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VZCZCXRO8674 PP RUEHCI RUEHCN DE RUEHKT #1059/01 1491301 ZNY CCCCC ZZH P 291301Z MAY 07 FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6089 INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5383 RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1307 RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 6077 RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5768 RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4102 RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1505 RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0286 RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0355 RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0394 RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0212 RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU PRIORITY 0381 RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3513 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 1664 RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2705

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KATHMANDU 001059 SIPDIS SIPDIS E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/29/2017 TAGS: PREF PREL PGOV BT NP SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS BHUTANESE REFUGEE CAMPS, FOLLOWED BY MAOIST MAYHEM REF: A. KATHMANDU 1036 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#parB) B. NEW DELHI 2503 Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty for reasons 1.4(b/d). Summary ------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par1) 1. (SBU) On May 25, despite rocks thrown by Young Communist League activists in Jhapa District (ref A), the Ambassador held several successful meetings with refugee teachers, youth and the elected camp management. Questions regarding resettlement were largely practical. On May 26, Communist Party of Bhutan (CPB) cadre attacked the Beldangi 2 camp secretary and burned the camp management committee office. SIPDIS In its efforts to disperse the crowd, Nepali Armed Police killed a 16-year-old refugee. On May 27, protests outside the Armed Police camp led to one more death and the imposition of a curfew. Refugee contacts reported May 29 that CPB cadre were taking advantage of the refugees' inability to leave the camp to threaten refugees who were known to favor third-country resettlement. Home Ministry contacts reported May 29 that the situation remained too tense for security forces to patrol inside the camps. UNHCR and its partners were unable to access the Beldangi camps or provide assistance. In an emergency meeting May 29, the Core Group discussed a joint public statement condemning the violence. Ambassador's Visit to the Camps Successful ------------------------------------------ [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par2) 2. (SBU) The Ambassador, accompanied by UNHCR Resident Representative Abraham Abraham and RefCoord, discussed U.S. resettlement plans May 25 with Bhutanese refugee teachers and youth in Beldangi 1 camp. The Ambassador also announced the selection of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to operate the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) and the additional USD 2 million USAID Food For Peace contribution to the refugee food program. The teachers, in particular, voiced practical questions, such as education equivalencies between Nepal and the U.S., the requirement to pay for the cost of airfare, and U.S. employment norms. One teacher noted that most refugee youth were interested in resettlement, but could not express this desire publicly because of threats from other "groups." The Ambassador and UNHCR's Abraham assured the refugees that expressions of interest in resettlement would be kept confidential and that security in the camps would increase, not decrease, in coming weeks as the U.S. and other governments began their resettlement programs. Young Communist League Cadre Throw Stones... -------------------------------------------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par3) 3. (SBU) After the meetings inside Beldangi 1 camp, the Ambassador departed for the UNHCR sub-office in Damak to meet with all seven camp secretaries and deputy secretaries as well as local Nepali journalists. As the UNHCR vehicles approached the office gate, roughly two dozen youth ran up and began throwing large stones. Although several rocks hit each of the two vehicles as they passed through the gate, no one was injured (Ref A). The youth continued to shout anti-American slogans while waving black flags until Nepal police arrived to disperse them. The journalists present identified the attackers as local Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League cadre. (Note: On May 27, press reports indicated that police had arrested four YCL activists involved in this incident. End Note.) But Do Not Mar Meeting With Camp Secretaries -------------------------------------------- KATHMANDU 00001059 002 OF 004 [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par4) 4. (C) Despite the interruption, the Ambassador held productive discussions with the seven camp secretaries and their deputies. Beldangi 2 camp secretary Hari Adhikari Bengaley opined that the Government of Nepal (GON) did not seem concerned about the lack of security in the refugee camps. Certain ideological groups, he added, were disrupting camp operations as well as preventing refugees from voicing support for third-country resettlement. Bengaley also requested that the U.S. and other donor governments increase the pressure on Bhutan to repatriate eligible refugees. The Ambassador detailed ongoing U.S. efforts to encourage Bhutan on repatriation, but said that repatriation should not become a pre-condition for resettlement. Both Khudunabari Camp Secretary Manoj Rai and Beldangi 1 Camp Secretary D.P. SIPDIS Pradhan expressed concern that refugees were not able to express their interest in resettlement because of threats. They also believed the refugees should be able to choose the country of resettlement. The Ambassador assured the camp secretaries that the U.S. would work closely with the GON to SIPDIS ensure that security in the camps allowed refugees to make independent and informed choices. Mass meetings with UNHCR staff and an extensive information campaign would educate refugees on their choices and ensure that all refugees knew resettlement was a humanitarian, not a political, program. The camp secretaries' other concerns included the opportunity to bring relatives still living in Bhutan to the U.S., skill acquisition and U.S. employment, and security for refugees living outside the camps. Communist Party of Bhutan Cadre Attack Camp Secretary --------------------------------------------- -------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par5) 5. (SBU) On May 26, Beldangi 2 Camp Secretary Hari Adhikari Bengaley conducted an interview in which he accused certain refugee groups of threatening other refugees. In response to these remarks, Communist Party of Bhutan (CPB) activists attacked Bengaley on May 27 outside the Beldangi 2 camp management committee office. According to refugee residents in Beldangi 2, Bengaley and other camp management committee members were injured and prevented from leaving the office. Nepal Armed Police Force (APF) later entered the camp to provide assistance to the entrapped camp management committee members. With hundreds of protesters outside the office, the APF fired warning shots in an attempt to disperse the crowd and reach Bengaley. One 16-year-old refugee boy was killed in the conflict. The APF succeeded in extracting Bengaley and other camp management committee members from the camp. Afterward, the CPB cadre set fire to the camp management office and police post. Government Curfew Allows CPB Unfettered Activity --------------------------------------------- --- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par6) 6. (C) On May 28, 2,000 - 3,000 refugees from the three Beldangi camps gathered outside the APF camp, which adjoins Beldangi 1 camp, to protest the May 27 death of the refugee youth. According to Home Ministry Under Secretary Shankar Koirala, the Jhapa Chief District Officer issued a curfew order in response. The refugees, however, refused to disperse. Fighting ensued when the APF attempted to break up the crowd, leading to the injury of at least 8 policemen and the death of a refugee man. (Note: On May 29, UNHCR provided the Core Group with a written summary of events, which Post will scan and email to SCA and PRM. End Note.) The curfew, which restricted movement into and out of the camps but not within the camps, remained in effect throughout the day May [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par29) 29. According to refugee contacts on May 29, CPB cadre were taking advantage of the absence of security and the restriction on movement to threaten and intimidate refugee families known to support third-country resettlement. In one case, Pingala Dhital, a reliable Embassy refugee source, KATHMANDU 00001059 003 OF 004 reported that her brother had fled the camp on May 27 following the attack on Bengaley. On May 28, CBP cadre entered her brother's hut and threatened the life of his wife and 12-month-old baby if her husband did not return. Dhital believed her brother was only one of many families targeted by the CPB. RefCoord urged Home Ministry official Koirala to initiate security patrols in the camps. Koirala, however, was not certain the APF would be willing to do so until tensions with refugees reduced. Sit-In at Mechi Bridge ---------------------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par7) 7. (C) Refugee leader Ratan Gazmere confirmed May 29 that CPB cadre and other refugee political leaders in the camps were seeking support from refugees to participate in the Mechi Bridge "Long March," (ref B) which had turned into a sit-in protest at the Nepal-Indian border. Gazmere reported that 1,500 refugees were present at the border on May 28, but he expected that number would grow. UNHCR Abraham indicated May 29 that refugees were not obeying the GON curfew order and were gathering at Mechi Bridge. As of 1730 hours in Kathmandu, UNHCR reported that roughly 8,000 protesters, both refugees and locals, had gathered at the Nepal-Indian border. Abraham reported that scuffles between refugees and Indian border security had occurred with some minor injuries. UNHCR intended to send a staff member to the border May 30 to monitor the situation. UNHCR Calls for Emergency Core Group Meeting -------------------------------------------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par8) 8. (C) On May 29, UNHCR Abraham called an emergency Core Group meeting in Kathmandu to discuss the current situation. Danish Ambassador Finn Thilsted, Australian Charge d'Affaires Linda Trigg, Canadian Cooperation Officer Ed Doe, and Norwegian EmbOff attended the meeting with Ambassador Moriarty and RefCoord. Abraham reported that UNHCR staff had been unable to visit the Beldangi camps since May 25. Huge crowds of refugees were blocking the access road to all three Beldangi camps. UNHCR implementing partner CARITAS had indicated to UNHCR that the CPB had forced all camp schools to close May 28 and 29. However, the three eastern camps (Khudunabari, Goldhap and Timai) remained accessible. Abraham stated that he supported the GON's request that Bengaley resign his position of Camp Secretary as he would be unable to fulfill his camp management responsibilities. World Food Program Deputy Country Director Dominique Hyde said that WFP had stopped food distribution in all the camps except for Sanischare. She was not concerned with a two-day interruption, but suggested that a one-week delay would cause significant food shortages in the camps. Nepali Maoists had been asking refugee families for "scoops" of food, she added, but was not certain about the extent of the problem. Core Group Members Lay Responsibility On GON -------------------------------------------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par9) 9. (C) Danish Ambassador Thilsted opined that the GON needed to realize the refugee situation was its own problem and not that of the international community. The Ambassador expressed concern that the CPB would benefit from the chaos reigning in the camps. The Nepali Maoists were not pleased with the prospect of third-country resettlement emptying the camps and intended to use the CPB to promote their objective of exporting the Maoist insurgency. The Ambassador said it was important for the international community to condemn the CPB for its activities and ensure the Nepali Maoists also did not escape censure. Thilsted said he preferred to sit and observe the situation for a few more days before he would support a joint statement condemning the CPB, let alone the Maoists. Australian Charge Trigg agreed to revisit the KATHMANDU 00001059 004 OF 004 possibility of a joint statement after another two days. Comment ------- [¶](http://www.bhutan-research.org/us-diplomatic-cables-on-bhutan/07kathmandu1059#par10) 10. (SBU) The situation in the Bhutanese refugee camps remains fluid and tense. The absence of security forces inside the camp has given pro-repatriation groups free reign to terrorize refugee families known to support third-country resettlement. Unfortunately, with the local Core Group Chairman and Australian Ambassador Graeme Lade out of the country, other Core Group members were unwilling at this time to support a coordinated Core Group message condemning the CPB. In his meeting May 30 with Home Minister Sitaula, the Ambassador will urge the GON to improve security within the refugee camps and arrest those breaking the law. Given the demoralized police force and lack of central leadership, however, we are not optimistic that the GON will successfully bring the perpetrators to justice. We expect many refugees under threat will seek safe haven outside the camps. However, UNHCR has indicated it would not be able to provide assistance to these refugees. We also expect more refugees will agree or be forced to participate in the sit-in protest at Mechi Bridge. Post will continue to monitor the situation closely. MORIARTY