

The Issue of the Expulsion of Asians from Uganda, 1972

Uganda was under British colonial rule from 1894 to 1962, as was India until 1947. The British brought over a large Indian population to Uganda, both to provide indentured labour and to serve as a 'buffer' through which they felt trade could be more easily done between Europeans and Africans. The British also prioritised the education of the South Asian minority in Uganda over the native Ugandans, and gated ethnic communities that began to develop meant that South Asians often had access to better healthcare services. Although the Indian minority made up 1% of the population, they earned a fifth of the national income and came to dominate trade. This gave rise to Indophobic stereotypes of Ugandan Indians as 'selfish and greedy traders'. Anti-Indian sentiments in Ugandan began to rise, especially as Uganda gained independence and the new government began to restrict the role of non-citizen Indians and accuse all Ugandan Indians of disloyalty and commercial malpractice.

On 4th August 1972, the President of Uganda, Idi Amin, ordered the expulsion of the Indian minority in Uganda, giving them 90 days to leave. This order originally applied to only British subjects with Indian origins, but it was expanded five days later to include any citizens of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. He justified this order by claiming that he was 'giving Uganda back to ethnic Ugandans' and returning the control of the economy to indigenous Ugandans. Property belonging to Ugandan Indians was redistributed, and some members of the Ugandan army used this opportunity to steal and attack the Indian minority. In total, 80,000 people of Indian descent were expelled.

The Indian government has warned Uganda of dire consequences for their actions, and the United Kingdom has frozen a £10.4 million loan to Uganda. The economy of Uganda has also been severely affected by this decision, as Indians had owned 90% of its businesses and been responsible for 90% of its tax revenues. The GDP and manufacturing output of Uganda is expected to fall at astonishing rates. This decision has also created a refugee crisis; around 27,000 Indians have headed to the United Kingdom, who have just introduced an immigration quota and are already struggling to convince its overseas territories to resettle these refugees. Kenya and Tanzania have closed their borders to Uganda. Many refugees are expected to arrive at the borders of countries such as Canada, India, Pakistan, and the United States. About 20,000 refugees are currently unaccounted for.

Points to consider:

- What can be done to help the Ugandan economy?
- Is there need for concern about tensions between Uganda and India?
- Should the United Kingdom take full culpability for their actions during their colonial rule of Uganda? Does this mean it is their responsibility to take in more refugees?
- How can the UN help the expelled Indians to resettle and recover? How can the upcoming refugee crisis be managed?

Useful links:

<https://www.itv.com/news/central/2022-07-17/how-brutality-in-uganda-forced-tens-of-thousands-of-asians-from-home>

[https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/oct/18/a-moment-that-changed-me-50-years-after-my-grandparents-were-expelled-from-uganda-i-visited-their-old-](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/oct/18/a-moment-that-changed-me-50-years-after-my-grandparents-were-expelled-from-uganda-i-visited-their-old-home#:~:text=In%20August%201972%2C%20Ugandan%20dictator,pets%20and%20lives%20for%20ever)

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<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2135&context=djilp>

<https://www.nytimes.com/1972/09/28/archives/britain-asks-un-assembly-seek-to-delay-expulsion-of-asians-by.html>

