

STATEMENT RE. ASIANS IN  
UGANDA

**THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SWARAN SINGH):** The Deputy Minister for External Affairs made a statement in the House on August 11 on the subject.

After President Amin's speech of 9th August announcing the expulsion of Asians of foreign citizenship within 90 days, a decree was issued on the same day cancelling entry permits and certificates of residence of all persons of Asian origin who are citizens of the UK, India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. A statutory order issued the same day listed the following categories of persons who would be exempt from these orders:

- (a) Persons in the employment of Government, international organisations and para-governmental organisations.
- (b) Professionals such as teachers, school owners, lawyers medical practitioners auditors, accountants, surveyors, technicians in industrial, commercial and agricultural enterprises, owners of industrial and agricultural enterprises, managers and owners of banks and insurance companies.

**SHRI PILOO MODY (Godhra):** What about architects?

**SHRI SWARAN SINGH:** I am not sure whether there are many architects of Indian origin.

We have been informed by the Uganda Government that they are now preparing lists of exempted persons who will shortly be notified.

On August 19, President Amin declared that citizens of Uganda of Asian origin would be required to quit as a second phase operation. However, on August 22 President Amin announced that citizens of Uganda of Asian origin would not come within his order of expulsion within 90 days but that citizenship documents would be carefully scrutinised.

We strengthened the staff of the High Commission in Kampala by six officials in the second week of August. Shri M. A. Rahman, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs was deputed to Uganda from August 26 to 31. He held discussions with the Ministers of External Affairs, Home, Defence and of Finance as well as with senior members of the Foreign Office. He also met representatives of the Indian community.

There are four categories of people of Asian origin in Uganda:

- (a) Ugandan citizens.
- (b) British passport holders.
- (c) Indian nationals and
- (d) Stateless persons.

We naturally accept responsibility for Indian citizens in Uganda. I had written to Uganda's Minister for Foreign Affairs pointing out that while we recognise the Uganda Government's right to regulate their internal affairs according to their best judgment we would expect that Indian nationals who are required to leave their country are enabled to do so under conditions conforming to humane and equitable standards under international law and usage. As long as Indian nationals remain in that country, their honour and safety and the security of their property are a responsibility of the Uganda Government. We have also impressed on the Uganda Government that they should announce urgently their regulations in respect of sale of properties, realisation of assets, transfer of assets out of the country and administration of residual assets.

There are about 4,500 Indian nationals in Uganda who have notified themselves to the Indian High Commission. Of these we have collected detailed statistics regarding 3863 and information on the remainder will be completed within the next few days. As far as these persons are concerned, we have already initiated arrangements for their shipping and airlifting and for extending Customs and Import Control concessions. We are

concerned at the repatriation of their assets. We consider that the present facilities for the repatriation of cash and moveable are wholly inadequate in relation to their long residence in Uganda as well as for starting a new life. We have urged that they should be allowed to bring all their personal belongings, while the repatriation of their residual assets should be on a fair and equitable basis

As the House is aware, the United Kingdom Government have accepted full responsibility for persons of Asian origin in Uganda holding British passports. We have noted with satisfaction the clear and forthright approach of the UK Government to this problem. We are in touch with the UK Government and understand that arrangements for the movement of these persons into the UK are being made by them.

According to present information, the scrutiny by the Uganda authorities of the documents of citizens of Asian origin is scheduled to be completed by September 10. We have in the meantime, made our stand known to the Uganda Government that stateless persons and those whose citizenship is revoked would continue to be Uganda's responsibility under international law and convention.

In today's world, considerations of compassion and generosity must needs govern the spirit in which thousands of persons who have lived in that country for decades are uprooted, and are required to start afresh in new surroundings. To be compelled to leave in haste can only add to their suffering.

Many aspects of human rights and fundamental freedoms are involved. To proceed on considerations of ethnic origin and discriminate against people of a particular race or region is likely to weaken the struggle against racial discrimination in other areas.

India has always responded with sympathy and humanity to those who have suffered and sought shelter here. We cannot deny it to our own kith and kin. We must stand firm in

support of human rights and freedom, the dignity of man and equality of all races.

SOME HON MEMBERS ROSE—

MR. SPEAKER: Every day you have to be reminded that according to the rules, no discussions or questions follow.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA (Bogusarai): If some time is left after all the discussions are over, would it not be possible for the minister to give some clarifications with regard to this statement?

SHRI C C DESAI (Sabarkantha): We will not be meeting for another two months. There are certain steps which the Government of India must take to receive these people in this country.

SHRI SWARAN SINGH: If it is convenient to you, Sir, I am prepared to answer some questions.

MR. SPEAKER: I will allow two or three clarifications, but not in the form of a discussion, because this is a very important subject. But it will not be treated as a precedent because the rules are very clear and we have been observing them in letter and spirit.

SHRI K D MALAVIYA (Domariaganj): It will not be treated as a precedent but a few more questions might be allowed.

MR. SPEAKER: Two from this side and one from that side.  
12 hrs.

SHRI C C. DESAI: Sir, we seem to have an uncanny knack for two things—receiving things without kicking back and unlimited absorption of immigrants from abroad. This we have done for centuries past. Sir, this problem should be handled humanistically and not legalistically. I am afraid the approach of the Ministry of External Affairs is likely to be legalistic. In other words they will say that those people who are Indian nationals alone would be permitted to enter this country.

**SHRI C. C. DESAI:**

Now these are people of Indian origin. Some of them have under our advice accepted Ugandan nationality, some of them have, under our advice, accepted British nationality. Now we are hearing of marches and morchas even in the United Kingdom. Only this morning you must have read in the papers that there were marches, what are called morchas in our country, in the United Kingdom against the entry of these people. Many of these people are homeless and penniless; they will not find it easy to settle down in the United Kingdom. In other words, they will want to come back to India. So, the criterion should be that every person of Indian origin, whether he is an Indian national Stateless person Ugandan national or a British passport-holder, if he is living in East Africa, must be permitted to come to this country and have the right to settle down in this country. This must be on the condition that he must be willing to accept once and for all Indian nationality. I am saying this because I was a High Commissioner once and I know that we used to advise people of Indian origin in those countries to accept the local nationality because that was the policy of the Government of India at that time. They have accepted our advice and accepted local citizenship. Therefore, it will not be right for the Government to prohibit those people of Indian origin from coming to this country.

Secondly, what is happening in Uganda today should be a matter of warning of for what would happen in the East African colonies tomorrow. We are told that the President of Tanzania is not happy with the treatment meted out to the residents of Uganda. A year ago it was the President of Tanzania—it was Zanzibar then—who was acting against Indian interests and the Indian girls were forcefully married to the Sultan of Zanzibar. This can happen in other colonies also.

Therefore, my submission is that we must allow people of Indian origin to come back and bring with them whatever they can from which-

ever country it may be, be it Kenya, Uganda or Tanzania. Now what is happening? If they are bringing eight sarees, two are withheld and only six sarees are given to them. The other two sarees will be exported to India, sold here and the export earnings will be remitted to Uganda. Do we want this to happen? So, our policy in regard to Indians from East Africa should be that every person of Indian origin should be allowed to come back to India with whatever they can bring without payment of customs or other duties.

Lastly, there must be a cell in Gujarat for the rehabilitation of these people. Most of them who are coming from East Africa are originally from Gujarat.

**MR. SPEAKER:** This is not a clarification. He is entering into a debate.

**SHRI C. C. DESAI:** These people have to be resettled. Yet, the Ministry of Rehabilitation does not seem to be aware of this problem. They have to depute a team to Gujarat for the rehabilitation of these refugees.

**SHRI K. D. MALAVIYA:** I do not wish to say much, but I am sorry I do not agree with the approach of my hon. friend, Shri C. C. Desai about the unconditional manner in which he is advocating his own views that all citizens of Indian origin should be allowed to come back to India. That view is not acceptable to this House because there are many considerations which we must weigh before taking any decision on this matter. These people might have amassed wealth in a reasonable or unreasonable manner. Therefore this question should receive very serious consideration. But I agree that broadly speaking humanistic approach has to be applied to this very important question.

**SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU (Diamond Harbour):** Why is it that the Government of India had left the whole matter in the hands of career diplomats instead of tackling it at the political level? Why is it that the hon. Minister or the Deputy Minister did not visit Uganda to negotiate the matter with that government and

come to some sort of amicable settlement in this regard?

**श्री जगन्नाथ राव जोशी (शाजापुर):** अध्यक्ष महोदय, यह एक बहुत महत्वपूर्ण सवाल है और यह केवल यूगान्डा तक ही सीमित नहीं है। तंजानिया, केनिया तथा अफ्रीका के कई देशों में भारतीय मूल के निवासी जिन्होंने ब्रिटिश पासपोर्ट लिया हुआ है उन लोगों की भी एक बड़ी समस्या है और वह समस्या ब्रिटिश गवर्नमेंट के साथ बैठकर हमको तय करनी पड़ेगी।

दूसरे में यह अर्ज करना चाहता हूँ कि किसी देश के मूल निवासी होते हुए दूसरे देश में बड़ी संख्या में वे बसे हुए हैं जैसे कि अफ्रीका वासी अमरीका में बसे हुए हैं और वे अमरीकी बन गए हैं तो वैसे ही किसी देश के मूल निवासी दूसरे देश में जाकर बड़ी संख्या में बसे हैं उनका स्थान और दर्जा क्या हो सकता है अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर कोशिश करके निकालना चाहिए।

यूगान्डा के सम्बन्ध में मैं जानना चाहता हूँ कि ऐसे लोगों के जो असेटस हैं उनको कैसे ट्रांसफर किया जाये यह एक बड़ी समस्या है और उसकी ओर ज्यादा ध्यान देना आवश्यक है।

**SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA (Ali-pore):** Firstly, I want to know what is the number of Indian nationals involved. Secondly, I want to know whether it is a fact that, as Mr. C. C. Desai has said, we had advised some of these people to acquire British citizenship and become British passport-holders. Please tell us about that. This is the first time we are hearing it.

**SHRI K. NARAYANA RAO (Bobilli):** So far as Stateless persons are concerned, they have certain international protections. Particularly in view of the fact that many people have been sent out from Uganda without any steps being taken up, may I know from the hon. Minister whether he would take it up in an international court, like, the Human Rights Commission, to see that the conditions are restored to their normalcy?

**SHRI SAMAR GUHA ROSE—**

**MR. SPEAKER:** I am sorry. I wanted to confine it to two or three questions.

**SHRI SAMAR GUHA (Contai):** Sir, it is on my request made on the floor of the House that there should be a statement by the Minister concerned that he has made the statement. I have written to you about it. It is on the basis of my request that the Minister has made a statement.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Yes; I think, I allowed it because of your question. You could remind me in a peaceful manner.

**SHRI SAMAR GUHA:** I am surprised to see and fail to understand why the Government is pursuing a hush-hush or ostrich-like policy in regard to the people of Indian origin, be it the citizens of Uganda, be it the citizens of U.K., or be it Indian nationals or be it Stateless Indians there. I have mentioned these four categories. This is a serious issue. For the past two months, this has been going on. We have not had an opportunity to discuss such a serious matter . . . .

**MR. SPEAKER:** I did not invite a speech from you.

**SHRI SAMAR GUHA:** As my hon. friend, Mr. Jyotirmoy Bosu, mentioned it, it is such a serious matter that not only it involves the fate of the people of Indian origin there but it involves the future relations of the Asians with the Africans. Because, this attitude of Uganda may have a contagious effect on other States in Africa. It is a serious matter. It should have been taken proper note of. The Minister of External Affairs should have gone there and, even if it required such a solution, to internationalise the whole issue so that this issue could be settled at a high level.

**SHRI PILOO MODY (Godhra):** It is our considered view that we should accept whoever wants to come into our country with open arms and do whatever we can to extend hospitality and make them feel at home. We have done that in respect of Bangladesh

**SHRI PILOO MODY:**

refugees. Why should we not do that in respect of the people of our own origin when they are put to such inconvenience in other places?

**DR. H. P. SHARMA (Alwar):** In 1968 the Labour Minister, Mr. Callaghan, made a categorical statement in the House of Commons that every Asian British passport holder would be allowed entry into the United Kingdom. But that right has been strictly limited because they say, they cannot accept all the people that would be coming, so that in 1972 the total number of vouchers issued is only 5,000. That difficulty is still being put forth, and a press report has come out that a substantial number of those British passport holders would come to India and would be allowed the option either to proceed to the United Kingdom or to stay in India? Would the Minister make a categorical statement regarding the position of such entrants?

**SHRI R. V. SWAMINATHAN (Madurai):** The hon. Minister is aware of the fact that many people who have got British passports are not going to Britain but are going to come to India. In that case, may I know from the hon. Minister, whether they would be allowed to come into India? In view of the fact that many of those people are left penniless, may I know what is the proposal of the Government to help them, if they come?

**SHRI P. M. MEHTA (Bhavnagar):** I would ask only one question. This is about another aspect of the problem. With your permission, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister and of the hon. House to this serious aspect of the problem. Some persons of Indian origin are arrested by the military personnel of the Uganda Government; they are taken to unknown places; their families do not know their whereabouts. I request that this matter should be taken up with the Uganda Government, and the Government of India should try to find out their whereabouts and bring those persons back to their homeland. (Interruptions).

**SHRI SWARAN SINGH:** Sir, the suggestion made by Shri C. C. Desai is that we should announce that we are prepared to take every person of Indian origin, whether he is Ugandan citizen, British citizen or Stateless. I would request him that he should seriously consider the implications thereof. I think, this will be a very easy way for the British Government to get out of their responsibility to receive the British passport holders. The British Government have already accepted the responsibility that they will take all the persons of Asian origin who are British passport holders. This should continue and I have said, we have noted this statement with satisfaction at the same time. . .

**SHRI H. M. PATEL** rose—

**SHRI SWARAN SINGH:** Mr. Patel, let me finish and if there is anything left, you can ask . . .

**MR. SPEAKER:** Please do not interrupt him.

**SHRI SWARAN SINGH:** At the same time, if, at any stage, we find that there is some problem by way of giving temporary transit facilities with the ultimate responsibility taken by Britain to receive them, that is a matter which can be discussed between the two Governments. Already, the British Government and the Indian Government are in touch with each other because we have to reduce the rigour that these people are facing because of the suddenness of the decision and because of a date-line having been announced. Whereas we can take a humane view, it will not be good for us to adopt any posture which relieves Britain of their responsibility which they themselves have clearly accepted . . . (Interruptions).

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Why?

**SHRI SWARAN SINGH:** Because they are the British passport holders . . . (Interruptions).

About the persons of Asian origin who are Ugandan citizens, we were greatly disturbed when the first announcement was made by the Ugandan Government that they will also

have to go. We have noted with some relief that the original blanket order now stands changed and it has been announced that they will continue to stay there.

SHRI C. C. DESAI: Do you believe that? If you are put in their position. . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. No interruption please.

SHRI SWARAN SINGH: I would suggest that we should not create conditions in which their difficulties increase. I am not sure as to whether we will not be increasing their difficulties by adopting that posture.

Then, there is the category of Stateless persons. According to international law and usage, the responsibility of the country where these persons are, remains. But, if there are any hard cases, cases of hardship, we will certainly be prepared to consider individual cases. But I would plead with the hon. Member not to press that we should declare a policy which relieves others of their responsibility.

He has made a suggestion that there should be some cell created in the Government of Gujarat. I am sure if and when the problem assumes a proportion that some special arrangements have to be made, I have no doubt that arrangements will be made. Most of these people who come will have contacts here and will have some resources and surely, whatever can be done will be done.

Mr. Jyotirmoy Bosu and one other hon. Member, I think, Mr. Samar Guha, have said as to why this matter is not handled at the political level, at the Minister's level. I would like to take this opportunity of informing the House that I did take up this matter at Georgetown with the Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs. He happened to be there for the Non-aligned Conference and I had a discussion with him and I made our approach to this problem clear to him. He was sympathetic. On my return from Georgetown, I again

wrote to him a letter about which I have made a mention in my statement. The object of sending a senior officer, an Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, was to find out on the spot the precise problem, the administrative arrangements and matters relating to assets, safety of their person, and safety of their property. I would like to take this opportunity of saying that this has been a useful visit and he had the opportunity of putting across our view point to four Ministers of the Ugandan Government and it is my assessment that this visit has yielded useful results. As you know, I have no hesitation to take it up at any level, and surely, if there is a necessity, I would certainly like to remain in touch with the Foreign Minister there. If not earlier, there is an opportunity of seeing him again in the United Nations General Assembly which starts about the 19th or 20th of this month.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: Why indirectly? Why not you write to him directly?

SHRI SWARAN SINGH: Not indirectly, but directly between the two Foreign Ministers.

Once, for a change, you are asking me to undertake this. Generally, these things are criticised.

The short point is this. We are trying to tackle it both at the political level and at the administrative level. We attach highest importance to finding a satisfactory solution so that the suffering and hardship of these people may be reduced as much as possible.

A question was asked about their numbers. I would like to take this opportunity of giving these figures to the hon. Members. I have already given in my statement the number of persons who are having Indian passports. The number is 4,500. I have also said that detailed statistics regarding 3,863 have already been collected and the rest of the statistics are being collected.

## SHRI SWARAN SINGH:

While we have been generally advising that persons of Indian origin who are in foreign countries should try to act in such a manner that their action is in conformity with the aspirations of the local people—and that has been our general advice—I am quite clear in my mind that we had never advised them that they should take British passports or that they should accept British citizenship; we had never advised them; I am absolutely clear on that issue. The House might recall that this was a point which at that time appeared to be pursued by Mr. Duncan Sandays who was in authority there and he wanted large number of these persons to accept British citizenship. So, these persons, in their own wisdom, decided to take British passports and British citizenship. But, having said that, I will say, if there is any human problem, we should be prepared to deal with it. But we should not undertake any blanket responsibility of the type that has been urged here.

About taking up this matter in the international forum I would be quite frank and say that there are certain limitations of anything arising or coming out of it. In fact as you might have seen it has been raised in a different form by Mr. B. R. Bhagat in the context of the discussion on Human Rights. This matter will have to be settled bilaterally with the Government concerned and this is what we are hoping to achieve. Unfortunately the capacity of the United Nations to deal with matters of this nature is extremely limited. It has been demonstrated from time to time that whereas speeches might be made and some sort of atmosphere might be created they have not in the U.N. got the wherewithal or the authority or the capacity to deal with such a matter effectively and these are the limitations which we should frankly admit and then we can formulate our policy, knowing these limitations.

But that does not mean that it cannot be raised, it might be raised

in some form, but the ultimate satisfactory solution of the problem, both with regard to the safety of these persons and also with regard to their properties, will have to be dealt with patiently, I should say, with the co-operation of the Government of Uganda, and this is the hard reality.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: The forum of Afro-Asian Conference could be useful for this purpose.

SHRI SWARAN SINGH: Now, it is true, as some persons have said, that they are facing difficulties in the matter of bringing their properties, particularly movable properties. There are certain restrictions on that which have been imposed by the Government of Uganda. At the present moment, the restrictions are that the movable personal effects of the value of about 9000 shillings are allowed, plus another 1000 shillings by way of cash.

With regard to immovable property, the record is kept there and later on, some method will have to be found to repatriate later the value of the property that might be realised. We have been urging that this limit that is now imposed should be more liberalised, but I cannot say what success we shall achieve in this respect.

Shri P. M. Mehta has said that some persons have been arrested there. If he could give me the particulars, we shall be prepared to take it up with the Government of Uganda.

SHRI P. M. MEHTA: I have forwarded a list to the hon. Minister.

श्रीमति सहोदरा बाई राय (सागर) : मैं यह जानना चाहती हूँ कि जो पांच छः हजार लोग भारत आ रहे हैं उनमें से जिन लोगों ने वहाँ की लड़कियों के साथ शादी की है वह उन को अपने साथ लायेंगे या वहीं छोड़कर आयेंगे ?

SHRI SWARAN SINGH: If I may say so, this is one of the objections that have been raised by the local Ugandan people that on the matrimonial front, Indians have been very close.