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DESKBY 160930Z

FM DELHI 161010Z MAR 82

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 292 OF 16 MARCH

INFO IMMEDIATE BOMBAY, CALCUTTA (ACTIONED)

MY TELNO 280

FESTIVAL OF INDIA: WORK PERMITS

1. IN THE LIGHT OF THE RECENT DIFFICULTIES I WOULD BE GRATEFUL IF ALL CONCERNED WOULD RECONSIDER URGENTLY AND IN DETAIL THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ISSUING WORK PERMITS TO FESTIVAL ARTISTS SET OUT IN YOUR TELNO 217 WHICH WERE DECIDED UPON BEFORE WE HAD AN INDICATION OF JUST HOW SENSITIVE THIS ISSUE WOULD BECOME HERE.

2. ALTHOUGH THE INDIAN AUTHORITIES ARE NOW CLEARLY ANXIOUS TO CO-OPERATE AND PREVENT THIS ISSUE FROM ESCALATING, THEIR FUTURE ATTITUDE WILL INEVITABLY BE INFLUENCED BY ANY FURTHER PUBLIC PRESSURE IN THE PRESS OR PARLIAMENT. THEY LIKE US NOW SEE THE NEED TO PREVENT AN INCIDENT. I HAVE BEEN COMPLIMENTED BY SEVERAL OF THEM ON THE WAY I HANDLED THIS QUESTION AT A PRESS CONFERENCE HERE (AND I UNDERSTAND THAT MY COMMENTS HAVE BEEN CARRIED EXTENSIVELY BY BOTH RADIO AND TV) BUT UNDERLYING THESE COMPLIMENTS IS THE STRONG IMPLICATION THAT BRITISH POLITESSE MAY YET PROVE TO HAVE DISGUISED AN UGLY REALITY.

3. MOREOVER, AS THE FIRST PARTY OF ARTISTS, SUBBULAKSHMI AND HER GROUP, WILL BE LEAVING BOMBAY ON 20 MARCH (BCD TELEX OF 15 MARCH TO THE FESTIVAL OFFICE); THERE IS A REAL RISK THAT THE PRESS MAY TRY TO MAKE A STORY OF THIS ON THE EVE OF MRS GANDHI'S ARRIVAL IN THE UK, OR DURING HER VISIT. IN MY VIEW THIS WOULD PROVIDE EXACTLY THE SORT OF SILLY ISSUE WHICH COULD SOUR THE WHOLE ATMOSPHERE OF THE VISIT.

4. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, I WOULD RECOMMEND MOST STRONGLY THAT:

(A) IF IT IS ABSOLUTELY OUT OF THE QUESTION, DESPITE THE RISKS INVOLVED, TO WAIVE THE NEED FOR WORK PERMITS FOR THE OFFICIALLY SPONSORED INDIAN ARTISTS (THOUGH I AND THE INDIANS WOULD FIND THIS SURPRISING IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN DONE ON OCCASIONS IN THE PAST), WE SHOULD AS A MINIMUM AVOID HANDLING WORK PERMITS TO THE INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS ON THEIR ARRIVAL AND INSTEAD HOLD THEM ALL AT THE FESTIVAL OFFICE AS THE AGENT WHICH APPLIED FOR THE WORK PERMITS. AS YOU KNOW ONE OF THE WAYS BY WHICH WE HAVE SO FAR OVERCOME THE WORK PERMIT PROBLEM HERE IS BY THE INDIAN SIDE SAYING THAT THEY ARE NOT "APPLYING FOR" PERMITS. IT WILL, I AM SURE, BE IMPORTANT TO ADD THAT INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS WILL "NOT BE GIVEN" PERMITS.

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(B) WE MUST AVOID STAMPING THE OFFICIAL ARTISTS' PASSPORTS WITH THE EMPLOYMENT/BUSINESS CONDITION STAMP (CODE 2 IN THE IMMIGRATION GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS CHAPTER 5.8.3) WHICH IS LIKELY TO BE REPRESENTED BY THE INDIAN PRESS (NOT LEAST BY THEIR LONDON CORRESPONDENTS) AS BEING AS DISTASTEFUL AS THE WORK PERMIT ITSELF. INSTEAD I RECOMMEND THAT WE SHOULD USE THE LIMITED LEAVE CONDITION STAMP (CODE 1) WHICH MAKES NO REFERENCE TO EMPLOYMENT. YOU SHOULD KNOW INCIDENTALLY THAT IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT MOST, IF NOT ALL, OF THE OFFICIAL ARTISTS TRAVELLING WILL HOLD OFFICIAL INDIAN PASSPORTS, DESPITE MACRAE'S EXPLANATION TO INDIA HOUSE REPORTED IN YOUR TELNO 262.

(C) A LIAISON OFFICER SHOULD BE APPOINTED FROM THE IMMIGRATION STAFF AT HEATHROW TO BE SPECIFICALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SMOOTH ENTRY OF FESTIVAL PERFORMERS. HE WOULD THEREFORE HAVE TO BE BRIEFED ON ALL THE VARIOUS FESTIVAL EVENTS SO THAT HE COULD ACT AS THE CLEARING POINT FOR ALL FESTIVAL QUERIES. WE WOULD RECOMMEND GRAHAM BOILING, INSPECTOR OF IMMIGRATION AT TERMINAL 3 WHO, AS A FORMER MEMBER OF THE HIGH COMMISSION HERE, IS VERY FAMILIAR WITH INDIAN SENSITIVITIES. TO STATE THE OBVIOUS A KEY FACTOR IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS PROBLEM WILL BE THE WAY EACH INDIVIDUAL ARTIST IS RECEIVED AT HEATHROW.

(D) IN ORDER TO AID IDENTIFICATION, THE BRITISH COUNCIL WILL ISSUE ALL THOSE ARTISTS PARTICIPATING IN THE FESTIVAL OF WHOM THEY HAVE DETAILS WITH A LETTER STATING THAT HE OR SHE IS PROCEEDING TO BRITAIN IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FESTIVAL OF INDIA AND THAT IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED IF HE OR SHE COULD BE GIVEN ALL POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE ON ARRIVAL.

5. IN VIEW OF PARAS 2 AND 3 PLEASE COPY THIS TELEGRAM TO COLES, NO 10.

6. SEE MIFT.

THOMSON

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PS/MR HURD
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