

Two refugees on Nauru agree to resettle in Cambodia, reviving teetering \$55m deal



Bangkok: Two Iranian refugees on Nauru have reportedly given up hope of living in Australia and have agreed to resettle in Cambodia, reviving a \$55 million agreement that was teetering on collapse.

Only five refugees have agreed to take a one-way ticket from the Pacific island to Cambodia since the controversial agreement was signed between Cambodia and Australia at a champagne-sipping ceremony in late 2014.

Three of them have returned to their country of origin and the remaining two are deeply unhappy and also want to quit the country.

Three Cambodian officials plan to fly to Nauru in June to interview the Iranian man and woman to assess their suitability to live in Cambodia, one of Asia's poorest nations with a poor human rights record.

Cambodia insists any refugees sent to the country must volunteer.

Australia has paid millions of dollars to the International Organisation for Migration in Cambodia to take care of refugees from Nauru for 12 months, including providing accommodation, cash payments, training and help setting up a small business.

But after that they will be on their own with no possibility of moving to anywhere but their country of origin, where they have been found to have a well-founded fear of persecution.

Cambodia's top government spokesman admitted in April that the agreement had failed and that his country did not have social programs to support them.

Fairfax Media revealed in March that 28-year-old Rohingya Muslim Mohammad Rashid felt abandoned and feared he would die in Cambodia, prompting denials by both Australia and Cambodia that he was being poorly treated.

An Iranian man in his early 20s ? the only other refugee from Nauru in the country ? has also complained to relatives about broken Australian promises, and told them he plans to return to Iran.

The agreement has been widely condemned, including by the UN refugee agency UNHCR, human rights and refugee advocates, and Cambodia's opposition parties.

As well as giving Cambodia, a country where corruption is endemic, \$40 million to sign the agreement, Australia also allocated \$15 million to the International Organisation for Migration.

Australia's Immigration minister Peter Dutton routinely refuses to comment on refugees who volunteer to resettle in Cambodia.

The Turnbull government has been lobbying a number of other Asian and Pacific nations to resettle refugees from Nauru, including the Philippines.

Nauru has only offered them temporary resettlement.

Source: SMH