

CANADABOUND

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29 | 2012

Flight to safety

40 years as Canadians: In the fall of 1972, thousands of Ugandans were ousted from their homes by dictator Idi Amin simply because they were of Asian descent. Many of them, mostly Ismailis, would be welcomed by Canada. This is their story.



Asian Ugandans enroute to a new home in Canada board an Air Canada charter flight at Entebbe airport outside Kampala, the capital in Uganda, in the fall of 1972.

THEY DID IT THE CANADIAN WAY

In 1972, Mike Molloy was part of a team of Canadians thrust into the crisis in Uganda, where they struggled with a flood of refugees » E2



THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

Frenny Bawa carved out a career in international business from her home base in Vancouver » E5



REFUGEE EXPERIENCE REINFORCES VALUES

Giving back to the community is a key Ismaili value and that goes double for those Canada took in as refugees from Uganda » E6



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THE EXODUS FROM UGANDA



'It was a very destructive time for the Africans that were there. It was devastating for them,' says Umeeda Switlo, shown with the suitcase she left Uganda with in the office of CUSO, where she works.

'We did it the Canadian way'

A dedicated team of Canadians brought to safety almost 6,000 Asians kicked out by Idi Amin

TARA CARMAN
VANCOUVER SUN

Fifteen-year-old Umeeda Switlo had already surrendered her pet dogs to the police, whittled her belongings down to a single suitcase and was steeling herself to saying an indefinite goodbye to her family and friends. As she stared out a penthouse apartment window one balmy September night, she wondered if she would ever see her hometown of Kampala again.

There was a rumbling in the distance and a tank ground its way down the road. It aimed its gun at a window in the apartment opposite hers and fired. A man fell to the street.

Any sense of nostalgia Switlo was feeling evaporated the moment the body hit the ground.

"Oh my God," she remembers thinking, "I gotta go."

The year was 1972; the country was Idi Amin's Uganda.

Switlo, an Ismaili Muslim who now lives in Vancouver, was one of about 50,000 Ugandans of South Asian origin that the dictator had ordered out of the country a month earlier. However, Switlo's family had been worried enough to start planning their exodus to Canada well before the infamous edict.

Uganda's Asian community had initially been relieved when Amin overthrew Milton Obote's civilian government in a 1971 military coup, Switlo recalls. Many were encouraged by Amin's reversal of a decision by Obote to take a 60-per-cent stake in the country's many Asian-owned businesses.

But the dark side to this new government became apparent to Switlo's family when Amin set up a concentration camp directly opposite their home. Switlo saw mutilated corpses tied to the complex's fence. Most were the bodies of people Amin considered political opponents or members of tribes seen as not loyal to Amin.

It was clear to Switlo's parents that Uganda was deteriorating and they needed to find a more stable country in which to raise their family.

"It was a very destructive time for the Africans that were there. It was devastating for them," Switlo says.

Somehow, though — perhaps because of their economic clout — the Asian community still felt protected, she recalls.

Then on Aug. 7, 1972, as the family watched the evening news on state TV, they were

shocked to see Amin push the newscaster out of the chair, sit down, and announce to the country that anyone of Asian ancestry had 90 days to leave. It was an idea, he said, that had come to him in a dream. But it was also a populist move designed to capitalize on the resentment the African majority felt at the higher standard of living enjoyed by the Asians, who had formed the country's middle-class for generations.

Salim Ahmed, another Vancouver resident who had to leave Uganda in 1972, was initially unfazed by Amin's announcement. Ahmed, also an Ismaili Muslim, was a third-generation Ugandan citizen and the official line was that only Asians of foreign nationality would have to leave.

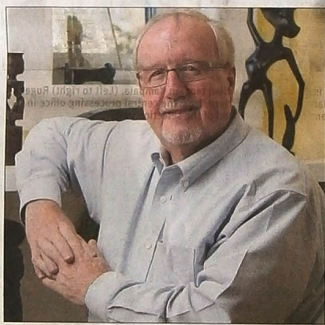
His family was also well-connected. Ahmed ran a large grocery store, owned by his cousin, where all the government ministers and foreign diplomats shopped, as did Amin's wives.

"They would come in and take whatever they want and then they would just go and you would get paid if you were lucky," he chuckles.

But word soon got around that the country would not be safe for anyone who looked Asian, regardless of their citizenship, after the Nov. 7 deadline. When Ahmed and his wife were pulled over by army officers one night and forced to lie on the ground while soldiers searched their car, they knew they couldn't stay in Uganda any longer.

The Switlo family's initial reaction to Amin's announcement was also one of disbelief, but it soon became clear the government meant business.

Switlo's mother, who owned and operated the Montessori school attended by Amin's children, found creative ways to liquidate their assets, such as purchasing two open-ended around-the-world plane tickets for each family member. Cash was of little use: Ugandan



Michael Molloy was a visa officer in Uganda and one of the people in charge of selecting which refugees Canada would accept when Idi Amin kicked out all the Asians in 1972. Officials were able to evacuate almost 6,000 of the people affected.

was the first time Canada had agreed to accept a significant number of refugees from a non-European country.

The leader of the team, Roger Saint-Vincent of the Beirut embassy, arrived in Kampala on Aug. 31 and Molloy followed five days later. By that time, Saint-Vincent had acquired and set up an office, had furniture made as there was no place to buy any, set up telephone and telegraph lines and arranged for a fleet of buses. Three other visa officers and three visa typists were on the ground and ready to go, though the army medical team had yet to arrive.

The office opened Sept. 6. As Molloy walked to work that morning, he saw people lined up around the block in both directions, all waiting for the Canadian office to open. On the first day alone, staff handled almost 2,600 visa applications for families numbering over 7,000 individuals, Molloy recalls.

Discretionary authority The team realized almost immediately they were up against a major logistical challenge: How to evacuate 3,000 asylum-seekers in 60 days with no reliable way to communicate with the applicants in Uganda. Mail was out of the question, not everyone had a telephone and the lines that did exist were buggy, Molloy explains.

As they discussed the issue that first night, a young clerk pulled a number stamping device out of his pocket. Why not, he suggested, use it to give each application form a number and stamp the same number on a piece of paper for the applicant to keep? The improvised system worked like a charm. Applicants were given a number and told to watch for it in the newspaper or on a list posted in the office window. When visa officers decided to interview certain applicants, they printed a newspaper ad requesting that the following numbers report to the Canadian office at a specific time.

Canada had no official refugee policy at the time, so visa officers were instructed to use the immigration points system to assess applications, Molloy said. However, they were told by Ottawa to be flexible as these were exceptional circumstances and not to hesitate to override the points system for people who wouldn't normally meet the criteria.

"Right from the start, they really had this strong sense that ... we've also got to take people in trouble," he said.

The Canadian team in Kampala reported back to Ottawa on a daily basis and it soon became clear to Trudeau's cabinet that there would be far more than 3,000 people who qualified under the Canadian points system. It bumped up the number to 5,000. In the end, close to 5,700 would come to Canada.

Game changers Two things happened in September of 1972 that changed the course of the Canadian mission in Kampala and ultimately determined which groups of refugees Canada would take in.

The first was that Uganda was invaded from Tanzania by supporters of the ousted Obote government. During this week, the Ugandan army became so dangerous that the Canadian team couldn't leave the hotel and office, and applicants were unable to get to the office for interviews, Molloy said.

The second was Amin's order that all Asians who were Ugandan citizens present themselves at a government office to confirm their citizenship. Some were issued new citizenship ID cards, but on at least one occasion army officers showed up and seized the passports

of everyone in line, rendering many people effectively stateless. Ismaili Muslims and Goans, two groups who had largely opted to become Ugandan rather than hold onto British citizenship when Uganda became independent, were particularly affected by this and their lack of British passports made them largely ineligible to go to the U.K.

In any event, the Canadian government did not believe Amin's government would distinguish between Ugandan and non-citizen Asians after the Nov. 7 deadline.

Word came immediately from Ottawa that those with nowhere else to go were to be given priority, Molloy said.

"If you were in that category and you didn't meet the points system, it didn't matter, we normally saw you anyway. If you clearly had a British passport and you didn't qualify, the answer was: Go to Britain. We're busy here. If you have no place to go, come and see us," Molloy says.

"We didn't go looking for Goans. We certainly didn't go looking for Ismailis. But those were the communities that were rendered stateless by an act of their own government in late September and that's how we ended up with so many of them in Canada."

Most of the Ugandans who settled in Canada were Ismaili. There were other wrenches thrown into the Canadian evacuation mission that had nothing to do with the Ugandan government.

The Canadian Army's medical technicians arrived to days late and no visas could be issued without medical exams. When the team did arrive, their tent — which was designed for use in much-cooler European climates — overheated to almost 40 C in a matter of minutes, Molloy says. Officials had to scramble to get enough fans and air conditioners so that blood samples were not destroyed.

Once the medical team got set up, however, they were highly efficient, Molloy says. The first Canada-bound charter plane left Uganda on Sept. 27.

Leaving Uganda

Shortly after Ahmed and his wife decided to flee Uganda, Ahmed heard Canada was accepting applications from Ugandan Asians with nowhere else to go.

Amin's expulsion order dispersed Ugandan Asians around the world

When dictator Idi Amin (pictured below) ordered Ugandans of South Asian descent to leave, Canada took many who were left stateless, most of them Ismaili Muslims.



UGANDA: A timeline

October 1962: Uganda gains independence from Britain.	January 1971: Idi Amin topples Milton Obote's civilian government and takes power in a military coup.	August 1972: Amin gives Ugandans of Asian descent 90 days to leave the country; British government asks Canada to take in some of the asylum seekers.	September 1972: Canadian visa office opens in Kampala, the capital.	November 1972: Last charter planes carrying Asian refugees leave.	1971-1979: Amin's government responsible for the deaths of between 100,000 and 300,000 Ugandan citizens. An roughly equal number are estimated to have died during the period of instability between Amin's ouster and Yoweri Museveni's installation as leader.	April 1979: Amin's government toppled by combination of Ugandan rebel and Tanzanian troops. Amin flees the country.	1986: Museveni becomes president of Uganda. He remains president to this day.	August 2003: Amin dies in exile in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
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He applied, saw his number in the newspaper and was interviewed by Molloy, who approved the application and suggested Vancouver might be a good city for a young couple like the Ahmeds.

It was the best advice he got before he left, Ahmed recalls. Switlo remembers being treated kindly and respectfully by Canadian officials as her family went through the screening process.

"The way that Canadians treated us was like human beings and with such dignity, I'll never forget that," she recalls.

"I felt like we had already started to be in Canada, that this was going to be a safe place that we were going to. That's how we were treated. Nobody yelled at us, there wasn't any 'You're here on the wrong day!'"

Switlo didn't go to Canada immediately. As the situation in Uganda deteriorated, her parents were warned by an American friend that there was a lot of rape happening and that it had become too dangerous for Switlo and her older sister to stay.

He asked for their travel documents and offered to get them out right away.

Switlo's mother handed over the passports. Within a day, the man had arranged student visas to the U.S. for Switlo and her sister, as well as accommodation with his own relatives.

Switlo would go to Oregon and her sister to West Virginia. The family was curious as to how the man had been able to procure American student visas so quickly for people with no country to return to. He turned out to be an undercover CIA agent.

Switlo recalls vividly the day her parents took her to the airport. There were strictures on the amount of valuables such as jewelry that refugees were allowed to take with them.

Switlo's mother had fawned her necklaces and bangles together so that they looked like one item.

At the airport, the guards searched Switlo, made her remove her jewelry, squeezed her tube of toothpaste and even sliced open a tooth to look for any items of value.

There was a British girl being strip-searched at the same time and when the guards found a gemstone the girl had received from her brother they took it away.

She started screaming. Her father was outside the security (area) and came running in because he heard his daughter screaming and they shot him," she recalls.

While they were looking at him and her, I was standing naked and I put on my clothes and I see my jewelry is on the table, unguarded. I pick it up, I hear the announcement for the flight. I walk out of three (the observation) deck. I got the jewelry," she said. She was quiet, get on the plane.



Sani Maradali holds the first visa issued by the Canadian team in Kampala. (Left to right) Roger Sani Maradali, officer in charge; Maradali; Jolene Carriere, from the central processing office in Ottawa, who typed the first visa; and Mike Molloy, head of the selection unit.



Canada-bound Asian refugees exit the bus at Entebbe Airport in Uganda.

Escorting refugees

It was 21-year-old Gerry Campbell of North Vancouver, six months into his foreign service career and freshly arrived from London, who was put in charge of producing the visas and getting the refugees safely on board charter flights bound for Canada.

Campbell insisted Canadian officials transport the refugees from central Kampala to the airport in Entebbe, a 40-kilometre route riddled with army roadblocks.

Many other countries simply asked people to get themselves to the airport at a certain time. Along the way, soldiers at roadblocks rifled through the refugees' meagre belongings and helped themselves to whatever looked interesting.

But Campbell arranged for the Canadian refugees to board buses in central Kampala flying the Maple Leaf flag and be accompanied by political escorts, Molloy says.

"All sorts of people got ripped off going to other countries and I'm sure some of our people got ripped off, too, but we had some very tough people out there at the airport with our Canada-bound refugees and our people stayed with them until they were on the plane."

Ahmed and his wife arrived in Vancouver on a flight that was much longer than they expected. No one told them

about the time change, Ahmed recalls with a laugh.

During a stopover in Edmonton, they saw snowflakes out the airplane window. It was then that the reality of the situation hit his wife, who turned to him and asked "What are we going to do?"

"Just pray," he answered. Because the Ahmeds arrived in Vancouver on a commercial flight rather than one of the planes chartered by the Canadian government, there were no settlement workers at the airport to meet them.

But there was a familiar face at the gate — a friend they had last seen in Uganda, who was waiting for someone else to arrive. He recognized Ahmed's wife as a friend of his own wife and insisted the Ahmeds come home with him.

"If ever my faith became strong, that was the time," Ahmed said.

The next day, the couple went to the Vancouver office of Canada's immigration service, where they received a hotel voucher.

Ahmed found a job selling clothes at the Fields store within a few days and his wife found work as a filing clerk. Within a week, they were able to move into an apartment on Haro Street.

Toiling as a sales clerk was a humbling experience for

Ahmed, who was used to having servants and drivers. They were generally more interested in office work than jobs involving manual labour in the resource industry.

They were, however, outgoing and enterprising people who wanted to embrace their new country, wore Western-style clothing for their arrival in Canada and were eager to get things done quickly, Sethi says. They wanted to learn outdoor sports unheard of in Uganda, such as cross-country skiing, and were particularly enthusiastic about fishing.

About half the families that arrived in Prince George migrated to the Lower

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MIKE MOLLOY
CANADIAN IMMIGRATION
OFFICIAL IN UGANDA

Mainland or Okanagan, where they could start businesses more easily, Sethi recalls. Overall, she says, they set a good example for Canadians that hard work leads to success.

The real losers

"For the African Ugandans who ran afoul of Amin, the story had no such happy ending. Reliable figures are impossible to come by because so many people simply disappeared without a trace, but it's estimated that anywhere from 100,000 to 300,000 people were killed between 1971 and 1979, when Amin's regime was toppled by a combination of Ugandan rebels and Tanzanian troops."

"They suffered a lot more than we did," says Ahmed, who is now a co-owner of Choices Markets, the organic food store chain.

He particularly recalls something he was told just before he left by a British judge who used to shop at his store in Kampala.

"He told me: 'I don't feel sorry for you.' And I said 'What do you mean?' I am losing everything here and you tell me you are not sorry for me?"

"(The judge) said: 'Wherever you go in the world... in five years, you will be where you are today or even better.' And he pointed to the local employees of ours that were working there. He says: 'I feel sorry for these people because they will be worse off than they are today.... They are the main losers.'"

Finally, an apology

Switlo says Canada did the right thing at the right time by admitting Ugandan Asians and saved the lives of many people.

"This is a country that we will never stop giving back to for what they gave us."

She returned to Uganda for the first time four years ago with her daughter while working for the aid organization CUSO. She had mixed feelings when the plane touched down at Entebbe airport, because the traumatic separation from her family more than three decades before.

"In one way I felt I was home, and in another way I was terrified," she recalls.

The Ugandan customs officer at the airport told her she would need to pay \$50 for a visa.

"I don't know where the energy or where the guts came from, but I said: 'I was born here and you kicked me out and you took my house and my dogs and I'm coming home.' And the lady looked shocked and she brought her supervisor. They had guns and they took me to another office," Switlo says.

"And they told me: 'Madam, Uganda is not the same any more. Welcome home. We are so sorry.'"

To be able to be there and have somebody apologize meant the world to me."

Switlo says she is now a co-owner of Choices Markets, the organic food store chain.

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ASIANS IN AFRICA

Economic hope motivated immigrants from India

Opportunity to farm land in Uganda was hard to resist

DON CAYO

VANCOUVER SUN

Indian traders first visited the coast of East Africa two millennia ago, and it's well over 100 years since they began settling with their families in villages that are now in Kenya and Tanzania.

Hundreds of these pioneering families soon began moving inland to Uganda, a country in those days known as "the white man's grave," says Sherali Bandah Jaffer, an 88-year-old Ugandan-born Ismaili who's now comfortably retired in West Vancouver.

Uganda, rife with malaria and a host of other tropical diseases, was no healthier for Indians than for Caucasians, Jaffer notes. But families with no chance of making a decent living in India were willing to risk it.

Most came from Gujarat, India's westernmost state, just south of what is now the border with Pakistan, and a place known then and now as a hotbed of entrepreneurialism.

The immigrants were mainly Hindu, but included a significant minority of Ismaili Muslims — members of the second-largest community of Shia Muslims, which itself is a minority second to the Sunnis in the Islamic world.

Ismailis are followers of a hereditary leader known since the early 1800s as the Aga Khan, or great king, whom they believe is descended from the Prophet Muhammad.

Ismailis had dispersed to a dozen countries, India among them, following the Mongol conquest of their short-lived homeland in what is now Iran and Syria in the 13th century.

Gujarat was to suffer religious tensions decades later when India and Pakistan split apart, but religion didn't influence the Ismaili immigration to East Africa, says Vali Jamal, another Ugandan Ismaili and the author of a forthcoming book that exhaustively chronicles the history of his people in East Africa.

"It was poverty as the push factor, and the fabulous riches of East Africa as the pull factor," he said.

Uganda, despite the dangers posed by disease, got more than its share of the migrants for two reasons, both economic.

The first draw, Jamal said, was land. Kenya, the country favoured by the British who controlled East Africa, was a full-fledged colony, whereas Uganda was a mere protectorate. So, while Indians were prohibited from farming in Kenya, in Uganda they took it up with enthusiasm. While many Indians, Ismailis among them, settled as storekeepers in isolated villages, many also took up land and introduced the lucrative cultivation of cotton, coffee, sugarcane and tea.

Many built highly successful businesses. And virtually all invested heavily in the education of their children.

For Ismailis, like most Muslims, daily life and faith are closely intertwined. Jamatkhana — Ismaili mosques, like the elegant one in Burnaby that serves Metro Vancouver's Ismaili community — aren't just for prayer, but also educational and social events. From a young age, Ismailis are steeped in the values of volunteerism, pluralism, building strong civil society institutions, engaging others and contributing to broader issues facing society at large.

These values were manifest from the start in India, Jamal said.

"First you pray alone. Then neighbours come to your house. When there are 10 families, you do a dedicated jamatkhana. The school followed straightaway — often a room in the jamatkhana structure."

The stress on community commitment and education caught the notice of the British, who preferred to live in the cooler and healthier climate of Kenya. From the time the first generation of Ismailis to be educated became employable, they were groomed to become the administrators of this little part of the vast British Empire.

Despite the level of comfort eventually attained by some, including his family, "it was Indians who sacrificed their lives who built East Africa," Jaffer said.

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FACE-TO-FACE WITH DANGER

Diplomats had to use their guile

Handcuffed man who entered embassy at gunpoint was quickly assessed

TARA CARMAN

VANCOUVER SUN

The dangers Canadian visa officers and desperate Ugandan Asians faced in the fall of 1972 were brought sharply into focus the day a small, grubby "somewhat smelly" man of about 30 was marched into the Canadian visa office in Kampala at gunpoint, handcuffed to the end of a chain held by a large machine gun-toting policeman.

The policeman gave Canadian visa officer Michael Molloy a wide grin.

When Molloy asked how he could help, the prisoner reached into his pocket and pulled out a grimy piece of grey paper with a number stamped on it.

Molloy took the paper, pulled the file, and saw the office had indeed requested the man report for an interview.

"I was really worried about this machine gun," Molloy recalls.

The officer was obviously not used to it and kept fidgeting with it, Molloy said.

"Every time that thing moved, half the people in the office could see it, and there'd be this huge intake of breath until it settled back into his lap and then there'd be kind of a sigh."

Molloy asked the guard to remove the handcuffs so he could interview the man in private, but he refused. So the man remained handcuffed to the chain, but the guard sat in a chair a slight distance away to give some measure of privacy.

It turned out the man had been arrested at the border while taking his Kenyan-born wife to stay with her family in Kenya. She had her jewelry with her. The border guards allowed the man's wife to leave, but seized the jewelry, arrested him for smuggling and sent him to the Kampala jail, where he'd been housed in a cell with about 60 other people.

His family had seen his number published in the newspaper and demanded prison authorities allow him to keep his appointment with the Canadians, so there he was.

The man looked to be in rough shape, so Molloy knew right away he



Dr. Marcel Piche, left, ran the medical unit, while Roger Saint-Vincent, an attaché from the Canadian Embassy in Beirut, managed the Kampala operation.

was not going to turn him down. But he also had a relative in B.C.'s Lower Mainland, spoke good English and was an auto mechanic, one of the in-demand occupations at the time. Molloy approved him on the spot.

The next step was the medical examination. The trio proceeded out to the medical tent.

"Everybody was watching this going on. You could have heard a pin drop in the office."

Head doctor Marcel Piche asked the guard to remove the cuffs so he could examine the man. The guard refused. So Piche took the man, still attached to the chain, behind a curtain while the guard waited outside.

"He couldn't have been in there for more than 10 minutes," Molloy recalls. "I think Dr. Piche just filed in the forms as fast as he possibly could. I'm not even sure the guy took his shirt off."

Piche emerged from behind the curtain and announced the man had passed. Molloy did not ask him about the required X-rays and blood tests.

At that point, the head of the Canadian team in Uganda, Roger Saint-Vincent, who had been a Second

World War pilot and always wore a blue military-style safari suit, decided to intervene.

"He plants himself right in front of the policeman and he just says, 'Sergeant, this man is to be at Kampala airport at 7:05 precisely tomorrow morning. Is that understood?' And the policeman said 'Yes, I understand.' And then Roger said 'That will be all' and the policeman actually saluted."

Piche then chimed in, telling the sergeant that if he made sure the man was at the airport in the morning, he and his family would receive free medical exams. The guard gave them all a big smile and took the man, still handcuffed to the chair, back to jail overnight.

Molloy crossed his fingers and hoped for the best.

Canadian officials were waiting when the man on the chain arrived at the airport under heavy police escort. Holding the other end of the chain was the same police sergeant, this time without the machine gun. Molloy recalls. He marched the man up the ramp to the aircraft.

Saint-Vincent, who was waiting at the top of the ramp, asked the sergeant to remove the handcuffs, which he did.

"Roger grabs the guy and shoves him into the airplane," Molloy recalls. "And the policeman then says 'Can I look inside?'"

Roger said: "I'm sorry, sergeant, you can't. It's Canadian territory and you're an official of Uganda." And he puts his arm around his shoulder and they walk down the stairs together and they shake hands and away they go."

The next morning, the police sergeant, his wife and their half-dozen children showed up at the Canadian office, dressed in their Sunday best, for their complimentary medical exams. The doctors who conducted the exams presented them with a big certificate attesting to their good health and gave candy to the children.

"We never had any problems with the police after that," Molloy said. "Word got around that we were all right."



Proud to be serving the Lower Mainland since 1983

President's Message

On this historic occasion, I would like to extend our warmest congratulations to all Ismailis on behalf of the Destination Auto Group. Having served the Lower Mainland for over 30 years, we are very grateful and very proud to be a part of the Greater Vancouver community.

With this message I would also like to express our deepest appreciation to all the staff and employees of Destination Auto Group for their hard work and dedication over the years, and to our customers for their loyalty. I would also like to thank our business partners at Chrysler, Honda, Hyundai, Mazda, and Toyota, and our suppliers, for their ongoing support.

Finally, with deep gratitude I would like to thank the community for accepting us as partners, a relationship that we look forward to continuing in the future.

Aziz Ahamed
President
Destination Auto Group

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COMMUNITY

Our care for the community is reflected in the long-term partnerships we have established with a number of charities, foundations and NGOs, including the Aga Khan Development Network (World Partnership Golf Tournament and World Partnership Walk), Make a Wish Foundation, Weekend to End Breast Cancer, BC Senior Games, BC Women's Foundation, Family Services of Greater Vancouver, Vancouver Police Department (Domestic Violence, Evolution in Policing; Women in Policing), Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter, Vancouver Society of Children's Centres, and the Harmony Arts Festival.

ENVIRONMENT

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THEIR STORIES | FRENNY BAWA

Education: A value that leads to success

Former RIM executive affirms Ismaili philosophy that educating girls has a tremendous effect on the community

DAPHNE BRAMHAM
VANCOUVER SUN

Nearly 60 years ago and only a few years before Aga Khan III's death in 1957, Ismailis were told that if can only afford to send one child to school, they ought to send their daughters because educating girls has a greater effect on the community's health and welfare.

Aga Khan III, father of the current Aga Khan, was years ahead in his thinking.

It wasn't until the United Nations set its millennium development goals that elimination of gender disparity at all levels of education was promised by 2015. Now, the World Bank estimates that an extra year of secondary schooling can increase girls' future wages by 10 to 20 per cent, while research by the U.S.-based Council on Foreign Relations indicates that women and girls reinvest 90 per cent of their earnings in their families while men and boys reinvest only 30 to 40 per cent.

Because the Aga Khan traces his lineage through the prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, women and girls have always held a special place in Ismaili society. But it was with the directive in the early 1950s that educating girls gained momentum within the community.

The Aga Khan's suggestion is what motivated Frenny Bawa's mother. Although she only had a Grade 3 education, Bawa's mother insisted to her husband that their five girls be educated. She insisted that they would not go to school in the dusty, Ugandan village where the family had settled two generations earlier. And that meant moving to Kampala where the schools were better and the instruction was in English.

Frenny, the oldest, was in Grade 2 the year they moved



Frenny Bawa is an Ismaili who came to Canada as a child from Uganda and made Vancouver her home. She has worked for the Royal Bank and later headed Research in Motion in India.

to the Ugandan capital. She already spoke four languages; none of them English.

Frenny was 12 when Ugandan dictator Idi Amin issued his surprising order expelling Asians from the East African nation. Canada agreed to take some of the refugees and the Bawas were on the first Canadian-bound flight out of Kampala and were among the few families that came to Vancouver — an experience that reinforced for the family the value of education and, particularly, the value of being able to speak English.

After high school, Frenny went to Simon Fraser University with the intention of doing a degree in English literature. But during the summer between first and second year, she worked at a bank. Heeding the advice of her manager — a woman — Bawa switched to business administration, graduated and went to McGill

University in Montreal to do her master's degree in business administration.

Business is her calling and a field in which she has earned an international reputation all the while staying true to her Canadian roots and firmly attached to her Vancouver home.

In 2011, Bawa was named one of the 10 most powerful women in India by Forbes magazine. But that's jumping ahead of the story.

After collecting her master's degree, Bawa came back to Vancouver to work for the Royal Bank. Along the way, she added French to the list of languages she speaks.

She was posted to a Surrey branch. A customer came in and began speaking to her in what she assumed was Punjabi — a language she doesn't speak.

"I gave him a blank look and he went away disgusted," says Bawa.

A few days later, Tara Singh Hayer (the publisher of The Indo-Canadian Times, who was murdered in 1998) came to see her.

In private, he told her that when they learned that Bawa had been posted to the branch, many Sikhs — especially those who had recently immigrated — had been excited at the thought that they would be able to do business in their own language. Bawa admits her name confuses many people.

Her first name is a common Farsi name, while Bawa is a common Sikh name.

Of course, she is neither. "I was really embarrassed."

Bawa didn't think it would be possible for her to learn Punjabi quickly enough to be able to do business in that language.

"So, I asked him if I brushed up on my Hindi (India's official language), would that work." It would, he said. And it did.

"Within a year or so, my portfolio had exploded. Anybody in Surrey who needed a loan came to me. People who had just immigrated were brought to me to set up bank accounts. It was interesting."

But Bawa was soon ready for other challenges and jumped at the chance to join Research in Motion, an upstart Ontario company whose BlackBerry was just starting to make huge gains against other cellphone manufacturers.

She was RIM's global marketing director and, later, country director for India.

Once again, she was a minority in a country where sectarian divisions have often led to violent confrontations. The confusion over identity that had caused initial problems in Surrey, made it easier for her in India.

"Indians embraced me as an Indian... They were proud that an Indian woman had been picked to run BlackBerry's operations," says Bawa who oversaw the growth of BlackBerry's market share to more than one million customers.

"India accepted me, but I was always yearning for Canada and Vancouver."

Bawa's affinity for India is evident. She describes herself as an Ismaili-Canadian of Indian origin; she makes no reference to Uganda. She has never felt linked to either Africa or Uganda. As RIM's global marketing director, Bawa has been back to Africa. But she's never yet returned to Uganda.

It's not that she hasn't had opportunities. A few years ago, the Ugandan ambassador to India — an Indian woman — invited Bawa to a presidential inauguration. But work got in the way.

When RIM's team did some deals in Uganda, Bawa could have gone, but she was more urgently needed somewhere else in the world.

Having been forced to flee, Uganda is a place Bawa may go back to at some point. But it's not at the top of her travel list.

Bawa resigned from RIM last fall, in the same month that she was named to the Forbes list. She was exhausted, having spent anywhere from half to three-quarters of the previous seven years travelling between India, her Vancouver home and RIM's Ontario headquarters.

Bawa isn't certain what she'll do next. Among the things she's thinking about is why British Columbia has failed to establish a RIM-, Google- or Apple-sized company, what it might take to build one and whether she's the person to do it.

Meanwhile, Bawa serves on four advisory boards. Three are at Simon Fraser University where she did her undergraduate degree. The other is on the B.C. Jobs and Investment Board.

Service along with education are values she learned from her family and from her faith.

"The values that I was brought up with are deep and profound. I try to live my life with integrity and honesty," she says.

It hasn't always been easy in business, but Bawa says, "I have found lots of strategies in the corporate world to be successful so that I didn't claw my way to the top. I find that behaviour abhorrent."

Now that she has the time, Bawa says giving back to the community is important to her.

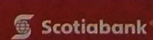
"One of the interesting characteristics of being Ismaili is that you don't have a homeland. So, when you're invited into somebody else's homeland, there's a very strong recognition that to be a good citizen, you have to give back... you have to invest and nurture that homeland."

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A Canadian success story

Scotiabank salutes the 40 year anniversary of the Canadian Ismaili community. Your resilience and generous philanthropy are helping build the future of Canada.

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THEIR STORIES | IQBAL AHMED

Refugee experience reinforced Ismaili values of education, hard work and giving back to community

DAPHNE BRANHAM

VANCOUVER SUN

On Sept. 15, 1972, Iqbal Ahmed was 17 and at home in Kampala on vacation from boarding school in England.

It's a day that shaped his life. That's the day that Idi Amin — who went by the self-proclaimed title of Life President of Uganda, Conqueror of the British Empire and the Last King of Scotland — ordered the expulsion of the more than 50,000 Ugandans of Asian descent.

"We didn't believe it," says Ahmed. "People thought it can't be true. ... We were in shock when we left."

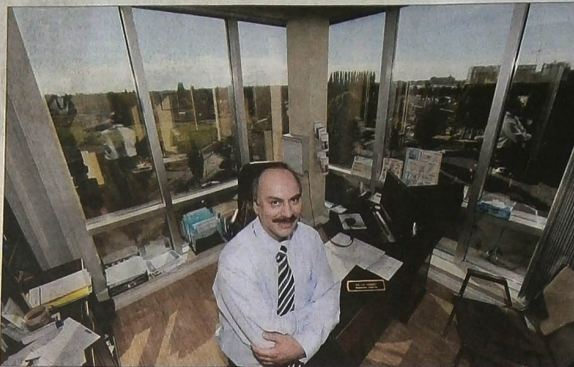
His grandfather — the patriarch who had taken his family to East Africa from India's Gujarat state in search of a better life — was left with nothing. The grocery store that he'd built was worthless.

Suddenly, three generations of his family were refugees.

Ahmed was the first to leave, taking his sister with him to Britain and charged with the responsibility of finding a school for her. It took some time, but by various routes, all but one uncle ended up in Canada. What eased the difficult transition for the dazed refugees is the fact that they'd all been taught English in school he true. ... We were in shock when we left."

The refugee experience reinforced for him the values he'd learned at the Jamatkhana, the religious, social and educational centre of the Ismaili community.

"The ethics of my faith cause me to want to do well, to give back to my community as well as the wider community, to help people," says Ahmed, who is now an internist and respirologist for Vancouver Coastal Health



Dr. Iqbal H. Ahmed is active in the Ismaili community as a member of the Aga Khan Council for Canada.

STEVE BOSCHING

Authority and an associate professor at the University of British Columbia. "Education is something you have not only for yourself, but to improve the lives of other people."

As for hard work, he says: "When you're displaced from your country and lose everything, you have a desire to work hard, to back to where you were (in terms of having a home, a job and being able to provide for your family)."

By 1976, Ahmed's family was settled in Canada, with the exception of an

uncle who went to New Zealand. Most were in Vancouver. Ahmed was again on school break, but this time from medical school in England.

"I was stunned by Vancouver's beauty and by how friendly everyone was," he says.

"Having grown up in England, this was so different. You'd go to fill gas at the pump and people were chatting with you."

"When I went back to England, there was a guy digging a ditch and I

said hello. I tried it to see what would happen. He looked at me as if I were crazy."

After completing his medical degree, Ahmed got a fellowship in respirology in Edmonton after seeing the position advertised in a medical journal.

An asthmatic child, Ahmed now treats the rapidly increasing number of people who have asthma.

And, as an internist, he's on the front lines treating chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which is

now the fourth leading cause of death among women and will soon move to Number 3 as heart disease, stroke and cancer rates decrease.

When he's not working, Ahmed spends as much time as he can with his two children — a 21-year-old daughter, who has just completed an undergraduate degree in economics at McMaster University, and a son, who's in Grade 12 and hoping to go to medical school.

Five years ago, Ahmed took them to Uganda on only his second trip back since 1972.

"It felt really surreal. This is where I grew up and to have my children there. It hasn't changed a lot."

They were in Uganda for the Aga Khan's Golden Jubilee visit.

Ahmed has met the Aga Khan, the head of the Ismaili faith, on several occasions.

Ahmed goes to the Jamatkhana several times to pray, to meet with others and to learn.

As a member of the Aga Khan Council for Canada, he helped organize the Aga Khan's 2008 visit to Vancouver, has helped organize the annual Ismaili Walk in Vancouver and is involved with the Aga Khan Museum, which is set to open in Toronto in 2013.

Although born in Africa of Indian descent and having spent years in England, Ahmed doesn't identify himself with the three other countries.

"I am a Canadian. I am fortunate to be a Canadian. And I am a Muslim."

But 40 years after being forced to flee Uganda and 11 years after 9/11, even that identity can be troublesome.

His name — Iqbal Ahmed — is so common in the Islamic world that it raises alerts every time he flies.

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THEIR STORIES | SHAMSHAD AND JALAL JAFFER

Vancouver was third-time lucky for young couple

Dictator Idi Amin gave newly married Ugandan Asians 90 days to flee their homeland

TARA CARMAN

VANCOUVER SUN

Shamshad and Jalal Jaffer were on a plane over East Africa when the pilot came on the loudspeaker to announce that Idi Amin was giving Ugandan Asians 90 days to leave the country.

There was a collective gasp of disbelief on the plane. Nobody believed it, Jalal recalled, because Ugandans of Asian descent — including some whose African roots went back several generations — ran many of the country's businesses. This was a source of resentment for Amin himself and some of the people who supported him.

"Nobody assumed that he was going to uproot third-generation Asians who have been more Ugandan than Ugandan, who really held the economy so firmly — for personal greed maybe, many of them — but by and large for the good of the country," Jalal said. "So nobody took it seriously because it was like shooting (yourself) in the foot twice over."

Shamshad and Jalal were flying home from a visit to Nairobi, in neighbouring Kenya. In their early 20s, they were newly married and had recently moved home to Kampala after attending university in England.

Using their foreign educational credentials to move to North America or Europe was something that had never occurred to them, Shamshad said.

"I was a child of the '60s, the feminist movement. I was going to go home and change Africa," she said. "We were probably at the beginning of a new wave of young Islamists that were educated at (foreign) schools and coming back."

But it soon became clear to the newlyweds they would not be able to build the life they envisioned for themselves in Uganda.

The army began to make life difficult, Shamshad recalled, setting up roadblocks and imposing curfews. There were whispered stories of people being fed to crocodiles.

"I think the focus of everybody's attention was: 'How do I get out of this absolutely fearsome environment alive?'" Jalal said. "Nothing mattered in terms of your assets, your goods — nothing mattered. It was like 'Here, take my home. I don't care.'"

The Jaffers became eventually build that new life in Vancouver, but like many of the Islamists forced to leave Uganda in 1972, it took several months for them to find their way here.

Many Ugandan Asians carried passports from Britain, the former colonial power in Uganda, but the way asylum seekers were treated by British consular staff made it clear that Britain



After being ordered out of Uganda, Jalal and Shamshad Jaffer, shown recently in their North Vancouver home, lived in London for a while before making the move to Toronto and then finally settling in B.C.

WARD PERKINS (PAG)

were unenthusiastic at the prospect of accepting as many as 50,000 non-white immigrants, Jalal said.

"You may line up for five hours and then by the time you get anywhere near they say 'Oh no, it's closed now. Come tomorrow.' So people were really, really completely shattered," he said. "When you treat people like animals, they start behaving like animals."

The Canadian government had sent in a small team to help the British by taking in some of the refugees and experience at that office was markedly different, Jalal recalled. They provided chairs on the street to the people lining up in the hot sun could sit down and even served them water, he said.

The Canadians also had a system whereby applicants were issued numbers and given a specific time to return for interviews, Shamshad says. "There was a process. ... They seemed to be way better organized and there was this can-do feel."

The Jaffers ended up with the choice of going to either England or Canada, and their good experience with the Canadian staff tempted them to choose the latter. But England was familiar territory from their university days, and Shamshad's parents kept a flat in London.

Canadian Immigration officer Mike Molloy, who had made earlier consular trips to Uganda and had even played squash with Jalal, encouraged him to hold on to the Canadian visa

just in case things didn't work out.

The days before they left Uganda were a blur for the Jaffers. They had to get Jalal's elderly parents out of the country and eventually sent them to live with his sister in the Congo.

Then there was the matter of how to support themselves once they left. Most of their assets and investments were in Uganda and difficult to liquidate.

They had been warned by friends that soldiers at roadblocks and the airport would seize any money or valuables they tried to take with them. So Shamshad, who worked for American Express, converted their money into airline vouchers that the soldiers would not recognize.

She gave personal items she couldn't take with her to a close African friend.

They left their car in the driveway, gave their house keys to a servant and boarded a London-bound British Airways flight on Sept. 22, 1972.

Life in London was not what they expected. Shamshad was able to arrange a transfer to the American Express office in Haymarket, so there was at least an income, but the couple quickly realized they enjoyed the city much more as students than they did as working adults. The idea of starting a new life and raising a family in this apartment where they had to put money into a coin-operated heater to stay warm was not appealing.

They began to weigh their options. Jalal started visiting Canada House

in Trafalgar Square and reading the Canadian newspapers.

He learned that Canada was not, as he'd imagined, a barren country full of igloos and, in fact, seemed like a promising place to build a new life. They still had the airline vouchers and the Canadian visa, so they decided to make the move.

They arrived in Toronto at the end of November and spent their first night at a hotel in a downtown area near Dundas Street.

The next morning they went to a reception centre at Ontario House, where they were given hot coffee and some much-needed winter clothes. An immigration officer asked if they would prefer to stay with one of the Canadian families who had volunteered to host refugees from Uganda and they jumped at the chance.

They went to stay with an Oxfam Canada director and his wife who showed the Jaffers around the city and with whom they became close friends.

"You've got the trauma of leaving, all the pressure, and then suddenly this sense of hope that opens up because there's a welcoming world out there," Shamshad said.

Within weeks, they had found a suite on the top floor of a house and both had jobs at CIBC. By the time summer came around, their airline vouchers were about to expire, so they decided to take a trip to Vancouver to visit friends and family. They fell in love with the West Coast and

when one of their friends asked what they were doing in Toronto, it was hard not to ask themselves the same question.

They flew back to Toronto on a red-eye flight, showered, went in to the CIBC and asked their manager for a transfer to Vancouver. When he suggested that might be difficult, they both resigned on the spot. The manager told them they were crazy.

The Jaffers packed the few belongings they had into their car and prepared to start a new life in a new city for the third time in 12 months. Shamshad recalls their September move from Toronto to Vancouver as "spectacular," with the fall colours through Ontario, the straight roads and dramatic sunsets of the Prairies and then crossing the Rocky Mountains.

"We really got a sense of the country in a very distinct way."

Since then, the Jaffers have made a point of visiting and driving through all of Canada's provinces.

Getting established in Vancouver took some time. The country was headed into a recession and finding a job was difficult.

They both took courses in real estate and Jalal, unhappy in his financial services work, decided to go to law school. He went on to a long career as a lawyer and became extensively involved with the Ismaili community in Vancouver, while Shamshad worked in real estate, did volunteer work and raised the couple's two sons.

It also took time for the couple to fully come to grips with what happened to them.

Years after they arrived in Vancouver, Shamshad went with friends to a movie that was partly set in Kampala. Seeing the red earth, lush green vegetation and corrugated roofs of her homeland, even through a movie screen, was enough to make her burst into tears.

"That was my catharsis," she says.

See the videos accompanying these stories at vancouver.sun.com/videos or use this QR code



THEIR STORIES | SHERALI JAFFER

Former politician felt an obligation to his community

Ugandan-born Ismaili vowed to stay in England until all of the expelled Asians had left the camps and found new homes

DON CAYO
VANCOUVER SUN

It was brutal shock when Ugandan dictator Idi Amin suddenly announced in August 1972 that he was expelling the country's 55,000 Asians. Many of them were Ugandan-born, some to families that had been in Uganda for generations.

A parallel would be a family that has lived in and helped to build Canada since the late 1800s or early 1900s, only to be told their citizenship is void and they have a few months to leave their home.

Sherali Bandali Jaffer, now an 88-year-old Ugandan-born Ismaili who's comfortably retired in West Vancouver, felt this shock as keenly as any — but he was not entirely surprised.

In 1972, he was a successful businessman, a member of Uganda's Parliament and a father of six. But he'd seen trouble percolating under the surface for months. Indeed, he had already fled for England in fear of his life after a colleague in Parliament had been killed by Amin's henchmen.

By the time the expulsion became formal, Jaffer had already done what he thought was necessary to help his community prepare.

"I had gone to the Indian High Commissioner and asked what would happen if we were thrown out of Uganda."

"He said don't worry and he asked, 'How many are you?'"

"I said, 'We are 55,000.'"

"He said, 'That is not a problem. That is one day's population growth in India. So it will be like a leap year.'"

And to stay in the bunks

"But when the expulsion came, the Indian government said, 'No, these are British subjects.' They took only 5,000."

One problem was that many of the 55,000 Asians, including most of the 12,000 members of the Ismaili minority, had given up their British passports when Uganda became independent and chose to become citizens of the place where their homes and hearts were firmly ensconced.

Vali Jamal, another Ugandan Ismaili and author of a forthcoming book on the history of his people in East Africa, says 15,000 to 20,000 Asians had taken up Ugandan citizenship. About 10,000 of these were rejected as candidates for other countries and found themselves stateless. Most wound up in temporary refugee camps in the U.K.

"The goal was always to get them into the U.K.," Jamal said. "We knew nothing about Canada."

But Jaffer, who was already in England with his wife and four of his older children who were going to school there, did know Canada from a previous visit.

And so did the spiritual leader of the Ismailis, the Aga Khan.

Hockey legend

The Aga Khan also knew Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Canada's prime minister of the day. The two sat down personally to negotiate a place for refugees in Canada.

The two leaders talked, as legend has it, during the eighth game of the epic Canada-Soviet

"summit series" hockey game in September 1972. The number agreed upon — 6,000 refugees to be accepted — is said to be tied to Paul Henderson's famous goal at 19:24 of the final period that gave Canada a 6-5 victory and a victory in the series.

About three-quarters of those who came to Canada as a result of this agreement were Ismailis, Jamal said, and the rest were Indians of other faiths.

Jaffer had by then been joined in England by his two youngest children who were able to leave without incident — but, like the thousands of others, without personal property of any value.

But, although his family lost assets and businesses that he reckons would be worth \$40 million or \$50 million today, they had a nest egg that most others did not — \$50,000 that he had deposited in England to cover the cost of his children's post-secondary studies.

A pledge to help

Jaffer still feeling the responsibilities of his elected office and an obligation to his community, pledged himself to seeing the thousands of Asians relocated from the refugee camps to permanent homes.

Over the space of a couple of years, he helped to negotiate and oversee the dispersal of every stateless refugee to Canada and several countries in Europe.

"A lot of the European countries were very good," he said.

Denmark, for example, took all the handicapped. And many are still there."

The Canadian government agreed to house the new arrivals for up to a year in downtown hotels in Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

Few stayed at government expense that long, said Jaffer's daughter, Mobina, now a Canadian senator. Most found jobs — the well-educated women faster than the men — and moved to their own apartments within a few months at most, and virtually all repaid the government for the cost of their flights to Canada, she said.

The future senator and her siblings came to Canada, where their cousin had already landed, well in advance of their father, who stayed in England until 1974 when all the occupants of the temporary camps were finally resettled in other countries.

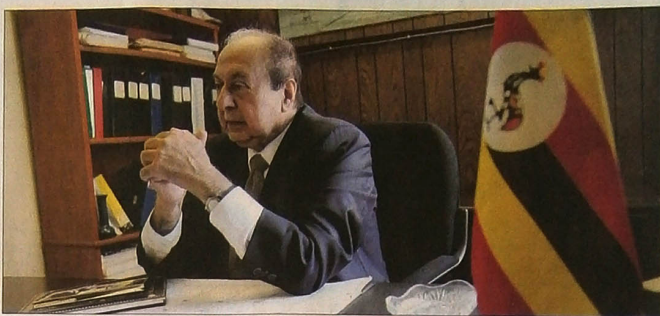
Many of the refugees who had been housed in Vancouver temporarily had stayed in the city, so there was an established Ismaili presence in the city by the time Jaffer arrived.

He had visited the city previously, when life was better in Uganda and he toured North America with his wife, and he found it to be small enough and pleasant enough to remind him of Kampala, his home.

So he and his family came west from Toronto, where his children had first landed. He invested the \$50,000 in a chicken farm in Abbotsford, and in land for a home he soon built in British Properties, where he lives to this day.

Uganda's loss became Canada's gain, with the Ismaili immigrants and their descendants integrating and succeeding in virtually all aspects of Canadian business, professional and public life.

dcayo@vancouversun.com



John Halani fled Uganda due to political unrest and arrived in Canada in 1972. As well as being a businessman and humanitarian, Halani is the honorary consul of Uganda in Vancouver.

THEIR STORIES | JOHN HALANI

He fled Uganda in 1972; 40 years later, he represents it in British Columbia

TARA CARMAN
VANCOUVER SUN

When John Halani learned that Canada had offered to take in his family after Idi Amin ordered Ugandans of Asian descent out of the country, it was a bit surprising.

Halani, his wife, two children and one of his sisters were accepted by Canada. His parents and two siblings were not.

Canada was looking for people who were relatively young, spoke good English and would be able to find work easily, he explains. In Uganda, Halani was a 35-year-old business owner, local councillor and school board chairman; his parents were in their 60s and retired.

The day before Halani left for Vancouver, he put his parents on a plane to London, where his sister lived. One day, he hoped, the family would be reunited.

Like many Ugandan Asians, Halani was unconcerned when he heard Amin's announcement that Asians had 90 days to leave the country. It only applied to Asians of foreign nationality, so Halani assumed that as Ugandan citizens, he and his family would be able to stay.

It was about a month later, when Halani and other Ismaili community leaders met with a representative of the UN, that he realized they would have to leave. The official warned Uganda soon would not be safe for anyone who looked Asian.

"His argument was that at the end of 90 days, you're not going to carry a placard on your neck saying that 'I'm a Ugandan citizen' because we are all one colour ... so the best thing is to leave and not face those consequences."

Soon after, Halani learned the Canadian consular office in Kampala was open and accepting applications.

The Halanis landed first in Montreal and spent the night in a camp the government set up for Ugandan refugees. The next day, Halani asked the immigration officials — who were sending people all over the country — to send him to Vancouver, where he had friends and contacts.

They were met at the airport by people from the Immigrant Services Society of B.C., which was just getting started that year — and some local Ismailis, who took them to a hotel and explained that they would have to go for an interview with the federal Department of Manpower and Immigration the next day.

"When we went to the Manpower (department) the first day and we were dressed up with suits and ties, the lady at

the counter said 'Why are you all so well dressed up? We have jobs lined up in warehouses.' And I told them that we are business people; we are looking for jobs in the offices. They were a bit surprised."

Within two weeks of his arrival, Halani had found a job selling window glass and moved his family out of the hotel and into a two-bedroom apartment in North Vancouver. His wife got a job as a clerk at the clothing store Fields.

The following year, he was able to sponsor his parents, after taking on a couple of other part-time jobs in order to meet the income requirement.

By 1975, Halani had earned enough to lease the Robson-strasse hotel and the following year took on a second hotel, the Tropicana.

He and wife worked long hours to save up for a down

payment on the hotels, which Halani has owned since the early 1980s.

Halani — who has maintained an extensive presence on various community boards through the years — is also Vancouver's honorary consul for the Republic of Uganda.

Uganda's government made contact with some of the expatriate Asian communities in 1991, when the World Bank offered the country development funding on condition that it restore property rights to the people who had been ordered to leave in 1972, Halani said.

He offered to chair a committee on behalf of Ugandan Asians living in Vancouver to gather the documentation of what they had lost and liaise with a representative in Uganda to oversee the lengthy legal process of returning it. It was through this work that he

became Uganda's representative in B.C.

It was also how Halani returned to Uganda for the first time in 1995. On that first visit he was shocked by the dilapidated condition of the roads and infrastructure, he recalled.

In his several return trips since then, he has noticed significant improvements. The people have also changed, he said.

"It's a new generation now in Uganda. Those who were there when we were there are not there, either because of war or HIV or whatever," he said.

"Their children are there; they don't remember what happened. And they're so polite and understanding ... they're colour-blind. They really don't see Asians and Africans."

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