

Bhutanese refugees in hunger strike; BRRRC urged for repatriation



Hunger strikers with their appeal/Photo:
Yubaraj Sampang

Bhutanese Refugees languishing in Beldangi camp started hunger strike in response to the World Food Program's (WFP) decision to curtailing the food commodities. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP decided to reduce subsistence ration allowance that has been provided to refugees in Nepal, citing large-scale emergency funding need for refugees in other parts of the world.

"Refugees who do not fulfill the vulnerability criteria will receive 70 percent of the current ration starting early 2016. The composition of the reduced basket is currently under discussion with refugees' representatives, so as to accommodate their preferences as much as possible. WFP will increase its monitoring of the nutritional status of refugees in order to detect new vulnerabilities," WFP Nepal Country Director Pippa Bradford said in a statement published October 12, 2015.

According to Harka Jung Subba, president of Bhutanese Refugees Elderly Repatriation Committee (BRERC), the hunger strike kicked off on November 22, 2015. "We want continuous humanitarian assistance and durable solution to those willing to repatriate to Bhutan", Subba told BNS. Subba further added, "around 7,000 refugees are willing to be resettled in third countries, while the remaining want to go back home".

The Chairperson of Bhutanese Refugee Representative Repatriation Committee (BRRRC), Dr. Bhumpa Rai, visited the hunger strikers and expressed worry over the deteriorating conditions of exiled Bhutanese. He urged Nepal Government and refugee aid agencies to stimulate assistance to those remaining in camps and open the door of repatriation to those willing to return Bhutan earliest as possible.

Meanwhile, Bhutanese refugees have appealed Nepal government to negotiate with Bhutan government for repatriation. Submitting a memorandum to Home Minister Shakti Basnet on Tuesday, November 8, Bhutan Independent Peoples' Forum (BIPF) urged Nepal government to raise the issue of Bhutanese refugees at SAARC and other international forums. "We got positive response from home Minister Basnet" DB Subba, one of the delegates of BIPF informed Bhutan News Service.

After resettlement marked 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in third countries, there are around

18,000 refugees left in the camp, according to the data of UNHCR and IOM.