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Subject	VISIT BY HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE TO INDIA AND BANGLADESH	
Summary	The Home Affairs Committee visited India and Bangladesh from 3 to 9 October as part of its Inquiry into the Points Based System. A positive visit, with a full programme including sessions with a range of internal and external stakeholders and local media in both countries.	

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Detail

1. The Home Affairs Committee (HAC) is currently conducting an Inquiry entitled "Managing Migration: the Points Based System". The HAC delegation of 6 MPS: Keith Vaz (Chairman), [REDACTED] and two officials, visited Delhi from 3 to 6 October.
2. In Delhi the delegation visited the VFS operated Visa Application Centre where they were able to meet VFS staff and talk to visa customers. They later met UKBA staff at the British High Commission and saw the end-to-end visa application process including PBS and risk assessment in action.
3. There was significant engagement with key business stakeholders: NASSCOM and IT companies, Tata and Business Express Programme companies. Key points that emerged: companies considered the

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UK visa process in India to be an effective one, easier and quicker than any Schengen countries. They were also struck by the evidence of serious problems for business caused by quotas in the US. They were positive about PBS. There were concerns about the qualifying period of 6 months' employment with a company before an intra-company transfer was possible and the impact of removing the training and work experience provision. The HAC would be recommending further information dissemination by way of seminars to users of the process.

4. The Chairman conducted a series of media interviews with selected journalists interested in migration and visa issues. The subsequent reporting accurately reflected the Chairman's positive views about PBS and the UKBA operation in India.

5. There were two ministerial calls. The first call was on Shri Vyalar Ravi, Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs. Each side gave an overview of its approach to managed migration and the two sides recognised the mutual desire to focus and work together to encourage legal migration and tackle illegal migration. MOIA presented its global "Emigration Management in India" policy and emphasised its awareness-raising efforts in the media and on-going collaboration with state governments. Tough messages and measures, including the prosecution of agents and illegal migrants, would continue.

6. The HAC also called on Shri Shivraj Patil, Minister for Home Affairs. Keith Vaz explained the role of the Committee and the independent nature of the inquiry. He also explained how PBS would work in practice. He described it as a significant step forward in managing the migration of skilled workers and students. The Minister took note. Two members of the Committee raised concerns about human rights in Kashmir. Keith Vaz raised a constituency case involving the murder of a British national in Punjab.

7. In Bangladesh, from 6 - 9 October, the main focus was on the interests of the UK's curry restaurant industry, which lobbied the Committee before and during its visit. In Dhaka the Committee attended the press launch of a food festival at which key players in the Bangladesh restaurant industry were present. Positive messages about PBS, the important role of the curry industry in the UK and also a reminder to employers to pay their employees salaries commensurate with their skills.

8. In Sylhet (from where about 90% of the UK diaspora originates) the HAC heard evidence from stakeholders at a lively and well-attended round table session. Stakeholders raised concerns about the requirement for chefs to have a basic knowledge of English under Tier 2, the ability of applicants to present verifiable evidence of their skills (there is an absence of formal qualifications in Bangladesh), and about the effectiveness of Administrative Reviews. The HAC visited the VFS Visa Application Centre and the BHC Consular Office where they met staff and customers.

9. There were three official calls in Bangladesh. In Dhaka, the Chief Advisor and Foreign Affairs Advisor informed the Committee that the Bangladesh government attached priority to raising the skills levels of its migrants and hoped to set up a catering skills training centre in Sylhet. This is an initiative supported by DFID, which is providing £400,000 to cover the costs of equipment and establishing the curriculum, as part of a wider programme of vocational skills education. On preparations for the 18 December General Election in Bangladesh, the Chief Advisor told the Committee that it would be

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necessary to relax State of Emergency provisions in order to ensure the elections would be free, fair and credible. There had been local relaxation of some provisions in the run up to local elections held on 4 August. The government was discussing the way forward with the political parties. At meetings with the Foreign Affairs Advisor and Ministry for Home Affairs the Committee raised concerns about forced marriages and is likely to request further evidence under its separate Inquiry into this issue.

10. The HAC concluded its engagements with a well-attended press conference. Media coverage was extensive and positive. The chairman's comments that PBS was "fair and transparent and not discriminatory in any form" were widely picked up. A significant focus of reporting was on the Committee's backing for the establishment of the catering institute in Sylhet. The Chairman's comments that Bangladesh's December elections would help bring "a new beginning" were also reported.

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