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PRIME MINISTER

YOUR VISIT TO INDIA
VOUCHER QUOTA FOR UNITED KINGDOM PASSPORT HOLDERS
IN INDIA

Play C
Play D
← The background to this matter was set out in my minute to you of 11th March and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's letter of 13th March. The Indians have expressed concern about the waiting times for United Kingdom passport holders (U.K.P.H) in India seeking to come to the United Kingdom. The waiting times are now over five years and the F.C.O. estimate that they will eventually reach a maximum of nine and a half years. An increase in the Indian quota will be reflected in the settlement figures and therefore I recommended that you should offer a modest increase in the quota from 600 to 800 (the precise figures not being disclosed) only if you were asked to do so by Mrs. Gandhi. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office recommended that the Indian quota should be doubled in advance of your visit because of the danger to the success of the visit and to contracts being negotiated. You concluded that you should offer a modest increase if asked by Mrs. Gandhi.

Play E? You will now have seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 26th March, in which he refers to the serious consequences he believes will follow for your visit and for our commercial prospects unless a substantial concession is made soon. He remains of the view that the quota should be doubled from 600 to 1,200.

Having looked at the matter again, my own view is still as recommended in my previous minute. However, you will wish to examine the options carefully. I set out below some considerations which you may wish to take into account in reaching a decision.

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An increase of 600 in the Indian quota would be reflected by an increase of about 1,800 in the numbers accepted for settlement under the voucher scheme, since each voucher holder has an average of two dependants. The net increase in those coming here from India would be less because there would be no increase in the number of entry clearance officers; some officers now processing applications from wives and other dependants seeking to join people in the United Kingdom would be diverted to work on special voucher applications. The precise adjustments would be a matter for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary suggests that we ought to be able to arrange administratively that there is no significant increase in the Indian immigration figure. However, it would be important to guard against the charge that we were deliberately allowing the queue of wives and others to lengthen in order to find offsetting adjustments in the settlement figures.

The benefits to be derived from an increase would depend largely on the way in which the decision was conveyed to the Indians. This presents difficulties, since the size of the increase could not be disclosed. If the quota were doubled, for instance, the Indians could not be told in those precise terms. There is no readily attractive way of presenting such an increase in terms of waiting times, because the times would in fact lengthen until 1984. (In order to peg waiting times at their present level much higher increases would have to be offered).

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The Control of Immigration Statistics, published quarterly, show the total number of U.K.P.H. accepted for settlement. They do not show separately the numbers coming from each country. Nevertheless informed opinion will be able to calculate in broad terms the size of the increase in the quota for India.

The total number of U.K.P.H. accepted for settlement has declined in recent years because the global quota has not been filled. A reallocation of vouchers to India within the global total will therefore result in an increase in the total number of U.K.P.H. accepted for settlement, and as mentioned above, this group is identifiable in the statistics as a separate category.

If the Indian quota were increased - whether to 800 or to 1,200 - this would not necessarily mean that this year's settlement figure would be higher than last year's. There are many factors affecting the figures and last year's total included 6,000 refugees from South East Asia. However the total number of those accepted for settlement from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan could be up. This figure is given separately in the statistics. In recent years it has been falling and in 1980 it dropped by more than 3,000 (1979: 37,000 1980: 33,700). The New Commonwealth and Pakistan figure is of course one which our supporters will be studying carefully.

If you decide to increase the quota in advance of your visit, as the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary would prefer, you may wish to consider what form of announcement should be made here. There have been recent Questions asking for the quota to be increased, to which we have replied that the quota is kept under review. We could say that the quota had been increased when a Question is next asked; otherwise the information could be given in reply to an arranged Question. In either event, it would be important to emphasise that the global quota was not being increased.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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30 March 1981