

24/79T

SUBJECT PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T 24/79T

*Prime Minister
Singapore*

5 June 1979

Dear Prime Minister

Thank you for your letter of 30 May.

This refugee problem is very grave and is likely to get worse.

The Vietnamese representative, at an international conference in Jakarta 15-16 May last month, stated that Vietnam would permit the legal departure of 10,000 Vietnamese every month. He put a modest estimate of 600,000 wanting to leave. Most people put the likely figure nearer one million.

You have suggested that I ask the Government in Taiwan to take in the refugees on the ship "Roach Bank". Because of my own government's position on Vietnamese boat refugees, I am not well qualified to make this plea. Taiwan's policy is no different from Singapore's. Nevertheless, I shall ask them to consider making these refugees on the "Roach Bank" an exception, a first and last one. I am not optimistic of the outcome because I know, as they do, that thousands more will come in the wake of such a gesture.

I believe the news handling of refugees by the mass media and by government spokesmen of western governments play into the hands of the Vietnamese. By focussing on possible solutions, such as which country should take on what refugees and how many, the media have made these refugees the subject of recrimination between non-communist governments, whose interests are better served by concentrating their energies on exposing the villainy of the Vietnamese government. People and leaders throughout the world must be told, again and again, that it is the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam which has actively promoted this massive migration, causing havoc to the countries of Southeast Asia.

We must put them on the defensive. Their leaders are not mad, irrational men like Idi Amin. They have cold, calculating minds, which, whilst incapable of compassion to their own people, are nevertheless most acute in computing cost-benefits. Only the threat of becoming outcasts in the international community will force them to

rethink and revise their present strategy. Until then they will push out refugees by the thousands each week.

Yours sincerely

Lehman

The Rt Hon
Mrs Margaret Thatcher
Prime Minister
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