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VZCZCXRO9476 PP RUEHCI DE RUEHKT #1001/01 1381158 ZNY CCCCC ZZH P 181158Z MAY 07 FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5987 INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5348 RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1271 RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 6043 RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5734 RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4065 RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1462 RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0386 RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0206 RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0280 RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0349 RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3479 RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1645 RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2680

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 001001 SIPDIS SIPDIS E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017 TAGS: PREF PHUM PREL PGOV BT IN NP SUBJECT: BHUTANESE REFUGEES WORRY ABOUT ONGOING DISCRIMINATION IN BHUTAN REF: A. NEW DELHI 1640 [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#parB) B. NEW DELHI 2229 Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty for reasons 1.4(b/d). Summary ------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par1) 1. (C) Recent press reports in Nepal and India have concluded that 70,000 - 80,000 Nepali-ethnic Bhutanese, called Lhotsampa, were not permitted to participate in the mock elections held in Bhutan in April. The reports also suggested that these people might be subject to eviction from Bhutan. Government statistics from Bhutan suggest that roughly 80,000 people are living in Bhutan as non-citizens. Refugee community leaders Ratan Gazmere, Pingala Dhital and S.B. Subba told RefCoord May 15 and 16 that these non-citizens were, in many cases, Lhotsampa who were disenfranchised as a result of ongoing government discrimination. They also believed that most Lhotsampas had not been able to participate in Bhutan's mock elections. However, the refugee leaders did not anticipate the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) would forcibly expel mass numbers of Lhotsampas. Gazmere suggested that the RGOB understood the risk of attempting another mass expulsion similar to 1990-1993, but thought the RGOB would continue to make life for Lhotsampas difficult to encourage them to voluntarily depart. Media Summary and Human Rights Watch Report ------------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par2) 2. (SBU) Journalists in Nepal and India have claimed in recent press reports that the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) was preparing to evict 80,000 Nepali-ethnic Bhutanese, or Lhotsampas, who had been denied the right to vote in Bhutan's first mock election held in April. The press reports drew a direct link between third-country resettlement offered to the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and the RGOB's intention to evict more Lhotsampa. A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report released May 17 in Kathmandu concluded that Lhotsampa who were not evicted in the 1990s continued to face "persistent discrimination and ongoing threats to their citizenship status." HRW Refugee Policy Director Bill Frelick told RefCoord May 18 that he had interviewed several Nepali-ethnic Lhotsampa living in Bhutan in November 2006 for the report. Frelick said that these Lhotsampa had felt constantly in danger of losing their citizenship or legal status in Bhutan. According to the HRW report, one Lhotsampa said "Everybody knows they are being discriminated against, but they don't dare to raise their voice, because they think the consequences will be the same as for the people who have already left." RGOB Census -- 80,000 Non-Citizens in Bhutan? --------------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par3) 3. (C) According to Bhutan's Population and Census Commission, the total population of Bhutanese citizens as of May 31, 2005 was 552,996 people. The same commission announced in May 2006 that the total population of Bhutan, including foreigners, as of April 27, 2006, was 634,972 persons. The difference between the number of citizens and the total number of people living in Bhutan, therefore, is roughly 80,000. Refugee community leader Ratan Gazmere told RefCoord May 15 that these 80,000 people included perhaps 1,000 - 2,000 expatriates working for international organizations in Bhutan. The vast majority, however, were ethnic minorities, such as the Nepali-ethnic Lhotsampa, whom the RGOB considered non-citizens. Gazmere opined that, in many cases, those classified as non-citizens had actually held citizenship at one time, but were disenfranchised as a result of government discrimination. (Note: According to KATHMANDU 00001001 002 OF 003 the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, any non-national person who is forced out of his or her "habitual residence" can be considered a refugee; he or she does not have to have had citizenship. End Note.) Government Census Discriminates Against Lhotsampa --------------------------------------------- ---- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par4) 4. (C) Gazmere also informed RefCoord that the RGOB continued to conduct census exercises every year. The Lhotsampa referred to these censuses as "kalo," or "black" censuses because they were conducted only in Lhotsampa communities, he said. Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB) Chairman S.B. Subba, whose wife remains inside Bhutan, reported that the RGOB-administered census continued to place Lhotsampa in seven categories of citizenship: F1 -- genuine Bhutanese; F2 -- returned migrants; F3 -- absentees (those not available at the time of the census); F4 -- non-national women married to Bhutanese men; F5 -- non-national men married to Bhutanese women; F6 -- foreign-born children legally adopted by Bhutanese; and F7 -- non-nationals (migrants/illegal settlers). Gazmere said that his wife's family, who had all remained in Bhutan as F1 citizens, were placed in several categories in the 2006 census. Gazmere's brother-in-law, who the RGOB had terminated from his position at the Central Bank without cause, was placed in category F7 and was now considered a non-national. Gazmere worried that the RGOB might force his wife's family out of Bhutan as a result. He questioned whether the RGOB disenfranchised his brother-in-law because of Gazmere's status as a refugee in Nepal. He stated he knew of 200 people from his administrative block in Samchi District of Bhutan who were categorized in F4, F5, or F7 in the most recent census. Difficulties Faced By Non-F1 Bhutanese -------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par5) 5. (C) According to Subba, any person in Bhutan now categorized as a non-F1 Bhutanese is refused issuance of a new identity, or citizenship, card. These people also have great difficulty obtaining a No Objection Certificate (NOC), which is required to register their children in public secondary or post-secondary schools, move freely in the country, buy or sell lend, or obtain government employment. Subba also noted that his wife had reported many instances of Lhotsampa who were refused NOCs because they had relatives inside the refugee camps. Another refugee community leader, Pingala Dhital, whose family remained in Bhutan, reported to RefCoord that her family had been unable to obtain NOCs, but had been able to register their children in primary school. All of the refugee leaders suggested that most Lhotsampa inside Bhutan now lived as non-F1 Bhutanese and, therefore, were not issued voter ID cards and were not able to participate in the mock elections held in April. (Note: The second round of mock elections are scheduled for May 28. End Note.) But Will Discrimination Result In Evictions? -------------------------------------------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par6) 6. (C) Gazmere believed that evictions were already happening inside Bhutan. He did not, however, expect expulsions would happen on a mass scale as in 1990-1993 because the RGOB understood that the international community was paying more attention. He expected that the RGOB would continue to make life difficult for Nepali-ethnic Lhotsampa to encourage them to voluntarily depart the country for more favorable living conditions abroad. Gazmere claimed that, in his visit to the refugee camps in early May, he had met a woman with two children who had recently left Bhutan because her children could not access education facilities. UNHCR Durable Solutions Officer Kim Roberson said May 17 that refugees in the camps were hearing from relatives inside Bhutan that RGOB KATHMANDU 00001001 003 OF 003 officials were telling them to depart the country. However, according to both Roberson and Nepal Home Ministry official Shankar Koirala on May 17, no new Bhutanese have arrived from Bhutan. Koirala noted that the GON had closed down the refugee screening post at the border and was not currently accepting new refugee registrations. Comment ------- [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par7) 7. (C) Enough accounts have trickled out of Bhutan to indicate that Nepali-ethnic Lhotsampa inside Bhutan, no matter what their status, continue to face government discrimination and possible loss of citizenship. However, it is unlikely that the RGOB intends at this point to force people to leave the country as it did in the 1990s. RGOB Prime Minister Wangchuk told A/S Boucher that "we did not want another 1990-1993." (Ref A) He also said, however, that "our citizenship rules are very clear. According to our census, there are 125,000 foreign workers in Bhutan, many of whom are illegal. We have not taken any action against them." These words bring little confidence, considering ongoing discrimination inside Bhutan, that the RGOB would not take action against them in the future. As refugee leaders and Human Rights Watch have suggested, what is more likely is that the RGOB will continue systematic ethnic discrimination in the hopes that these people will depart Bhutan voluntarily and in a trickle rather than a wave. Bhutanese Ambassador Dago Tsering recently suggested that democracy in Bhutan might bring even less tolerance for Nepali-ethnic groups, including for repatriation of the refugees (Ref B). In addition to focusing on concerns about a possible second wave of expulsions, we also should begin to focus on ongoing discrimination against ethnic minorities inside Bhutan. [Â¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1001#par8) 8. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Embassy New Delhi. MORIARTY