

FOI Request: FCO Documents Relevant to the Request

Email of 13 March 2009 from Col Jeremy Ellis, UK Defence Attache to Nepal, to MoD official:

As expected, I met with Ambika Luintel, the MFA's Under-Secretary for Europe America Division this morning. She is currently the sole desk officer in the Division. Neither Pradumna Bikram Shah, her Joint Secretary, nor Mr Acharya, the Foreign Secretary, will be back in the office until 17 March. I briefed her in outline on next week's expected written Ministerial statement in the House on Gurkha pensions. I emphasised the importance of keeping even the limited detail I could make available to her within the MFA, and that the announcement might not take place as planned. She noted this, and seemed grateful for the early 'heads-up' on our Government's intentions.

I also broached the subject of the GoN's views on 'the immigration (settlement) question', reminding her of the background and the GoN's (or at least the MFA's) inability to give a view last time we asked. In doing this, I suggested that there would be a number of matters for the GoN to consider, not least would be the possible financial impact to Nepal if substantial numbers were to fall within the Home Office's revised criteria and to take the opportunity to move to the UK. I noted that it might still (very much along the lines that her Foreign Secretary had advised over the continuation of recruitment for the BG) be difficult for the GoN to give a formal view until after the post-Constitution election. She agreed, and also agreed to brief the officiating Foreign Secretary now and the Foreign Secretary on his return on our discussion. She invited me to approach the Foreign Secretary's office for an appointment for [the Deputy Head of Mission] and me to discuss the matter with him during the week beginning 23rd March. She agreed with me that it would be helpful for the MFA to give some thought to the matter soon. An announcement will inevitably be made on the revised settlement criteria; whichever way it goes the MFA (and the GoN) will need to respond to media and ex-Gurkha servicemen's views (pro or not). If an announcement has still not been made by the time USofS [MOD Under Secretary of State] visits Nepal, we would have a formal opportunity to pose the question of their views to the GoN. Mrs Luintel agreed with me that it will be vital for Nepal's Foreign Minister to be fully briefed by her Foreign Secretary prior to that meeting.

Email of 13 March from Embassy officer to MoD official:

Thank you for the email. I understand that you and Jeremy [the UK Defence Attache] discussed this further last night. For the benefit of copy addressees, he is meeting with the Under-Secretary for Europe and North America today, and will raise this matter for the attention of the [Nepalese] Foreign Secretary. If there is any further news on a GoN view then we will arrange a meeting with the [Nepalese] Foreign Secretary early next week.

Email of 11 March from FCO desk officer to MoD official:

I spoke to Andrew [Dr Andrew Hall, the UK Ambassador]. He does not think that you will get any clarity from the GoN on their position on the immigration issue, but if you want he is willing for either Jeremy [the UK Defence Attaché] or [name of UK Embassy official withheld] to raise it with the [Nepalese] Foreign Secretary (PUS) on Friday. He said the FS was politically astute and might be able to give a good indication of what the political reaction might be.

Please let [name of embassy official withheld] know asap if you want him to set up a call for [name of embassy official withheld] on Friday with the FS.

Email of 11 March 2009 from MoD official to FCO desk officer

[Name of FCO Desk Officer withheld] we discussed this proposal. It would be helpful to have posts view about whether this is a good idea. I am not convinced how strongly we can rely on the views of the outgoing [Nepalese] Ambassador in any event. When I met him last year he clearly said he was not in favour of increased immigration but we have never had a GoN view. Jeremy [The UK Defence Attache] broached this last year (before the court case) with the MFA and couldn't get a view from them. The current costs of the Gurkha pension run at over £50M a year with the latest rise. If a further 20,000 (worst case) ex-Gurkhas were to come to UK the majority would be here and this would be a significant transfer of money out of Nepal so I suspect the GoN would not want this. They have formally though asked us to address Gurkha grievances (and this means entry to the UK and higher pensions). Their note to this effect though talked about temporary entry and they have never gone as far as saying they were in favour of emigration of their people. I agree with the line below that any approach we make must be with the knowledge of the HO as we must all stay joined up on this.

Email of 26 January from Dr Andrew Hall, the UK Ambassador to Nepal, to the UK Defence Attache to Nepal about the visit to Nepal by Kevan Jones MP, Minister for Veterans:

I managed to have a brief word with the [Nepalese] Foreign Secretary today, who made the following points:

- we should not expect any substantive discussion about the future of Gurkha recruitment; the position had been made clear ... this was an issue that needed to wait for the emergence of the new Constitution (ie in 2010 in drafting remains on track); it would remain in a holding pattern until then;
- we should assess nearer the time the Nepalese reaction to HMG's package for ex-Gurkhas (he did not give the impression that this would be a show-stopper, whatever it was).

I think this is as positive a steer as we could expect at this point. We should revisit the question in say early March (assuming the ILR question has been settled and announced by then) to assess the public mood.

It would be helpful to have a sense of the Minister's own objectives and particularly how the accompanying MPs fit into the picture.