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B Smith Esq OBE
South-East Asian Department
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
London SW1

BRITISH EMBASSY,
RANGOON.

6 February 1979

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Mr Simon
Mr Beale for draft.

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Dear Smith,

VISIT OF BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTER

1. Mr Shamsul Huq paid an official visit to Burma from 23 to 25 January. He was accompanied by three others. During his stay he was received by the President, called on U San Yu, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Home and Religious Affairs, the Minister for Trade and had talks with his opposite number.

2. My Bangladesh colleague describes the visit as a considerable success. The highlight was the conversation with Ne win for which one hour had been provided but which in the event lasted for two hours and ten minutes.

3. Repatriation of Refugees.

Both sides congratulated each other on the smooth flow of this operation. To date more than 60,000 refugees have returned to the Arakan and the Burmese undertook during the visit to do all they could to permit the flow to increase to 25,000 a month. At present some 20,000 are crossing. Zahiruddin said that the Burmese reception arrangements are good. After paper checking and documentation the repatriates are taken to their villages, provided with fifteen days' food supply, clothing, cooking equipment and helped to reconstruct their homes if that is necessary. Two villages which had been destroyed have been rebuilt.

4. Zahiruddin estimated that the first category of returnees - National Registration Certificate holders - amount to between 105 and 110,000. These are those currently being repatriated and the fact that they hold NRCs smooths the flow. The next category will be Foreign Registration Certificate

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holders amounting to some 3,000 at the most. Then there will come a category - some 80/90,000 strong - of those who do not hold either NRCs or FRCs but who have other documentation to demonstrate that they have previously lived in Burma. Zahiruddin expects that the flow of this group will not be anything like so speedy as the Burmese immigration authorities will want to check their documentation with some care. Nevertheless the Bangladeshis are now drawing up lists of those concerned, describing the documents they hold, with the intention of handing them over in advance. (Similar lists of NRCs were also provided in advance and this has greatly facilitated the return process). Zahiruddin expects all the refugees in the NRC category to have returned before the monsoon sets in plus a certain number of the other categories. Finally there will be a smallish group left without any documentation of any sort. They will probably not in fact be able to return to Burma but Zahiruddin thought that they could be absorbed without difficulty in Bangladesh.

5. On other bilateral questions my colleague said that the two sides have completed the demarcation of the boundary along the Naaf River. A group of Bangladesh officials have also been here for an unpublicised fifteen day stay and succeeded in reaching agreement with the Burmese on the demarcation of the land frontier on maps. The demarcation on the ground, altogether a much more difficult proposition, still remains to be carried out.

6. The conversation with Ne Win was in fact a monologue and, according to my colleague, was a brilliant survey going back to pre-independence days, demonstrating Ne Win in full recall of names and facts and on impressive form. The most interesting subject was of course Indo China. Ne Win took the view that for the next two or three years the Vietnamese will quietly reinforce their control over the whole of Indo China but will give no difficulty to other South-East Asian states. After that the future will be determined to a large extent in his view by great power rivalry. He linked recent events in Indo China with Soviet and Cuban aggressive expansionism in Africa (Angola and the Horn) and in

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the Middle East (Iran and Afghanistan). He blamed American weakness in all three areas for recent Soviet successes. He did not think that China would react to the fall of Kampuchea by aggressive action against Vietnam; they would be too afraid of a Soviet backlash.

7. Ne Win made no mention of the possibility of the Burma Communist Party turning to Vietnam for support (a rumour current in Rangoon at present on which we shall be reporting separately).

8. I have no reason to doubt that the visit was a success and that it has reinforced the good relations between the two neighbours.

Yours ever,

Charles Booth

C E Booth

cc. Chancery, Dacca

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BURMESE REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH

1. In a recent private letter to me the Belgian Ambassador in Dacca says that 178,000 refugees have actually returned to Burma so far and that 8,800 are still in Bangladesh.

2. This information was confirmed by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Tin Ohn, in a conversation I had with him today. He assessed the number of refugees awaiting return as 9,000. He confirmed that they are all category "C". He said that the Burmese and Bangladesh Authorities had exchanged lists of names of this remaining category and that the Burmese Authorities are now diligently checking the claim of each individual in the Bangladesh lists as to their previous residence in Burma. In some cases the Authorities are already discovering that the claims were bogus. U Tin Ohn added that the category includes the hardcore of the trouble makers who led the emigration in the first place and who sought to prevent the other refugees from returning to Burma. He also claimed to have knowledge that the Bangladesh Authorities were actually advertising in the bazaars to encourage people to emigrate!

3. U Tin Ohn said that he expected about half of the remaining 9,000 to return. The other half he said would never be able to demonstrate a genuine claim to residence in Burma, and would not qualify for return. I commented that I thought that this was a relatively small number which Bangladesh ought to be able to absorb easily enough.

4. U Tin Ohn said that the Bangladesh Minister of the Interior had invited Brigadier Sein Lwin, Burmese Minister for Home and Religious Affairs, to visit Bangladesh in order to "round off the operation" successfully.

3 October 1979

C L Booth

cc: R P Flower Esq, SEAD. RESTRICTED
cc: Chancery, Dacca.

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