



Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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C L Booth Esq MVO
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Your reference

Our reference

Date 6 August 1979

My dear Ambassador,

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see 23

REFUGEES BURMESE STYLE

1. I write to acknowledge your despatch dated 3 July (with an amendment dated 12 July) on refugees. It has been printed in the Departmental series; I enclose a copy of the distribution list.
2. It makes a pleasant change from work on Indo-China refugees to read of Burma's success story in organising with Bangladesh the return of 170,000 refugees. The effectiveness and speed of the UNHCR's action and that of the voluntary organisations were impressive and perhaps offer grounds for confidence in their handling of the more daunting problems posed by Indo-China. Britain's contribution to UNHCR programmes has increased in response to the growing refugee problem and it is encouraging that his efforts were on this occasion so well received.
3. It is a measure of the mistrust between the religious groups that an apparently trivial incident could have led to such an exodus. The events of the Bangladesh war had accustomed us to expect animosity and fear between Muslims and Buddhists but the number of refugees who fled in 1978 was still a surprise.
4. The non-committal attitude of the Burmese at the beginning of these negotiations seems typical of their attitude to large issues of foreign policy; we too were among those who expected the negotiations to drag on.
5. The intervention of Ne Win casts light, not only on a virtually unsuspected side of his character, but also on the degree of control he has over his government. This is of course entirely in line with your other reports about him.
6. I am copying this letter to the Chanceries in Dacca, Bangkok, Geneva and New York.

Yours ever,

R P Flower
South East Asian Department

