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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

30 March 1981

Dear Michael,

Proposed Visit by the Prime Minister to the Bhabha Atomic
Research Centre in India

Your letter of 25 March to Roderic Lyne recorded that the Prime Minister, having seen FCO telegram number 7 and Delhi telegram number 1 to Maastricht, saw no difficulty about visiting BARC. These telegrams did not however spell out in detail the arguments against a visit. You ought to be aware of these before Sir John Thomson finally confirms arrangements with the Indians, in case the Prime Minister feels that they put the proposal in enough of a new light for her to want to take a different view.

Key production facilities at BARC are not subject to international safeguards. India's 1974 nuclear test almost certainly used plutonium separated there from fuel irradiated there. Much of the necessary research also took place there. The newly appointed Head of BARC was himself closely associated with the 1974 test. The safeguarding of all nuclear facilities is the central element of efforts to contain nuclear proliferation. A Prime Ministerial visit to an unsafeguarded facility in India would weaken our argument that both India and Pakistan should bring their remaining nuclear facilities under international safeguards. Lord Carrington last week raised with President Zia the adverse effects of a test by them on our efforts to give them further support. Finally, the Americans have recently shared with us photographic evidence consistent with preparation for a further Indian test. (There is a piece in this week's Red Book examining this evidence). A further test might be less directly linked with BARC than that in 1974, but the role of BARC in the overall Indian programme would undoubtedly receive further publicity.

Against this there are the arguments in favour, set out by Sir John Thomson and already seen by the Prime Minister. A visit has been proposed by the Indians, and it would be awkward to turn it down. It

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would be well received (not least by Mrs Gandhi who is the responsible Minister). The High Commissioner advises us that other distinguished visitors have been there. The Centre has a high prestige of which the Indians are proud, and much of its work is undoubtedly civil.

On balance we do not recommend that the Prime Minister should now decide against a visit to BARC. But the arguments are finely balanced and before arrangements are finalised we believe the Prime Minister will wish to see the relevant considerations more fully set out than they have been in the previous correspondence.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Francis Richards".

(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street

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