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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

29 April, 1981

Dear Mr. Paul,

Thank you for your letter of 23 April. It was very good of you to write.

I greatly enjoyed my visit to India and my talks with Mrs. Gandhi. I much regretted the line taken by the Press. Your letter to The Times seems to me to be just right.

I found the visit very interesting and rewarding. Mrs. Gandhi was marvellous and went out of her way to give me her time and attention. After Delhi we went to Bombay where the visit was a great success.

Warm regards,

Swraj Paul, Esq.

Yours sincerely  
Margaret Thatcher

MB

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SP/EBA/CH

23 April 1981

My dear Prime Minister,

It was a great honour for me to receive your telephone call before you left for India. My small son who was hearing the Chequers operator for the first time will remember it all his life.

On your return I write to say how much I hope you enjoyed your visit to the country of my birth and to express my heartfelt wish that you have been able to strengthen relations with India. I was delighted to hear from my friends in Delhi how well your talks had gone with Mrs Indira Gandhi.

I am pained to see the negative press comments about your visit. For reasons best known to themselves the press have tried to highlight the differences rather than the achievements of the visit.

I had felt uneasy from the start, when I saw a B.B.C. film report on India, almost on the eve of your visit, which unfortunately set the tone for the press in India who were quick to take a cue from their brethren in Fleet Street. I did mention this to you on the telephone.

In an effort to set the record straight, Mr Eldon Griffiths and I have written to The Times as attached. I hope they will print the letter soon and if so I will arrange for the text to be widely circulated in India.

I very strongly believe that the visit has done an immense amount of good and has cleared the air for future good relations between the two countries.

Meanwhile may I say that if there is any way in which I can help in your future relations with India, or, nearer home in your Government's dealings with the Indian community in Britain, I shall be glad to do all I can.

The dearest wish of my family and myself is to improve relations between the people of both my countries.

Sincerely yours

Swraj Paul

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EG/SP/EBA/IBA

Letters Editor  
The Times  
New Printing House Square  
Grays Inn Road  
London WC1

23 April 1981

Sir:

On the Prime Minister's return from India and the Gulf, the impression created by much of the press and TV coverage is that her tour of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates was a diplomatic and commercial success whereas her talks in Delhi and Bombay achieved little or nothing. Few people will quarrel with this assessment of Mrs Thatcher's visit to the Gulf but insofar as India is concerned, we have reason to believe that the media got it wrong.

That Mrs Thatcher and Mrs Gandhi would not see eye to eye over a wide range of East-West issues - Afghanistan, Poland, the U.S. intervention force - was predictable and predicted. And the reasons are not far to seek. Modern India, under almost any Government, is bound to give high priority to good relations with the Soviet Union - just as Britain under any Government we can foresee, is apt to be broadly pro-American.

Mrs Gandhi too is just as sensitive about Pakistan and suspicious of Washington's intentions as Mrs Thatcher is bound to be sensitive about Ireland and suspicious of Moscow's intentions. On our own more modest level, we too disagree about the relative merits and demerits of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., but this in no way diminishes our common commitment to Indo-British understanding.

So it was, as we understand it, when the two Prime Ministers met in New Delhi, both leaders freely and openly stated their positions on East-West relations. Both came away with an enhanced appreciation of the other's views and the factors that lie behind them. Why such frank exchanges should have been reported as a "row", much less a "failure" is beyond us. Is it not precisely the function of high level talks, especially between Commonwealth leaders, to deepen understanding and, perhaps, to find common ground?

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23 April 1981

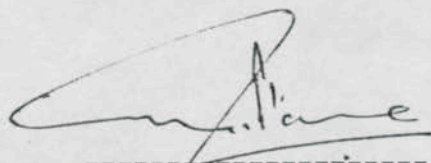
This, we are informed, is exactly what happened when the talks turned to bilateral matters. Mrs Gandhi can be assumed to have accurately represented the strong feelings of her fellow countrymen about Britain's Nationality Bill. And Mrs Thatcher, no less accurately, will have explained its objectives, replying, as she was surely entitled to, the wilder allegations that have appeared in the Indian press. But on neither side was there any hint of interference in the other's internal affairs. Exactly as one might expect from the most experienced of the Commonwealth's Heads of Government, Mrs Gandhi accepts that Britain's nationality rules are the exclusive province of the British Parliament, and no other. Mrs Thatcher, by the same token, was at pains to avoid any appearance of interference in India's own decisions on such strictly internal matters as population control or constitutional changes - notwithstanding Fleet Street's erstwhile preoccupation with them. Where we hope - and believe - that the Prime Ministers had their most useful exchanges was in the field of bilateral commerce. Both are well aware of the potential for vastly increased trade between an India that needs British technology, investments, and buying power, e.g. for tea and light engineering goods, and a Britain which can benefit enormously from 700 million Indians growing ability to absorb British exports - be they steel plants, jet aircraft, telephone exchanges or support for oil exploration.

To the extent that the press in both countries concentrated, as is their wont, on the well rehearsed differences rather than on these new opportunities, a totally misleading impression has been given of Mrs Thatcher's visit to India. Insofar as this serves to impede trade and investment, or to worsen race relations in certain parts of Britain, the Indo-British Association will be the first to regret it. Fortunately, both our Prime Ministers are too experienced and too confident of their personal relationships to be greatly discomfited. It is after all, barely two years since the British press, including The Times, was condemning Mrs Gandhi as a "dictator...criminal... and (pace Bernard Levin) a murderer!" To her credit, Mrs Gandhi has brushed aside these fatuous objurgations as surely as Mrs Thatcher will dismiss the absurd allegations that she is a "racist...fascist...and a warmonger" that have appeared in the Indian press.

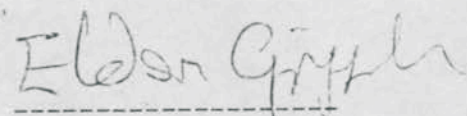
That British relations with India need constant care and attention, we have never doubted; indeed, in no small way we ourselves never cease working to improve them. So in rejecting, as we must, the misleading coverage of the British Prime Minister's visit that has been projected both in the Indian and British media, we take comfort in the abiding things that link our two countries together: the inter-penetration of so much Indian and British culture; the inter-dependence of a great deal of British and Indian commerce; in our shared belief in the rule of law and Parliamentary election; above all, the human relationships personified by a million graves in India and a million or more people of Indian origin who have made their homes in Britain and contribute so much to this country's economic and social development.

The most important aspect of Mrs Thatcher's visit to India was that it symbolised this abiding friendship. Ill-informed press reports can make things more difficult: but they cannot and must not be allowed to take this friendship away.

Yours faithfully



Swraj Paul  
Chairman



Eldon Griffiths, MP  
Vice-Chairman