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27 May 1981

*Dear Prime Minister,*

As preparations enter their final phase for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Melbourne from 30 September to 7 October 1981, I write to seek your views on the subjects which you would like to see discussed and to offer some preliminary ideas for your consideration.

I do so against a background in which the Commonwealth's established capacity for consensus building is perhaps more widely recognised and valued than ever before - and not just by member Governments but by the international community as a whole. Significantly, Melbourne will be the first major consultation at the highest level of 'North' and 'South' anywhere in the world since Lusaka. The challenge to the Commonwealth to improve the prospects for global harmony through its unique facility for direct and informal discussion between Heads of Government could hardly be more pointed than at this moment of acute difficulty for many countries and with the larger crises of the '80s looming ahead. In responding to that challenge, Heads of Government will, I am sure, be reinforced by recollections of the achievements of Lusaka and of Commonwealth roles since then.

On the political front it clearly is a time of unusual danger. The decline of detente, the acceleration of the arms race, the hardening of the policies of the superpowers across the board, the persistence of such areas of tension as Afghanistan and Kampuchea and the emergence of new flashpoints cannot but be matters of grave concern.

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And, as the set-back to the SALT process and the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea illustrate, there is the danger of an unravelling process which could further aggravate political tensions and difficulties. Some Commonwealth countries feel directly affected by particular situations, but a worsening of the political climate and threats to peace affect all nations. Heads of Government will no doubt wish to consider these developments in their review of the world political situation while recognising that, in a world in which issues become ever more closely inter-linked, they are not without relevance for development and international economic co-operation generally.

Zimbabwe's independence after long years of travail was a source of particular pride and satisfaction to the Commonwealth. Its presence at Melbourne will be a reminder of the unfinished business of Southern Africa. After years of patient negotiation, Namibia's progress to independence and Commonwealth membership has now suffered a major set-back; while much will obviously depend on events over the next few months, the situation inevitably occasions grave concern. Within South Africa, apartheid continues to constitute an affront to the world community, undermining the prospects for peace and stability of the entire region. Recalling the Lusaka Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice, and the earlier and more particular Gleneagles Agreement, Heads of Government will, I am sure, wish to consider urgent ways and means of shaping events towards internationally agreed objectives. And a similar wish will certainly obtain in relation to the situation in Cyprus which has continued to defy resolution.

On the economic side, I am keenly aware of the opportunity which the Melbourne Meeting presents to focus upon the crisis which affects the world economy in general and the developing countries in particular and to consider what measures Commonwealth countries, individually and collectively, might take in the context of broader international action to help improve the situation. The timing of the Melbourne discussions - after the Ottawa Summit of the major industrialised nations (in July) and prior to the summit of world leaders of both industrialised and developing countries in Mexico (later in October) - invests Melbourne with added significance.

Since Heads of Government last met in Lusaka two years ago, the international economic situation has unquestionably deteriorated, manifesting itself in massive economic problems and enlarging poverty and instability in the developing 'South' and rising unemployment and falling output in the industrialised 'North'. At such a time when the need for sustained action at the global level has never been greater, individual Governments are tending to turn



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inwards, and negotiations on the form and substance of that action remain painfully deadlocked.

At Lusaka, Heads of Government agreed on a study by an independent group of experts with a view to identifying specific measures to reduce or eliminate as a matter of urgency constraints on structural change and economic growth in both developed and developing countries. The Report of the Expert Group led by Professor Arndt of Australia ('The World Economic Crisis'), was circulated to the 11th Special Session of the United Nations last year and has received much attention. With appropriate updating, which the Secretariat will provide, the Report provides an eminently suitable starting point for the discussions at Melbourne. In the context of prevailing conditions in the world economy, food, energy, trade and financial flows would seem to emerge as critical issues for attention.

As in the past, the Commonwealth, by virtue of its special capacity to view the world situation from both North and South can lend a much needed impetus to the processes of global negotiation. By helping to point the way forward, Commonwealth leaders can contribute to progress at the Mexico Summit and in the 'Global Round'. I would welcome your thoughts on how Melbourne might best serve these purposes.

Finally, there is the important area of functional co-operation. The Commonwealth's capacity to contribute to wider global issues is of course rooted in and sustained by practical co-operation between Commonwealth countries themselves. Past Heads of Government meetings have successively enlarged the scope of such endeavours particularly in the field of development. It was in this spirit that Lusaka initiated a programme of industrial co-operation and already gratifying progress has been made in initiating new industrial projects in a number of countries. In this vein and responsive to current needs, I venture to suggest a few areas of special emphasis at Melbourne. These involve, in the main, not the initiation of new programmes but the strengthening of existing ones:

- I have mentioned 'food' as one of the global issues to which Heads of Government might pay particular attention. I know it is high among the concerns of many leaders. There may well be important practical ways in which the Commonwealth can respond to these concerns and the needs they reflect. Enhanced co-operation in food production in particular can be of immense value to many Commonwealth countries facing serious food deficits and the prospect of major global food shortages. At their recent meeting in Dacca, Commonwealth Agricultural Ministers urged an enlarged Commonwealth role in



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this area including measures to harness Commonwealth experience and skills in a manner that could yield practical results. I propose, therefore, to submit for consideration some specific proposals in this respect.

- Heads of Government of the Asia-Pacific region held their second meeting in September 1980 in New Delhi and the evolution of this important regional initiative will be of interest to the Commonwealth as a whole, as will other efforts at regional co-operation involving Commonwealth countries - one of which, the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) emerged since Lusaka.
- Lusaka gave emphasis to special programmes of assistance to our island developing and specially disadvantaged member countries, a theme which was pursued further at the regional meeting in New Delhi. Commonwealth work in this area has been essentially pioneering and it requires reinforcement. It would be particularly helpful to consider how bilateral and multilateral programmes may be strengthened and given greater momentum, responsive to the wishes of the countries concerned.

There will be need, too, to review or carry forward a number of specific decisions that were taken at Lusaka or at subsequent Ministerial Meetings:

- Heads of Government will have before them the Report of the Working Party on Human Rights which seeks to respond to its mandate in this important but sensitive area.
- Heads of Government will also have before them a Report of the Commonwealth Committee on Communication and the Media as well as a Report on the proposal for a Commonwealth Film and Television Institute.
- The ongoing work and resource problems of the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the Commonwealth Foundation will require close attention if they are to continue to fulfil the purposes for which they were established.



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- At their meeting in Sri Lanka in August 1980, Commonwealth Education Ministers requested me to convene a Consultative Group to examine ways in which student mobility between Commonwealth countries could be maintained and fostered. The Group's recommendations are now before Education Ministers but in view of the urgency and importance of the matter, Heads of Government may wish to give some attention to it at Melbourne.

Underpinning all these activities, and indeed the Secretariat's entire operational capability in the field of development, is the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. Despite impressive achievements, it is a matter of major concern that the last two years have seen a decline in real terms in the Fund's resources and a corresponding diminution in its capacity to meet the needs of member countries. That this should have happened during a period of sustained Commonwealth achievement on the world stage is all the more disquieting. I very much hope that at Melbourne Heads of Government will attach importance to reversing this trend and will consider favourably the Report of the Working Party on CFTC Resources set up by Finance Ministers last September. I cannot emphasise too strongly the intimate link between the fortunes of the Fund and the elan of the Commonwealth connection, which will be weakened if the Fund declines. The amounts involved are relatively small but the returns are of disproportionate value and significance. For the major contributors to the Fund it is much less a question of additional resources than of priorities within existing development assistance programmes. Melbourne will offer an opportunity to respond in priority terms to what the Commonwealth relationship both needs and deserves.

Separately, a more general question has been raised about the possibility of greater co-operation in the cultural sphere. The Commonwealth Institute hopes Heads of Government will take note of its work and consider ways in which it could be of greater service to Governments; and the recently formed Commonwealth Arts Organisation seeks official support. I would welcome your guidance.

As I indicated earlier, these are preliminary thoughts on the broad contents of the agenda, based on my assessment of the current concerns of Commonwealth Governments. I assume Heads of Government will wish the agenda's actual format to follow the successful pattern of recent Meetings, with broad and flexible headings under which specific topics can be inscribed.

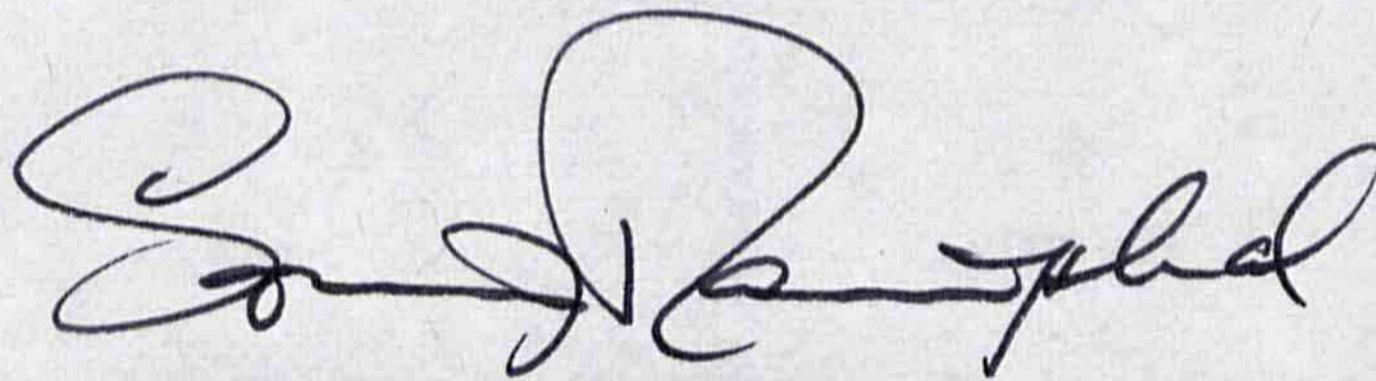


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I shall be grateful to have your views, if possible by mid-July, along with an indication whether it will be your intention to present any papers to the Meeting. In the light of the responses I receive, I hope to be able to circulate an annotated draft agenda in the first week of August.

Meanwhile, having just returned from Canberra, I am glad to be able to report to you on the excellence of the arrangements for the Meeting, and how much effort and care the Australian Government has devoted to them. You are assured of a warm welcome and of facilities designed to make your consultations as productive as possible.

With deep respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Shridath S Ramphal'. The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored paper. Below the signature is a short horizontal line.

Shridath S Ramphal