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PRIME MINISTER

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PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
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New Delhi
October 29, 1980

Dear Prime Minister,

Last month the Second Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting for the Asian and Pacific region was held in Delhi. It was a success. There was very frank discussion and interaction which led to a better understanding of problems, especially of the small island countries with which we on this side have not been very familiar. It is good that they had a sense of participation in wider world affairs.

We recognised the growing relevance of economic and technical cooperation in the region. Concrete measures at initiating and expanding such cooperation were outlined. During the First Regional Conference, Working Groups on cooperation in the fields of Trade, Energy, Illicit Drugs and Terrorism were set up. The Conference endorsed the very useful reports of these Groups. It was decided that most of these Groups should continue, with expanded terms of reference in some cases. We also added new areas like Industrial cooperation and Agricultural Research and Development for increased cooperation. Special measures for the small island States were also agreed upon.

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Apart from questions of particular interest to the region, all participants were deeply concerned about the gravity of international economic issues. The situation is particularly critical for developing countries like India. The Conference underlined that the future of all countries, developed or developing, is closely interlinked. Yet there are growing signs of protectionism in affluent countries. It is often forgotten that if developing countries are unable to export to industrialized countries, they will be in no position to import their products. Narrow-minded and chauvinistic policies can only exacerbate or augment problems. While endorsing the recommendations of the Brandt Commission and the Commonwealth Group of Experts, we underlined the need for bold and innovative international action.

The Joint Communique reflects the considerable common ground on many of the world's current problems despite our diverse approaches. We reiterated our opposition to external interference in the affairs of any country in any form whatsoever. We also emphasised the necessity of resolving all problems through peaceful means.

This approach has become increasingly relevant. The crisis in Afghanistan continues and the active

hostilities between Iraq and Iran are a new source for anxiety. We have excellent relations with both countries. It is painful to see them involved in a destructive conflict which not only affects them directly but also has consequences for the rest of the world. We have noted the efforts made by various countries and organisations to help stop the fighting. Unfortunately, no progress has been achieved so far. Special envoys of the Presidents of Iran and Iraq have called on me to explain their respective points of view. We are in touch with Iran and Iraq as also other like-minded nations and sincerely hope that a way out can be found in a manner honourable to both countries.

Some recent events in India have been widely reported in the Press. The disturbances in Moradabad and Aligarh did not follow the pattern of religious riots as we have known them earlier. Initially, it was a confrontation between some people and the police. There is reason to believe that this was deliberately engineered as is being done on one excuse or another in other parts of the country. Later, wild rumours spread, arousing communal passions. Narrow-minded fanatics exploited the situation for their own ends. But we are determined to maintain our tradition of tolerance and are doing everything possible to prevent the recurrence of such trouble and to give relief to all who have suffered.

In my previous regime, we had considerably reduced such incidents. The minorities and poorest sections felt secure in the feeling that Government would stand up for them. My family and I have always been specially concerned about the welfare of our minorities, for we want different religions to co-exist in peace and dignity. This is essential not only on humanitarian grounds but for the economic progress in which all sections must have a fair share. Since 1951 the population of Muslims in India has more than doubled from about 35 million to 80 million. Our Christian population has also increased from 8 million to over 18 million.

The oil crisis and world inflation have placed tremendous burdens on our economy. The lack of a coherent policy in the last three years resulted in further deterioration. In addition, there was drought in many parts of India in 1979. Luckily, during my last regime, we had not only achieved complete self-sufficiency in foodgrains production but had built up buffer stocks of 20 million tonnes of cereals. This helped us to tide over the difficult period last year. We were also able to help some friendly countries in a modest manner.

The stagnation in industrial production is partially due to the bad law and order situation which we inherited

from the previous regime. Lack of discipline and social responsibility are attacking the very vitals of our economy. Anti-social elements, which had been brought under control previously went completely out of hand after the Jayaprakash Narayan agitation. We are still plagued with labour trouble, fomented in many cases by politicians. Recently we have taken some measures to tackle these problems. Within our Constitution, a set of legal rules has been framed to enable action against anti-social elements so that peace between various religious communities, industrial workers and other sections of society can be effectively maintained for the general good. The problems India faces are particular to our society. Solutions must, naturally, be in response to these particular problems. Sometimes these measures are misunderstood and presented out of context. This is due to a lack of understanding of the Indian situation. But it is the responsibility of every elected government to safeguard the lives and liberty of the vast masses of people against encroachment by a minuscule minority of anti-social elements. We have taken care to ensure that the fundamental freedoms of the masses are safeguarded. There has now been some improvement in the law and order situation and in the industrial field. We are confident that production in agricultural field will also continue to register satisfactory growth.

It was a pleasure to meet your representative, Lord Greenhill. We do need to make an effort to improve our relations in various fields. Thank you for taking the trouble of introducing our new High Commissioner to important individuals, particularly in the public media. With the continued cooperation of your Government, I hope the High Commissioner will be able to strengthen our relations. We look forward to Prince Charles' visit; this will be another step forward.

We shall be glad to welcome you in India next April. However, I must warn you that this time of year is exceedingly hot and dusty. Would it not be possible for you to come earlier? I have asked our Ministry of External Affairs to finalize necessary details about dates etc. in consultation with your Foreign Office.

Yours sincerely,

Indira Gandhi

(Indira Gandhi)

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP,
Prime Minister and First Lord of Treasury
and Minister for the Civil Service,
London, U.K.