeline for verification and repatriation, as well as international pressure on Bhutan. "The Bhutanese government has chosen to baffle Nepal once more by agreeing to start veriication ahead of the donors' meeting in Geneva this month," Upadhyay wrote. "It wants to create the impression on the international community that it is willing to accommodate bona fide Bhutanese by cooperating with Nepal." Bhutanese sincerity, he added, can be measured by the GOB's willingness to take back the refugees within a prescribed timeframe. "If the 13th ministerial meeting can agree upon such a time-table... it could be welcomed by all. Otherwise, the international community must reject and expose Bhutan's dilatory tactics." [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/03kathmandu286#par7) 7. Comment: Post shares much of the refugee community's skepticism about the sincerity of Bhutan's agreement to start moving toward large-scale repatriation of refugees. Similar statements have been made by the GOB in the past, only to be forgotten when the world is no longer watching. While the apparent positive outcomes of the 12th ministerial talks are encouraging, continued international pressure will be necessary to ensure that the GOB lives up to its promises. MALINOWSKI