



Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH

Telephone 01-233 3470

20/4

C L Booth Esq MVO
RANGOON

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



FAB 243/1		
- 4 OCT 1979		
NEW	YES	NO
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BRITISH EMBASSY,
RANGOON.

020/1

R. F. Flower Esq
SERA
FCO

28 September 1979

Dr. Flower

to look out my side.

correct to 24/10

Dear Flower,

Thank you for

8-10

REPATRIATION OF REFUGEES TO BURMA

1. At the time of writing, and with the bag about to close, I have not yet seen any reply by Dacca to FCO telegram to them no. 277 of 20 September. In the meantime you may like to have such information as is available here to answer your questions.

*The reply is at 25
H. Dacca
Tel. 331*

2. According to the Rangoon based representative of the UNHCR, Mr. Werner Blatter, some 10-12,000 refugees remain in the camps in Bangladesh, of which he thinks there may be two or three. All these refugees are "Category C", i.e. they have no documentary evidence to prove their original residence in Burma. The lists of their names are being checked by the Burmese and local evidence is being taken in the villages where they claim previous residence as to whether their claims are accurate or not.

3. According to Blatter some Burmese reception centres are still open at the frontier but the flow of refugees has fallen off now that the monsoon is hindering movement.

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4. As regards timing, Blatter thinks that the problem could drag on for some time yet or could be resolved quite quickly, depending on whether further bilateral Burmese/Bangladesh talks are held. He said that there have been hints that the latter are impending but he has no firm information.

Yours ever,

Charles Booth

U L Booth

40 Chancery, Bazaar
South Asia Dept.

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SEND/FCO

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MINUTE FOR FILE

BURMESE REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH

FAB 243/

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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.

LAST
PAPER

Signatures
Ref to

Handwritten initials

3 October 1979

J L Booth

A J Flower Esq. SEND.

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