



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Prime Minister

Agree X on the understanding
at Y ?

31 August 1979

Dear Bryan,

Phms 23/8

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES : MV BRITISH RESOLUTION

The "British Resolution", a ^{B.P.} Super Tanker, rescued 36 Vietnamese refugees on 29 August while en route from Panama to Singapore to enter dry-dock. It is due at Singapore early on Friday, 31 August.

X
Y

Our High Commissioner in Singapore has already asked the Singapore authorities to accept the refugees without a guarantee of eventual resettlement in the United Kingdom although we knew such a guarantee to be Singapore's standard requirement. The Singaporeans have now told us that they will not do so. We therefore have to take an early decision on whether to give such a guarantee. You will recall that in the case of the MV "Ashford", which also went to Singapore, the Prime Minister agreed that a guarantee should be given. The Lord Privy Seal believes that, in this case also, we have no option but to give the requested guarantee. These refugees would have to be counted against the quota of 10,000 which we have agreed to take.

In this case there are particular considerations which call for a very early decision. Before entering dry dock, the "British Resolution" will have to carry out tank cleaning and de-gassing operations at sea. These have had to be suspended due to the presence of refugees on board. She will therefore have to make a further cruise after disembarkation of the refugees to complete the necessary work, estimated to take five days. However if the vessel is not ready to enter dry dock by 8 September, her dry dock booking

/will

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will lapse, causing eight weeks' idleness. Unless the refugees can be disembarked by Sunday therefore, BP will incur significant cost penalties. Delay in carrying out these operations would also, I understand, constitute a possible danger to the ship and crew, as well as to the refugees.

The timing of any announcement about a guarantee will however need to be judged in the light of developments concerning the MV "Rudd Bank", about which I am writing separately. It would of course be preferable if the Japanese could agree to land the "Rudd Bank" refugees without a guarantee before they learned that we had given a guarantee to Singapore.

I am copying this letter to John Chilcot, Home Office, Martin Vile, Cabinet Office, Bill Beckett, Law Officers Department, and Tom Harris, Department of Trade.

Yours sincerely,

Myles A. Wickstead,

ff S J Gomersall