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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT

Entry Clearance from Bangladesh

1. Thank you for your letter of 30 October about a possible visa regime for Bangladesh. I fully recognise your problem and can assure you that we wish to do all we can to help. We have been considering urgently here the various options for action as set out in your paragraph 4 and have been in touch with our High Commissioner in Dhaka.

2. I agree that the issue is of sufficient importance to merit an urgent high-level review by our respective Departments of the arguments for or against an extension of our current visa policy which would shift much of the burden of dealing with immigrants and visitors to our posts overseas. There are attractions in this course, for example in reducing pressures and queues at our ports of entry. There would be serious disadvantages in creating queues overseas, as well as implications for our bilateral relations and for the Commonwealth as a whole (where I agree the main problems lie). Any major extension of our visa regimes would bring into question the need to establish a visa regime for South Africa. But I suggest all these points should be gone into thoroughly by our officials. My officials would be happy to meet with yours as soon as possible to work out the framework for such a review to which both Departments would contribute and which we would aim to have completed well before Christmas.

3. In the meantime we shall be faced with the continuation of the problem presented by young Bangladeshis arriving in London which I accept puts a severe strain on your immigration staff.



I do not think we could, unfortunately, take Bangladesh in isolation. There would almost certainly be a knock-on effect in that the imposition of a visa regime in Bangladesh would create a surge of young men from India and Pakistan who would arrive in the United Kingdom to try and pre-empt more rigid controls. Your immigration staff would then find themselves in an even worse position that they are today.

4. I need hardly say that the prospects of instituting visa regimes for Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, which I fear is the minimum that would be necessary, causes me concern. The effect on our bilateral relations might be tolerable, though queues would inevitably build up which could for example put strain on our current sensitive relations with India. But the extra resources required in terms of immigration staff in the field, with support staff, accommodation, communications and additional administration etc, would present formidable problems. To keep an Entry Clearance Officer in Dhaka costs £68,000 sterling a year. I estimate we would need about 90 additional immigration staff in the Sub-Continent, costing some £5 million a year. It will not surprise you to know that I would have to look to you to provide the necessary staff involved and to help us with finance, in so far as increased fee revenue is insufficient to cover costs (I am writing to you separately proposing increases in entry clearance charges, which have become necessary to cover current costs worldwide).

5. The main problem about instituting a visa regime in the Sub-Continent, let alone for other Commonwealth countries such as Nigeria, is that we would be setting up bureaucratic mechanisms to provide pieces of paper for large numbers of visitors, 90% of whom at present come to Britain with no problems at all. This would go against the grain of the Government's efforts to reduce bureaucracy and paperwork. Before instituting such an operation we need to be sure that there is absolutely no other way of dealing with the current

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Bangladesh problem. I quite accept that if we fail to deal with it, visa regimes, with all they imply, may have to be instituted.

6. In the immediate future, I propose to take certain steps to try and stem the flow of immigrants from the Bangladesh end. I propose to make representations to the Bangladesh Government, both in Dhaka and through their High Commission in London, to enlist their help in restraining current traffic, pointing out the inevitable pressures otherwise for the imposition of a visa regime. We will urge them to take what administrative or exhortatory action they can, such as delaying issues of passports and putting pressure on the State airline to refuse to take their nationals to Britain without entry certificates. We have some credit with the Bangladesh Government and I propose we should speak firmly to them. If necessary, we should make a Minister, such as Tim Eggar or David Waddington, available to go out and discuss the matter with them.

7. At the same time, I propose that it should be made known in Bangladesh that in future those without entry certificates would be likely to be immediately removed from Britain. For this we will need some immediate reinforcement of additional Immigration Officers in Dhaka, which I hope I can look to you to provide and pay for.

8. In all this I shall need your own cooperation. I hope very much that you may succeed in restraining representations by MPs on the lines suggested by David Waddington in his letter to Gerald Kaufman. I think it also worth considering two other possibilities which have, you may have seen, been suggested by our Mission in Dhaka. One is a temporary arrangement whereby those who do not qualify for entry are returned immediately to Bangladesh pending consideration of their case, with the Government if necessary paying the costs of their eventual return to the UK. The current air fare is £536 per return

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ticket and it may well be cheaper to spend money in this way rather than for additional staff at home or overseas. The second proposal is that an independent individual with the standing of an adjudicator might be stationed at London Airport to investigate MPs' representations on the spot. If he recommended removal, this would be carried out.

9. If we pursue these various measures vigorously it should give us a breathing space in which to make a more considered appraisal of the wider implications of the need to extend visa regimes.

10. I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Lord President, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Secretaries of State for Transport and Employment and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe', written in a cursive style.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
5 November 1985

IMMIGRATION
RULES

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