

RESTRICTED

SUBJECT

RECORD OF A CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER BY INDIAN MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT ON THURSDAY 16 APRIL 1981 AT 1600 HOURS AT
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI

*of Matter
India - Pt. 2: UK/Indian
Relations*

The Prime Minister held a meeting at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 16 April with the following Indian Members of Parliament from the Congress (1) Party:-

Mr. Eduardo Faleiro: Goa
Dr. Shanker Sharma: Madhya Pradesh
Mrs. S. Kaur: Punjab
Mr. N.K. Sharma: Rajasthan
Mr. R.L. Bhatia: Punjab
Mr. B. Gadjil: Maharashtra
Mr. J. Tytler: Delhi
Mrs. M. Sultan: Madhya Pradesh
Dr. Lokesh Chandra

After being welcomed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Faleiro said that he and his colleagues had been glad when they heard that the Prime Minister was coming to India. They had been charmed by her performance on television the previous evening. Their hope was that Indo-British relations, which were already good, should be further improved. However, there were one or two problems on which they wished to express their views, in particular the question of the British Nationality Bill and of the "hostile treatment" of Indian visitors arriving at Heathrow. They recognised that the Nationality Bill was a matter lying entirely within the prerogative of the British Parliament. He then invited Dr. Shanker Sharma to speak.

Dr. Shanker Sharma (a former Minister of Communications) said that his starting point was the belief, which he and many Indians shared, that the British people had a tradition of liberal thought and a liberal approach to all problems. The Indians were therefore upset if anything happened which conflicted with their view of Britain. In this spirit he wished to bring to the Prime Minister's notice that there were in India some 40,000 people of Indian origin who had come from the former British Colonies after they became independent. Although they held British passports it had been recognised that they could not all be admitted to Britain at once, and there was an understanding that they should come to India in the meantime, but would be able to enter the United Kingdom in due course. They now found that only about 500 (annually) were admitted and even then with some difficulty. This created a problem. He and his colleagues received many letters and

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petitions, and the issue was used by other political parties to embarrass the Congress (I) Party.

He hoped the Prime Minister would find a solution to the problem and to the problem of "those born afterwards" (presumably a reference to the children of UKPH born after enactment of the Bill). This would be in the larger interests of Indo-British relations and would enhance the reputation of Britain in the minds of right-thinking Indians. They had a warm feeling about Britain which they wished to treasure.

There was also the question of harrassment of visitors at Heathrow which he was sure the Prime Minister and her government did not condone. He understood that no visa was needed by Indian visitors, but he advised people who approached him to take a letter with them in order to avoid embarrassment. India had, he believed, more English speaking people than any other Commonwealth country except Britain herself. Indo-British friendship was an asset for India and he hoped also for Britain.

In reply, the Prime Minister stressed that those people who were permanently settled in Britain would not be affected by the new legislation. There were about half a million people of Indian origin who now belonged to Britain and were British citizens because they had their permanent home there. Furthermore the British Government had responded swiftly to concerns expressed by the Indian Government over certain aspects of the Bill and as a result had introduced 4 major amendments. The effect of these was:

- (a) to enable British citizens who had acquired their citizenship by grant rather than by birth to transmit it in the same way as British citizens by birth;
- (b) to provide for children born in Britain to parents neither of whom were British and neither of whom were permanently settled in Britain to acquire British citizenship by registration after they had lived for 10 years from birth in the United Kingdom;

/ (c)

- (c) to extend the grace period for registration of those with an entitlement to British citizenship through registration from 2 years to 5 years;
- (d) to provide British Overseas Citizens, Citizens of Dependent Territories, British Subjects under the Bill and British Protected Persons with an entitlement to be registered as British citizens after they had lived for 5 years in Britain. This was a major improvement on the arrangements for them as originally drafted.

The Prime Minister stressed that there was nothing racial or religious in the Bill, and that she had been greatly hurt by allegations to the contrary.

As regards UKPH, the Prime Minister pointed out that their existing right to come to the United Kingdom was not affected adversely by the Bill. She accepted that the number allowed in was lower than it had been, but pointed out that there were now 2½ million unemployed in Britain, and that last year the UK had accepted for settlement from the new Commonwealth 35,000 people who came in as dependants, and that another 30,000 had chosen to register as British citizens. She pointed out that the figure of 500 UKPH admitted for entry was misleading because it did not include their dependants who were also allowed in. An increase in numbers would not make for racial harmony. Until the events in Brixton a few days earlier, she had been pleased with the way things were going. The West Indians posed a particular problem because, unlike people from the Sub-Continent, they had no tradition as small businessmen and could not easily find employment. She was deeply concerned and shocked by what had taken place in Brixton, and had agreed with the Home Secretary to set up an inquiry under an eminent judge in order to try to ensure that it never happened again.

Reverting to the UKPH question the Prime Minister said that because of high unemployment this was not the time to increase the quota. The only way to do this would be by taking in UKPH

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instead of dependants of people already settled in Britain. This would cause great hardship to some families.

The Prime Minister went on to say, in relation to the allegations of harrassment at Heathrow, that the isolated "virginity test" case should never have happened and arrangements had been made to prevent it happening again. X-rays had occasionally been used for age assessment where other documentation was lacking, but that practice had now been suspended. The High Commissioner pointed out that arrangements had now been made for the Indian High Commission to be contacted from Heathrow in cases of difficulty involving Indian citizens. In answer to a question about sterilisation of women, the Prime Minister replied that there was no such thing as compulsory sterilisation in Britain. For such an operation to take place it was necessary to have the consent not only of the woman concerned but also of her husband. Sir John Graham said that the Deputy High Commissioner at the Indian High Commission in London had told him that the report filed on this subject by an Indian correspondent in London was incorrect and that the journalist concerned had admitted that he had got it wrong.

The Prime Minister went on to point out that of the 190,000 visitors to the UK from India last year only about 6 in a thousand had been turned back; this was a smaller percentage than from many other countries. She advised prospective visitors to the United Kingdom to come with a letter or an entry certificate. The immigration officials did an excellent job in the face of great difficulties. For example, she had recently investigated a case involving a family in her constituency who had complained about the way in which a relative had been questioned on arrival. Her enquiries had revealed that 2 other members of the family who had earlier entered the UK had both overstayed. In such circumstances it was not unnatural that an immigration official should be suspicious.

In answer to a question from one of the MPs, the Prime Minister said that it was necessary to be firm sometimes and at the same time to be fair and to be seen to be fair. It was easy always to say 'yes' but this did not solve any problems. In response to a query about the lack of any provision in the proposed legislation for appeals in naturalisation cases it was pointed out that this was not normally provided in the citizenship legislation of other countries. It did not exist in India.

Ans

18 April, 1981