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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

3 November 1981

Romeo Lyne

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Paul

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Dear Michael,

I enclose a copy of a despatch from HM Ambassador in Islamabad reporting on the recent visit of the Prime Minister to Pakistan.

As you will see, Mr Forster concludes that the visit was entirely successful in terms of the objectives we set out to achieve. It strikingly demonstrated our support for Pakistan on the Afghanistan issue and served to maintain international interest in that issue as well as pressure upon the Soviet Union and the Babrak Karmal regime.

*yours ever
Roderic Lyne*

(R M J Lyne)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street

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SUMMARY

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO PAKISTAN, 8 OCTOBER 1981

1. This visit was the culmination of a series of visits over the last 18 months which have been designed primarily to demonstrate our support for Pakistan and to encourage her to stand firm against Soviet pressures, as well as keeping world opinion focussed on the Afghan problem (paragraphs 1-3).
2. The programme was therefore designed to give the Prime Minister the opportunity to deliver these messages in public in front of the world press (paragraph 4). The Pakistanis also intended to use the visit as a public signal of British support for Pakistan and General Zia's regime and from the start made it clear that it was to be no ordinary Head of Government visit (paragraph 5).
3. The talks with General Zia therefore assumed a lesser importance and concentrated mainly on Afghanistan and Iran (paragraph 6). General Zia accepted without question the Prime Minister's account of what had happened at Melbourne about Pakistan's wish to re-enter the Commonwealth (paragraph 7). General Zia raised a few bilateral points, but his object clearly was to keep the atmosphere friendly and uncontroversial (paragraph 8).
4. The major part of the programme was the Prime Minister's visit to the frontier and this was a dramatic and moving occasion, with her powerful speech to the Afghan refugees followed by the scene at the frontier post where she looked into Afghanistan (paragraphs 9 and 10).
5. It was a pity that the Prime Minister's main contact during the day was with two Generals, who are pleasant but not very intelligent, and that she had no opportunity to meet some of the technocrats in the government and to see the more modern industrial and business part of the Pakistan picture (paragraph 11). But for all its shortness, this visit must be accounted entirely successful in terms of what we set out to achieve and must have contributed greatly to our objective of adding to Pakistan's self-confidence (paragraph 12).

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25 October 1981

The Rt Hon
The Lord Carrington KCMG MC

My Lord

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO PAKISTAN, 8 OCTOBER 1981

1. The Prime Minister, accompanied by Mr Denis Thatcher and members of her staff, paid a one day visit to Pakistan on 8 October 1981. She arrived at 8 am and left well after midnight after a crowded programme, a copy of which is attached, and a hectic day.
2. Since the Russians invaded Afghanistan and Pakistan became a front-line state, she has had more than her usual share of high-level visitors from all over the world and particularly from Britain. You yourself have been here twice within 14 months and we have had visits from other FCO Ministers of State. In the reverse direction, Agha Shahi, the Foreign Minister, has been to London for talks on a number of occasions as have other members of the Pakistan Cabinet. General Zia was in London and saw the Prime Minister in October 1980 and it was on that occasion that he invited her to visit Pakistan at her convenience. The Pakistanis were disappointed that she could not come earlier in the year when she visited India but readily accepted the reasons for this and the promise that she would come when she could. Their disappointment over the shortness of the visit was offset by their appreciation that

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the Prime Minister had gone out of her way at a particularly inconvenient time on her way back from Melbourne to stop off in Pakistan and was not stopping off anywhere else on the journey home.

3. From our point of view, therefore, the Prime Minister's visit was the culmination of a series of visits and of increasing contacts over the last 18 months. Our objectives in all this have been primarily to demonstrate support for Pakistan in the exposed and difficult position in which she has found herself since December 1979. In a constantly changing and complex diplomatic situation we needed to keep particularly close to Pakistan thinking so that we could guide and advise them. We needed to keep the Pakistanis' morale high and to ensure, as best we could, that they continued to stand firm against Soviet pressures. At the same time, we needed constantly to keep the Afghanistan problem in front of the world in order to avoid a gradual loss of interest and an acceptance of what the Russians had done. We needed to continue to bring home to the Russians in a public forum as well as privately the message that we were not prepared to acquiesce in the swallowing up of Afghanistan. Finally, we needed to keep the attention of the world focussed on the Afghan refugee problem, by now the biggest refugee problem in the world.

4. The programme, short as it was, was designed to meet, as far as we could, these objectives. It had to be largely

a public programme since the messages we wished to convey needed world-wide publicity. Not much in the way of private talks was needed at this stage since we were fully in touch with Pakistan thinking on the Afghan and other problems and it was closely in line with our own. Further, there were no major bilateral problems which needed sorting out at the highest level. Apart, therefore, from a talk with General Zia lasting for about 1½ hours, together with such further private conversation as the Prime Minister was able to have with him throughout the day, the rest of the programme took place in the full glare of publicity with a fair contingent of the British and Pakistan press accompanying the Prime Minister throughout.

5. It turned out that the Pakistanis' objectives were similar to our own. They also had no pressing problems to discuss with us in private and were more interested in demonstrating to the Russians, and no doubt the Indians too, that they had powerful friends who fully endorsed the policy they were pursuing and were prepared to stand by them and say so in public. No doubt General Zia also saw the value of the visit in helping to bolster up the standing of his own regime. In the eyes of his own people it would enhance his standing as a leader of world stature and would give his regime that additional measure of respectability which is always important to dictatorships. From the very start, therefore, the Pakistanis made it clear to us that this visit was to be treated as no ordinary Head of

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Government visit but was to be given throughout the full ceremonial treatment more appropriate to a Head of State. Similar treatment has been given this year to the Prime Ministers of China and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's two closest and most powerful allies, so the message was that we rank in importance to Pakistan with these two.

6. Since both sides were using the visit primarily for its public signals, the Prime Minister's private talk with General Zia assumed a lesser importance. Without warning us in advance, the Pakistanis started the talks with a brief military presentation. This was too short and general to shed any real light on the Afghan situation or Pakistan's response to it; inevitably it focussed at least as much on the point, which the Pakistanis can never resist making to visitors, that the bulk of the Indian Army is on their eastern frontier and that therefore they face a double threat. After the military presentation the talk concentrated mainly on Afghanistan and the Afghan refugee situation, which is causing increasing worries to the Pakistan Government. The only other issue discussed at any length was Iran. The Pakistani views on Iran are usually of some interest since they have contrived in the past to keep closer to the Iranian Administration than most other countries and they have a fair degree of understanding of what is going on. However, on this occasion, General Zia had to admit that they had lost contact with the Iranians almost completely and had not yet succeeded in re-establishing it. He lamented the passing of Bani-Sadr and Qotbzadeh

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with whom they had found that they could do business and with whom they were beginning to make some progress.

7. Inevitably, relations with India were also touched on. With oriental courtesy, General Zia left it to Mrs Thatcher to raise towards the end of the talk the subject which must have been uppermost in his mind - what had happened at Melbourne about Pakistan's desire to re-enter the Commonwealth. He accepted her explanation without question or complaint and repeated, as he did at intervals throughout the visit, his desire to achieve closer and more friendly relations with India and his bewilderment at the constant rebuffs administered by Mrs Gandhi.

8. Towards the end of the talk, General Zia suddenly remembered that he had been briefed to raise some bilateral matters and fished out of his pocket a set of cards which he flipped through rapidly making one or two quick points without much explanation. Most of these points were already familiar to me and we will be following them up. It was a pity that we were not able to take further the Pakistani interest in a modest list of arms purchases from us, but the President made it clear that money remained the problem. There was no mention of attacks on Pakistanis in the UK during the recent riots or of the conduct of Pakistan exiles in the UK. His only complaint was about student fees. All in all, General Zia's object during the talk seemed to be to avoid any note of criticism or
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controversy and to keep the atmosphere as friendly and good-humoured as he could.

9. The rest of the visit took place in a blaze of publicity and enabled the Prime Minister to put over the various messages which she had come to deliver. It was crowded, hot, dusty and hectic. The Pakistanis were amazed at the Prime Minister's stamina in getting through it all, after a night spent in the aircraft, without any sign of flagging. I do not know how it struck the Prime Minister, but although I have been over the course before the meetings with the refugee leaders, the trip up the historic Khyber Pass and the feeling that one is standing on the frontier of the free world never fail to move me. Her reception at the refugee camp was certainly one of the most moving I have experienced. These meetings have nowadays become somewhat staged and the refugee leaders have come to know what is expected of them; there is a lack of spontaneity about them. However, on this occasion the number of refugee leaders assembled was greater than I have seen before and the Prime Minister's speech, as she delivered it, was so powerful and moving that as the translation came over it drew spontaneous outbreaks of cheering, slogan-chanting and waving of fists. Even the hard-boiled Western press were moved by the occasion. She went on from there to call on the refugee ladies, a privilege denied to the males of the party. I had hoped that she could go to the tents and huts and see something of how

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the women and children lived, but the Pakistanis, either for security or practical reasons, chose to assemble the ladies in their own enclosure at a discreet distance from the men's enclosure.

10. The next item on the programme was a lunch at Government House Peshawar which again surpassed anything I have seen before. The setting of this old historic British Residence, with State trumpeters to herald the Prime Minister's arrival and all the elite of Peshawar many of them in tribal dress assembled for lunch on the lawns, was perfect. We went on to perhaps the high-light of the trip - the visit to the Khyber Pass and the Afghan frontier, where the Prime Minister, flanked by General Zia and General Fazle Haq, the Governor of the North West Frontier Province and surrounded by the press, could look down into the Soviet Empire. The visit to the frontier ended with a short stop at the historic Khyber Rifles Mess with tribal dancing performed on the lawns. The dense crowds of cheering Pathans massed in the streets of the frontier town of Landikotal was again something beyond my experience and that of the Pakistanis accompanying us. Back in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, the press conference and the Prime Minister's speech at the President's banquet for her enabled her to repeat and emphasise the messages of support for Pakistan and condemnation of Soviet actions which she had expressed so forcibly on the frontier. Copies of her speeches to the Afghan refugees and at the banquet are attached.

11. My one regret is that the programme did not allow time for the Prime Minister to meet and talk to more of the people who run this country. Of the two Pakistanis with whom she spent most of the day, Generals Zia and Fazle Haq, General Zia was not at his best. He had been in bed with flu only two days before and it was doubtful up to the last moment whether he would wish to accompany her throughout what was bound to be an exhausting day. He was quieter than usual and less articulate and thoughtful. General Fazle Haq is always a rumbustious character, full of anecdotes of fighting on the frontier and, in contrast to General Zia, the caricature of the "hit 'em for six" type of General. He is good company but never strikes me as being over-endowed with intellect. It was a pity that the Prime Minister had no opportunity to meet some of the brains of this not unintelligent government; for instance both Agha Shahi and Ghulam Ishaq, the Finance Minister, were out of the country. To that extent, the Prime Minister may have received a somewhat distorted picture of Pakistan. It is not entirely run by affable but not very clever Generals and it does not in any way consist only of military ceremonial and relics of the British Raj. Perhaps a longer visit in the future will show her more of the industry, the dams and irrigation schemes and the more modern business world of, for instance, Karachi which are responsible for the considerable economic progress this country has made over the last few years.

12. I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for sparing the time she did, sandwiched as it was between the Melbourne and Blackpool Conferences, and for undertaking such an exhausting and hectic programme. Short though it was, this visit must be accounted entirely successful in terms of what we set out to achieve. Certainly the Pakistanis were delighted with it and it has firmly underlined our position as their leading friend and supporter in Europe. In addition, judging by the hysterical reactions in Kabul, the message evidently struck home on the other side of the Afghan frontier. But, most important of all, this visit has contributed greatly to our objective of keeping the Pakistanis firmly and more confidently in the front-line of the free world.

13. I am copying this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives in Washington, Delhi, Kabul, Moscow, Peking, UNDEL NATO and Karachi.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully

O G Forster