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Handwritten signature
Prime Minister

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DESKBY 041400Z

FM SINGAPORE 041200Z JUNE 79

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 180 OF 04 JUNE

AND TO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, HONG KONG.

MIPT

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GWS
4/6

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES: TALK WITH LEE KUAN YEW.

1. I HAD NINETY MINUTES WITH LEE THIS AFTERNOON, FIFTY OF THEM ON THE REFUGEE PROBLEM.

2. HE BEGAN BY ASKING IF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT REALLY KNEW THE TROUBLE THEY WERE LAYING UP FOR THEMSELVES. DID THEY REALLY KNOW WHAT THEY WERE DOING?

3. IN REPLY I DESCRIBED THE ACTIONS LISTED IN YOUR TELEGRAM NO 120 TO KUALA LUMPUR. I SAID, TOO, THAT WE WERE IN TOUCH WITH OUR NATO AND EEC PARTNERS, AND WERE CONSULTING, THROUGH THEIR HEADS OF MISSION IN LONDON OR DIRECTLY, ALL COUNTRIES WE JUDGED MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN MANAGING THIS PROBLEM EITHER BY APPLYING PRESSURE ON THE VIETNAMESE OR BY ACCEPTING REFUGEES OR BY INCREASING THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNHCR. I SAID THAT WE HAD A PARTICULAR CONCERN AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR HONG KONG, WHERE THERE WERE NOW 41,000 REFUGEES AWAITING RESETTLEMENT, 39,000 OF WHOM HAD ARRIVED THIS YEAR, HALF OF THEM IN THE LAST MONTH. AGAINST THAT THE 3,400 WHO HAVE LEFT FOR RESETTLEMENT THIS YEAR WERE A DROP IN THE OCEAN. HONG KONG'S PROBLEMS WERE EXACERBATED BY THE INFLOW OF LEGAL AND ILLEGAL REFUGEES FROM CHINA, WHO WERE ARRIVING AT A RATE OF ABOUT 7,000 A MONTH. IT WAS AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND THAT HMG HAD APPEALED TO THE TAIWANESE AUTHORITIES TO STAND BY THE PRINCIPLE OF LETTING REFUGEES PICKED UP AT SEA LAND AT THE RESCUING SHIP'S FIRST PORT OF CALL AND ALSO TO OPEN THEIR DOORS TO REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM, AS OTHER COUNTRIES WITH FAR DENSER POPULATION AND WITHOUT THE ETHNIC SIMILARITY WHICH THE TAIWANESE BORE TO THE REFUGEES FROM VIETNAME HAD DONE. IT WAS THIS CONCERN WHICH HAD INSPIRED THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE.

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4. I WENT ON TO SAY THAT HMG WERE AWARE OF THE POLICY WHICH, BECAUSE OF ITS SMALL AREA, SINGAPORE HAD TOWARDS REFUGEES, BUT THEY HOPED THAT, NOT LEAST BECAUSE OF TAIWAN'S LARGER AREA AND A DENSITY OF POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE TEN TIMES LESS THAN THAT OF SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG THE TAIWANESE AUTHORITIES COULD BE PREVAILED UPON TO MAKE THEIR CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM, AND THAT LEE WOULD FEEL ABLE TO USE HIS GOOD OFFICES WITH THEM TO THIS END.

5. PICKING UP RAJARATNAM'S HARD-NOSED ATTITUDE (MY TELEGRAM NO 175) I SAID THAT WE SHARED THE CONVICTION THAT IT WAS THE DUTY OF EVERY GOVERNMENT TO BRING ABOUT CONDITIONS WHICH WOULD ENABLE ITS PEOPLE TO LIVE CONTENTEDLY WITHIN THE BORDERS OF THEIR COUNTRY. IT WAS A CRITICISM OF A GOVERNMENT THAT ITS POLICIES OR RULE SHOULD MAKE ANY PART OF ITS PEOPLE FEEL SO OPPRESSED THAT THEY SOUGHT TO LEAVE, BUT IT WAS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT THAT IF THAT WAS THEIR CHOICE THEY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO GO. BUT FOR A GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT DELIBERATE EXPULSION AS AN ACT OF POLICY WAS UTTERLY CYNICAL AND CALLOUS. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, WHILE TAKING NOTE OF THIS OBNOXIOUS POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM, AND REPROBATING IT IN THE MOST VIGOROUS WAY, MUST, IF IT WERE TO BE TRUE TO ITSELF, MOBILISE ITSELF TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF HUMAN MISERY WHICH IT CAUSED. THE REFUGEE PROBLEM WOULD NOT GO AWAY WHILE EFFORTS WERE MADE TO TRY AND SHAME THE VIETNAMESE INTO CHANGING THEIR POLICY OF DELIBERATE EXPULSION, AND, EVEN IF THEY DID, THERE WOULD STILL BE THOSE WHO WOULD SEEK TO GET AWAY TO THE BETTER LIFE WHICH THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, FOR ANY NUMBER OF REASONS, COULD NOT HOPE TO PROVIDE.

6. LEE SAID HE TOOK A FAR MORE CYNICAL VIEW OF THE VIETNAMESE. THEY WERE BENT ON EXPELLING ALL ETHNIC CHINESE, ALL OTHER VIETNAMESE WHO COULD NOT ADJUST TO THEIR REGIME, AND AS MANY CAMBODIANS AS POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO RESETTLE CAMBODIA WITH THEIR OWN PEOPLE AND EASE THEIR ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. AT THE SAME TIME, BY THIS POLICY OF GENOCIDE, THEY HOPED ALSO DELIBERATELY TO UNSETTLE AND DESTABILISE THE WHOLE OF SOUTH EAST ASIA. BUT MANY MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY BELIEVED THAT BY NOT SAYING ANYTHING ABOUT THE ENORMITY OF WHAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE DOING, THEY COULD COZEN THEM INTO COOPERATION IN "REGULATING" THE FLOW, PERHAPS WITH PROMISES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE.

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7. I SAID THAT I DID NOT THINK WE WERE ANY MORE STARRY EYED ABOUT THE VIETNAMESE THAN HE WAS. BUT IF HE WAS RIGHT, THE VIETNAMESE WOULD NOT BE DETERRED FROM THEIR POLICY BY A REFUSAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE REFUGEES, AND TO DO NOTHING WOULD PLAY MORE EASILY INTO THEIR HANDS BY CREATING THAT MUCH MORE INSTABILITY IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES. SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO CONTAIN THE THREAT TO STABILITY WHICH THE MULTITUDE OF REFUGEES POSED, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME TRYING TO SHAME THE VIETNAMESE INTO ABANDONING THE POLICY OF DELIBERATE EXPULSION. IT WAS NOT ANSWER FOR HIM TO SAY THAT IF MORE COUNTRIES TOOK MORE REFUGEES IT WOULD ONLY MEAN THAT THE VIETNAMESE WOULD PUSH MORE OUT. ON HIS OWN ANALYSIS OF THEIR POLICY THEY WOULD DO THIS ANYWAY.

8. LEE SAID HE ADMIRERD THE ROBUST ATTITUDE OF HMG AND WAS IMPRESSED BY THE MOUNTING EVIDENCE OF IT: IT WAS MOST REFRESHING. HE SAW THE FORCE OF MY ARGUMENT, BUT I HAD NOT CONVINCED HIM THAT THE REST OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WOULD BE ANYTHING LIKE SO ROBUST I SAID THAT, AS WE AT LEAST WERE BEING ROBUST, I THOUGHT THAT HE MIGHT FEEL THAT WE WERE ENTITLED TO THE HELP WE WERE ASKING OF HIM. HE SHIFTED GROUND, AND ASKED WHAT THERE WAS IN IT FOR THE TAIWANESE. I SAID PROBABLY NOT MUCH MORE THAN THE FEW HUNDRED REFUGEES THEY WERE BEING ASKED TO TAKE IN (HE TOOK THE POINT WITH A GRIN) BUT I THOUGHT THAT THEY MIGHT SEE THE ADVANTAGE OF CONTRASTING A HUMANE ATTITUDE WITH THE CRUELTY AND CALCULATING INHUMANITY OF A COMMUNIST REGIME. LEE DID NOT THINK THAT WOULD STRIKE THEM: THEY DID NOT FEEL THAT THEY OWED THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUCH.

9. AFTER A LONG PAUSE, HE SAID THAT HE DID NOT LIKE WHAT HE WAS BEING ASKED TO DO AT ALL, BUT HE FELT THAT HE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE TO. HIS CONTACT, WHOM HE DID NOT NAME, WAS SOMEONE TO WHOM HE COULD ONLY PASS A SERIOUS MESSAGE IF HIS INTERVENTION WAS TO HAVE ANY EFFECT, AND HE COULD NOT GUARANTEE IT ANYWAY. HE WAS SORELY TEMPTED TO SAY HE WOULD DO WHAT WE ASKED AND DO IT IN A PERFUNCTORY WAY, BUT HE WOULD RESIST THIS.

10 I SAID THAT I WAS GLAD TO HEAR IT, AND SO, I WAS SURE, WOULD THE PRIME MINISTER BY. I ASKED HIM HOW SOON HE WOULD ACT, SINCE TIME WAS OF THE ESSENCE. HE SAID HE WOULD PASS A MESSAGE WITHIN THE NEXT DAY OR SO, WELL BEFORE HE LEFT FOR GERMANY ON 8 JUNE. I AGAIN SAID THAT THE MATTER WAS MOST URGENT. HE SAID THAT IT WAS CLEAR THAT I HAD HAD THE MOST PRESSING INSTRUCTIONS: HE WOULD DO HIS BEST.

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