**05NEWDELHI1715**

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 C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 001715 SIPDIS E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2015 TAGS: PGOV PREF PREL PHUM IN NP BT SUBJECT: ADVANCING USG EFFORTS ON BHUTANESE REFUGEES REF: A. STATE 27085 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#parB) B. KATHMANDU 460 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#parC) C. GENEVA 2859 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#parD) D. NEW DELHI 1482 Classified By: Ambassador David C. Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B, D) [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#par1) 1. (C) Summary: The Bhutanese Ambassador reaffirmed to us on March 3 that Thimphu remains committed to repatriate Category 1 refugees under the Dewey-Wangchuck framework, but is unlikely to allow any refugees to return until the constitution is finalized, and sees little prospect of progress on the refugee issue while political turmoil persists in Nepal. Ambassador Tshering also reiterated that no Bhutanese would travel to Nepal to participate in the Joint Verification Teams in the current security situation and cited the recent imposition of a military curfew in the Jhapa District to bolster his case. The demands by both Thimphu and Kathmandu that the other draft the next letter spelling out modalities of the Dewey-Wangchuck plan is another hurdle we must overcome to move the process forward. We support a trip to the region by A/S Dewey (or the Ambassador) as part of the effort to convince Thimphu that a solution to the refugee issue must be found. The USG should continue to press Bhutan and Nepal to engage with the other, but the Nepalese King's dismissal of the Deuba Government has heightened Bhutanese security concerns and given Thimphu further arguments for delay. The refugee issue is not a high priority for the GOI at this time, but the MEA is intrigued by talk of a "global solution." The EU feels the time is not right to press the issue. Mission continues to research conflicting local opinions about whether the RGOB could use the census to facilitate further expulsions. End Summary. Bhutan's Position ----------------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715%22%20%5Cl%20%22par2) 2. (C) The Dewey-Wangchuck framework remains our best road map, but the return of any refugees, including verified Category 1 refugees is unlikely prior to the adoption of the constitution, which could take a year, Bhutanese Ambassador Tshering told Polcouns and Poloff in a March 3 meeting. He SIPDIS reasoned that the Bhutanese people do not want refugees, possibly influenced by Maoists ideology, returning during the implementation of the constitution and formation of political parties. (Note: This is the first time the RGOB has confirmed that political parties will be allowed under the new constitution. End Note.) He also reiterated that the RGOB will not restart the Joint Verification Team (JVT) process until the political and security situation in Nepal becomes more stable. [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#par3) 3. (C) Polcouns expressed USG desire to receive a response to the January 19 letter from A/S Dewey to King Wangchuck asking the RGOB to transmit a second letter to Nepal reaffirming its commitment to the JVT process. Tshering responded that he believed the Nepalese were responsible for sending the next letter, demonstrating that the standoff over the exchange of correspondence between Kathmandu and Thimphu continues. Tshering reiterated Thimphu's three major concerns: 1) the security of JVT members; 2) the lack of stability in Nepal; and 3) the unwillingness of the Nepalese opposition to abide by agreements made by the GON. He commented that events since February 1 have reinforced Bhutanese concerns. The Ambassador concluded that security remains foremost for the RGOB, and that it has no other alternative but to wait until the situation in Nepal improves. He seemed incredulous at our suggestion that the JVT's might resume, citing the imposition of a military curfew in the Jhapa District as evidence of the dangerous security situation. GOI Views --------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715%22%20%5Cl%20%22par4) 4. (C) The MEA also does not consider the refugee problem a high priority at this time, particularly in light of the political problems in Nepal. MEA Joint Secretary (Nepal) Ranjit Rae acknowledged to Polcouns on March 2 that the GOI had not heard that the new government in Nepal was willing to continue PM Deuba's policies concerning the refugees (Ref B). Rae also inquired about the possibility of a "global solution," suggesting that this problem should not be too difficult to resolve, "because only about 16,000 families need to be resettled." Polcouns responded that we need to see progress towards repatriation and have heard different messages from the international community about possible resettlement numbers as part of such a global solution. Commenting on the possibility of restarting the verification process, Rae agreed with the Bhutanese position that there must be security in Nepal for the JVT members, as neither side can afford another violent incident. Queried by Polcouns, Rae reaffirmed Foreign Secretary Saran's promise to Ambassador Moriarty that New Delhi will encourage the Bhutanese to continue identifying and repatriating the refugees, especially those in Category 1 (Ref D). EU Views -------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715%22%20%5Cl%20%22par5) 5. (C) EU Mission Development Assistance Counselor Brian O'Neill told Poloff on March 3 that the EU does not believe the time is right to press for a solution to the refugee problem. He indicated that the EU was still interested in working together with the USG to find a solution to the problem, but that the EU was waiting for the situation in Nepal to become clearer. Options ------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715%22%20%5Cl%20%22par6) 6. (C) We do not believe that discussions of third country resettlement would lead to more expulsions by the RGOB, because Thimphu is genuinely concerned about its image on the world stage. We have told the Bhutanese Government on a number of occasions that the refugee issue is the one issue that clouds its otherwise exemplary relations with the international community. That said, the USG may want to reinforce to Thimphu that, if resettlement is discussed, the RGOB should not use the issue to justify further expulsions. We also need to bear in mind the USG stake in the success of Bhutan's democratic transition. [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#par7) 7. (C) We also do not believe that the introduction of a "third option" would lead to a Bhutanese refusal to take back any refugees. The possibility of third country resettlement is already public, and the RGOB continues to maintain its willingness to repatriate bona fide Bhutanese citizens. However, the Bhutanese Embassy has repeatedly said that only refugees classified as Category 1 fall into this group and would be allowed to return. Were the USG to provide a clearer picture to Bhutan as to how many refugees could be resettled in third countries, Thimphu would be reassured that they would not need to accept large numbers of persons, and possibly be more willing to resume the JVT process. In order to provide a clearer picture of possible resettlement numbers, the UNHCR surveys must first be completed. The surveys, which UNHCR has said could be completed in approximately 8 months, would assist in finding a durable solution when the political situation in Nepal improves. [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#par8) 8. (C) We believe that a high-level USG delegation to Bhutan would highlight our determination to move the process forward. However, based on comments by the Bhutanese, such a visit would be less productive while the political situation in Nepal remains unclear, and until the Nepalese government has made a decision to allow the UNHCR surveys. [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#par9) 9. (C) We believe that maintaining a dialogue with a greater "Friends of Bhutan" group is important and continue to meet with them on the topic. Officers from the EU Mission and the Australian and Canadian High Commissions are traveling to Bhutan in the near future and have pledged to provide readouts of their trips. Census ------ [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/05newdelhi1715#par10) 10. (C) Post continues to research the Bhutanese census. We have asked Thimphu officials for details, including a copy of the census questionnaire, and are awaiting a reply. We are also seeking input from our local human rights contacts. Mission will report back on the likelihood that the RGOB could use this census to facilitate further expulsions. MULFORD