



Kampuchean returning home with UNHCR resettlement kit. Photo: UNHCR

NEWS IN BRIEF

SIKHS STRAIN REFUGEE POLICY

In recent months there has been a dramatic increase in the number of East Indian Sikhs coming to Canada, many of whom claim to be refugees. Toronto International Airport at Malton, where most of the Sikhs first land, has had arrivals in excess of fifty per day.

Most frequently, the Sikhs claim that they are persecuted for their membership in the Janata party, the political party which ousted Indira Ghandi's government in 1977. But events at ports of entry have led Canadian immigration officials to believe that the claims may be false and that the Sikhs have received specific instruction on what to do and say once in Canada. In many cases, Sikhs who speak little or no English are arriving at the airport saying "refugee, refugee" to the first officials they encounter. In addition, waiting relatives frequently have \$2,000 to \$5,000 ready in cash to post the bond required to ensure that a refugee claimant does not disappear while his case is under review.

A good portion of this "coaching", it seems, has come from travel agents, primarily in Jullundur City, who give the Sikhs Canadian contacts and the information that Canada does not turn away refugees. For this service, the agents charge fees in excess of the \$1,200 one-way air fare to Canada.

This situation has put considerable pressure on Canada's immigration policy, which forbids visitors' applying for permanent residence but also forbids the turning away of anyone claiming to be a refugee. The process of determining the validity of a claim for refugee status is a lengthy one which may extend over a year and a half, given the size of the ever-growing caseload. Nevertheless, officials have no recourse but to consider all the claims.

During the intervening period, the claimant is permitted to live in Canada. This opportunity to live in Canada, even temporarily, seems in fact to be the prime factor behind making the request for refugee status. However some Sikhs who have not had bond posted for them or who immigration officials fear might disappear, must remain in hotels at the airport.

The situation has caused some controversy within the East Indian community in Canada. Mr. Ritendra Ray of the Tagore Lectureship Foundation expressed anger in an interview with the *Toronto Star* (June 4, 1981), saying that the claims are no more than a ruse and that "to say one is fleeing persecution from India is false" because "India inherited British common laws. It's a democracy." But others are not so much upset by what Ray called a "stunt to get into Canada" as by the fact that many of the Sikhs, who are largely uneducated tenant farmers, have been swindled out of everything they own by unscrupulous travel agents.

"So far the stories told by the Sikhs claiming refugee status don't qualify them and all have been refused," said Ken Brown, chairman of the Refugee Status Advisory Committee. As of June 25, 1981, there have been no deportations, but André Pilon, District Administrator for Immigration Canada at Malton, said that there had been a number of one-year exclusions.

- S.F.

jungle, they were ill-prepared to govern a large, corrupt city like Saigon, and with so many difficulties it has been almost impossible to win the hearts of the people. Also, the very real threat of another attack by China is always there. They felt it necessary to conscript the able young men into the army, losing the manpower they so desperately needed to grow food and reconstruct the country. After their high expectations for peace after the Americans left, both the young people and their families fear another war and resent the necessity of joining the army.

In spite of all the difficulties there are many devoted, dedicated people who are serving their fellow citizens and their country to the limit of their ability. I am convinced that if only enough aid were forthcoming, given the Vietnamese people's great courage and great capacity for reconciliation and creativity they would be able to build the good humane society that Ho Chi Minh and many of my friends have told me they dreamed of all through the long and bitter wars.

Kampuchea slowly recovering

Phnom Penh is a strange city - much of it still empty or destroyed but other parts teeming with people. None of the utilities work well: the electricity comes and goes; the water has little pressure; the sewage system is wrecked and everyone fears a major epidemic.

The people are still fed by international agencies, but they are getting back to growing food. Kampuchea is a

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Refugee Movements in Southeast Asia

	Arrivals in Countries of First Asylum		Departures for Permanent Settlement Elsewhere
	Land	Boat	
Jan.	4,101	5,579	10,140
Feb.	4,823	4,060	13,046
Mar.	17,989	5,154	16,830
Apr.	2,093	11,212	10,045
May	1,532	14,792	18,734
June	1,384	12,368	15,118

Refugees awaiting durable solutions (as of July 1981):

Boat: 63,310

Land: 105,906

Total: 169,216 *

* This number does not include Kampuchean in Thai holding centres who are not designated refugees or refugees in Refugee Processing Centres who are scheduled to proceed to the United States after language and orientation programmes.

Source: UNHCR