



FCS/85/311

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT

Entry Clearance for Bangladeshis

1. Thank you for your minute of 20 November about the problems that have arisen over entry clearance for Bangladeshis.
2. I was grateful for your recognition of the problems that might arise elsewhere if we were to impose a visa regime on Bangladesh. For that reason I think it important that any planning we do should involve visas for the entire subcontinent.
3. I continue to believe that the introduction of a visa regime would also lead to difficulties for our wider relations with Bangladesh, and with other Commonwealth countries, as well as setting an unhelpful precedent for South Africa. That is quite apart from the major resource and organisational difficulties that would be created by any major extension of our visa regimes, and the increase in superfluous paperwork.
4. As you say there has been a recent and welcome reduction in the number of Bangladeshi passengers arriving in Britain, whom your immigration officers do not consider qualified for leave to enter. The latest weekly figures I have show a distinct continuing downward trend: around 30 arrivals a week now instead of one hundred a week at the end of October. This trend reinforces my view that it would be wrong to be rushed into decisions on imposing new visa regimes.

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5. We cannot be sure of the reasons for the reduction, just as we could not be sure about the reason for the earlier increase. But there are good grounds to think that the decrease has been partly because the word got around that those who came without the appropriate clearances were returned forthwith to Bangladesh, suffering some inconvenience in the process. It is most important in my view that we should reinforce this impression. The reports that already have appeared in the press will not have escaped the notice of the Bangladeshi authorities and may have persuaded them to discourage Bangladeshis not entitled to enter the UK from coming here. I am asking Tim Eggar to speak to the Bangladesh High Commissioner on the lines indicated in paragraph 6 of my minute of 5 November, with parallel representations in Dhaka. I think this should be done separately from David Waddington's meeting to discuss the situation at Heathrow, although Tim Eggar will be happy to attend that.

6. In the meantime, I am glad that our officials are getting together to start work on the general review of visa policy which I agree will inevitably take longer to complete if it is to cover, as it should, all the relevant considerations.

7. The question of contingency plans for the extension of our visa regimes should, I believe, be dealt with separately. We are already looking into the serious administrative problems that might be posed, in conjunction with our Missions abroad. Our officials must certainly stay in close touch, in particular about the provision of staff and resources.

8. I think that at the same time we should continue to explore without commitment alternative approaches. I did indeed envisage letting it be known that those who arrived from Bangladesh without an entry certificate and without good cause would be immediately returned unless their MP intervened.

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This practice has been going on and it will be very important that those dealing with these cases should not encourage Bangladeshis to seek intervention by an MP as a matter of course. I hope that David Waddington will have success in persuading MPs to exercise restraint over representations. I understand that a number of colleagues with whom we have been in contact appreciate the need for this. I continue to believe that we should look carefully at the idea of sending people home on the next 'plane while being prepared to refund their fare if their representations were successful. I was interested to note that we are at one with the Immigration Service Union in raising this possibility. I do not believe that large numbers of Bangladeshis would in practice start claiming political asylum on their return.

9. I am copying this minute 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 Employment and Transport, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
2 December 1985

IMMIGRATION
RULES
PT 2

