

# PRESS OFFICE BULLETIN

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## THE POPE'S VISIT

Sir Mark Heath, our Ambassador to the Holy See, has informed the Vatican that the Government would naturally be disappointed if the Pope decided not to visit Britain. By coming to this country the Pope would not, in the Government's view, demonstrate any particular stand on the Falkland Islands crisis. But a decision not to come would inevitably give encouragement to those who seek to achieve their objectives by the use of armed aggression. The visit is of course pastoral at the invitation of the Roman Catholic hierarchies in England, Wales and Scotland. The British Government welcomed the visit but was not involved in the arrangements.

Our Ambassador told the Vatican that if the Pope felt it appropriate and thought it would enable him to maintain his visit the Government would be ready to distance itself even further from the visit than at present envisaged. The Government would therefore be ready to consider changes concerning its own involvement in the visit.

We were awaiting the Pope's decision on whether or not to go ahead with his visit. It may come today.

There are rumours that the Prime Minister sent a hand written letter to the Pope. These can be denied. She has not.

### What was the likely Government involvement?

The normal courtesies would be extended to the Pope; he would be met by a Minister on arrival and departure and the Government would probably be represented at some events in his programme.

### Did the Prime Minister plan to see him?

She expected to see the Pope. This would have been a private meeting during a reception hosted by Archbishop Hume.

### What about the Queen?

You should ask the Palace, but we understand the Queen would still be pleased to receive the Pope during his visit.

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