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File India MJ

Subject

- Copied to Master Sec
- ① India: UK/India relations
  - ② All Tours Abroad: Invites
- from 90715



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

2 July 1980

Kear Rosenic,

Call by Mr. Swraj Paul

Mr. Swraj Paul called on the Prime Minister this morning as arranged.

Mr. Paul said that Mrs. Gandhi had asked him to seek a meeting with the Prime Minister in order to convey Mrs. Gandhi's concern that relations between India and the United Kingdom were drifting and to express the hope that something positive could be done to reverse this trend. Mrs. Gandhi hoped that the Prime Minister might be able in future to take a rather greater personal interest in the question of relations with India.

Mr. Paul expressed concern on two specific points. He said that there was a strong feeling in New Delhi that the media in the United Kingdom were consistently and unfairly critical of India. Both the press and the broadcasting companies here seemed to Indians to be more critical than their colleagues in other western countries. Mr. Paul mentioned in this connection an article by Mr. MacFarquhar in the Economist and a series of three television programmes carried by ITV. Both the article and the programmes had appeared on the eve of the recent Indian elections. The Prime Minister told Mr. Paul that she had little influence over the press (a point Mr. Paul readily acknowledged) but that she had taken careful note of what he had said.

Mr. Paul then referred to the Indo-British Exchange Conference. He recalled the circumstances in which the Exchange had originally been established in 1977 and said that it had always been a centre of criticism of Mrs. Gandhi. It was unfortunate that HMG had continued to support the Exchange until very recently and that they had only cancelled the official reception connected with the recent conference when the Indian Government had cancelled a planned session of inter-Governmental talks. This had been an unfortunate affair which had caused a great deal of ill feeling in Delhi. The Prime Minister said that she had known nothing about the difficulties with the Exchange Conference

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until she had seen the briefing for her meeting with Mr. Paul. She undertook to look into the background. I should be grateful if you could let me have a full account of what happened. It would be helpful if your analysis could deal with the suggestion that we were very slow to disengage ourselves from the conference. (Mr. Paul suggested that the Socialist International are involved with the conference.)

In the course of a general discussion about how relations might be improved, Mr. Paul said that Mrs. Gandhi was looking forward to receiving Prince Charles in India in the autumn. The Prime Minister commented that he was very keen to make the visit. Mr. Paul added that the Prime Minister would shortly be receiving a reply from Mrs. Gandhi to her letter about the steel plant contract which is shortly to be awarded. He went on to express the hope that the links between the Prime Minister and Mrs. Gandhi could be further developed. He believed that Mrs. Gandhi and Mrs. Thatcher could achieve a great deal if they worked together. He asked whether it would be possible for the Prime Minister to visit India in the near future. The Prime Minister said that she had always greatly enjoyed her discussions with Mrs. Gandhi. She was very enthusiastic about the idea of a visit to the sub-continent but she thought it would be right to wait until after Prince Charles' visit had taken place. She added that anything she could do to cement the friendship between the United Kingdom and India, she would do.

Towards the end of the conversation Mr. Paul commented that the western world was quite wrong to assume that Mrs. Gandhi was in any way pro-Soviet or 'leftist' inclined. There had been a period between 1969 and 1973 when many of her advisers had been pro-Soviet. This situation had ended in 1973 when her then Private Secretary had been moved. It was true that Mrs. Gandhi was suspicious of the United States. She was not convinced that the United States had the same interest in the security of Asia as it had in the security of Europe. The Indians could not share the confidence in American intentions that the Europeans enjoyed. The Prime Minister recalled that Mrs. Gandhi had referred to her doubts about the Soviet Union during their conversation in Belgrade.

Mr. Paul and the Prime Minister discussed briefly the death of Sanjay Gandhi. Mr. Paul confirmed that the death of her son had been a terrible blow for Mrs. Gandhi. He had spent some time alone with Mrs. Gandhi shortly before the funeral and Mrs. Gandhi had told him that she had come to regard Sanjay not as a son but as an elder brother. Although she was putting a brave face on things, she was now in an extremely lonely and isolated position. None of her Ministers were her equals either socially or educationally, in experience or in

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ability. She had in effect no-one to talk to. Mr. Paul said that he had flown out to the funeral with Mrs. Gandhi's other son who had been holidaying in Italy at the time of the accident. The elder brother had confirmed to Mr. Paul that he had no wish to become involved in Indian politics.

You will no doubt wish to consider further the timing of a possible visit by the Prime Minister to India. In doing so you will need to bear in mind that the Prime Minister is already committed to longish visits to Canada next summer for the Economic Summit and to Australia in the autumn for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. The Prime Minister would like to spend several days in India: it will therefore not be easy to link it with any other visit except, perhaps, elsewhere in the sub-continent. A possible time might be next April.

*Yours ever*

*Richard Alexander*

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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