

010

CONFIDENTIAL

① I have grave doubts about the wisdom of such a visit  
② more aid with the  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
expedient



1. Mr. Bylles
2. Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

③ Friday 20  
Polignac would  
be for  
Belgrade  
Britain  
not

Now see  
folder No.

A.S.C. 22/3

There is certainly a chance of instability growing in Bangladesh between now and November - and a backlash to the terrible slaughter in Assam cannot be ruled out. But such things can always be said of Bangladesh. My advice would be that the Prime Minister should agree to the proposal but say that it will be even more important than usual to watch the internal situation carefully.

23 February 1983

Dear John,

Agree?

A.S.C. 1/2

I am writing to seek the Prime Minister's approval to our advising The Queen to accept an invitation to pay a State Visit to Bangladesh before Her visit to India in November for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). We need to put this formally to the Palace soon.

The Bangladesh Government first issued the invitation in December 1981, and it was renewed by Lt General Ershad's military government in March 1982 after the bloodless coup against President Sattar. In November 1982, the Royal Visits Committee agreed that the Royal Tour preceding the CHOGM should include a bilateral visit to Bangladesh, to immediately precede that to India which will begin on 19 November. The length of the visit has yet to be decided, and will depend on whether The Queen also visits Kenya before Bangladesh.

The Queen has not visited Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. She was there in 1961 when it was East Pakistan, during a tour of India, Pakistan and Nepal. Bangladesh has emerged as a moderate member of the Commonwealth, the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement and the UN. Since moving away from a close relationship with the Soviet Bloc in the early 1980s, Bangladesh has followed generally pro-Western policies, and has been sympathetic to our interests. We maintain close and friendly bilateral relations and Bangladesh is one of the largest recipients of British aid.

However the country is politically unstable. The present head of Government, General Ershad, deposed President Sattar in March 1982 only months after he had been elected to replace the assassinated General Zia. There has to date been no sign of a back-lash in Bangladesh to the present Hindu/Muslim troubles in neighbouring Assam. But recent student riots, and the subsequent detention of political leaders, have further underlined the country's potential instability. There is a risk that the situation may deteriorate before November. There is also risk of criticism over The Queen visiting a country headed by a military regime which deposed a democratic government.

You have just agreed that the Queen should visit Kenya. If the Bangladesh visit had to be cancelled for any reason it would leave an awkward gap between Kenya and CHOGM, but there is always some risk of such a mishap.

FERB  
1.3.

/However,

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However, our High Commissioner in Dhaka has recommended firmly in favour of the visit going ahead. He considers that the present martial law government is as acceptable as any foreseeable successor and that the recent disturbances are unlikely to shake the regime's position. Meanwhile, the Government appears sincere in working for a return to representative government and in trying to safeguard human rights. A visit by The Queen could help to encourage confidence in Bangladesh and would demonstrate Britain's interest in the future of the country and its people.

Mr Pym agrees with this assessment and recommendation. The Queen would undoubtedly receive a warm welcome and we would have no special fears for her safety. There is, of course, a possibility that if the internal situation were to deteriorate markedly, the visit would have to be cancelled. But this risk would always be there, and the current proposal should not in our view be turned down on these grounds.

I would be grateful to know therefore whether the Prime Minister agrees that this proposal should now be put formally to the Palace. If the Queen approved the recommendation, we would propose to inform the Government of Bangladesh towards the end of March.

I am copying this to Robert Fellowes at Buckingham Palace.

*Yours ever*

(J E Holmes)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

22 FEB 1983



PRIME MINISTER

Possible State Visit by The Queen to Bangladesh

Somehow your minute on an FCO letter of 23 February has been mislaid (we are continuing to search for it).

I attach a further copy. I remember that you minuted that (a) you had grave doubts about The Queen visiting Bangladesh;

(b) we should be asked for more aid;

(c) a visit to Malaysia, instead, would be a better idea.

*Amend*  
I thought I should consult you again because my impression, following the visit by the Prime Minister of Malaysia last week, is that it is a little too soon to put to him the idea of a state visit by The Queen. You may also have got the impression that, while he seems to want to improve relations with us, he wishes to do this slowly. There is also the point that The Queen paid a state visit to Malaysia in 1972 and the King of Malaysia came here in 1974. It would be very special treatment to give the Malaysians a second state visit now.

I wonder whether you would be prepared to reconsider the possibility of The Queen going to Bangladesh. I have discussed this with Antony Acland who was there recently. He tells me that the question of aid did not come up at all. He is also confident that, under the current military regime, there will be no security problem. Bangladesh is of course one of the largest Commonwealth countries and The Queen has never visited it.

Do you still want me:

(a) to pursue the question of a state visit to Malaysia; *No*

(b) to state that you advise against The Queen going to Bangladesh? *No - but I can see little point*

*A.S.C. is going politically. I however still wish to do so - by all means agree not*

14 March 1983