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DESKBY 131300Z

FM NEW DELHI 131155Z JUN 84

TO IMMEDIATE DESKBY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 502 OF 13 JUNE 1984

INFO BOMBAY (ACTIONED), ISLAMABAD, DHAKA, COLOMBO, KATHMANDU

INFO SAVING CALCUTTA AND MADRAS (BOTH ACTIONED)

MY TELNO 482 PARA 6

UK/INDIA RELATIONS: INTRODUCTION OF VISA REGIME

1. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY (PUS EQUIVALENT) SUMMONED ME THIS AFTERNOON TO SAY THAT VERY RELUCTANTLY THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO INTRODUCE A VISA REQUIREMENT FOR UK PASSPORT HOLDERS ARRIVING IN INDIA WITH EFFECT FROM MIDNIGHT 14-15 JUNE. HE SAID THAT THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN AFTER MUCH DELIBERATION AND WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE, BUT WAS FELT TO BE NECESSARY ON SECURITY GROUNDS. THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT WAS CONTINUING TO RECEIVE REPORTS WHICH THEY WERE BOUND TO VIEW WITH DEEP CONCERN AND GRAVITY ABOUT PEOPLE OF INDIAN ORIGIN RESIDENT IN BRITAIN HATCHING PLOTS AGAINST INDIA. THEY THEREFORE FELT IT ESSENTIAL TO INTRODUCE SOME CONTROL OVER THE ENTRY OF SUCH PEOPLE INTO INDIA. NONE AT PRESENT EXISTED.

2. RASGOTRA SAID THAT IT WAS VERY FAR FROM BEING THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO SEVER OR EVEN TO MAKE DIFFICULT THE NORMAL RUN OF CONTACTS FOR BUSINESS, TOURISM, CULTURAL MATTERS ETC BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. INDIAN MISSIONS IN THE UK WOULD DO WHATEVER WAS NECESSARY, AND WOULD BE ABLE TO ISSUE VISAS FOR SUCH VISITORS IN 24 HOURS. ALTERNATIVELY VISAS COULD BE ISSUED ON ARRIVAL, PROVIDED WE HAD FOREWARNED THE INDIAN AUTHORITIES. HE INVITED US TO LET THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT KNOW OF ANY PEOPLE, OR EVEN CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE, FOR WHICH WE WOULD WISH SPECIAL FACILITATION TO BE AVAILABLE.

3. RASGOTRA SAID THAT THE INDIAN AUTHORITIES WOULD GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO HELP OVER UK PASSPORT HOLDERS ALREADY IN INDIA. HE ALSO SAID THAT THEY DID NOT WISH TO INCONVENIENCE PEOPLE CAUGHT BETWEEN THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NEW REGIME AND ITS INTRODUCTION, AND SUITABLE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS WOULD BE MADE.

4. I EXPRESSED THE GREATEST CONCERN THAT THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT HAD FELT IT NECESSARY TO INTRODUCE SUCH A GRAVE MEASURE. IT WAS BOUND TO HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT ON EXCHANGES BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE COMMERCIAL FIELD AND THE MANY OTHER CONTACTS WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN US. RASGOTRA AGREED THAT IT WAS A GRAVE STEP BUT SAID IT WAS DESIGNED TO DEAL WITH A GRAVE SITUATION.

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5. IN ANSWER TO QUESTIONS, RASGOTRA SAID THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS LIKELY TO BE MADE TONIGHT, ALTHOUGH NO SPECIFIC TIME HAD BEEN DECIDED. THE MEA PROMISED TO LET US HAVE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, PROBABLY BY MID-DAY TOMORROW, THE FULL TEXT OF THE NEW REGULATIONS. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER A VISA REGIME WAS BEING INTRODUCED FOR OTHER COUNTRIES, HE SAID THAT THE MATTER WAS BEING KEPT CONSTANTLY UNDER REVIEW BUT IT WAS FELT THAT THE MAJOR THREAT CONCERNED THE UK. HE SAID THE MEASURE WAS NOT BEING INTRODUCED ON A TEMPORARY BASIS, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT EXCLUDE, IF CIRCUMSTANCES WARRANTED, ITS REMOVAL AS SOME STAGE IN THE FUTURE (HE SAID THIS WAS FOR MY PRIVATE INFORMATION, AND IT IS CLEARLY NOT PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PRESENT POLICY). I SAID THAT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF INDIAN VISITORS GOING TO THE UK DID NOT AT PRESENT HAVE ANY FORM OF VISA OR ENTRY CERTIFICATE, BUT YOU MIGHT WISH TO RECONSIDER THIS IN THE LIGHT OF THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S INTRODUCTION OF A VISA REGIME. RASGOTRA ACCEPTED THIS.

6. COMMENT. RASGOTRA'S TONE THROUGHOUT WAS CONCILIATORY BUT THERE WAS CLEARLY NO QUESTION OF THE DECISION BEING REVERSIBLE. HE DID HOWEVER RECALL HIS REPEATED EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN TO BRITISH MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS AT THE ANTI-INDIAN STATEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES WHICH HAD BEEN CURRENT IN BRITAIN WHICH HE SAID HAD NOT PRODUCED ANY RESULT. HE CLEARLY IMPLIED THAT THE VISA REGIME WAS INTENDED TO CONTROL THE ENTRY INTO INDIA OF BRITISH CITIZENS OF INDIAN ORIGIN WHO MIGHT BE OPPOSED TO THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT, AND THAT THOSE NOT OF INDIAN ORIGIN WOULD BE INCONVENIENCED AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE. THE VERY SHORT NOTICE IS CERTAIN TO CATCH MANY BONA FIDE TRAVELLERS OUT WITHOUT ANY POSSIBILITY OF OBTAINING VISAS. IT IS CLEARLY IN THE SPIRIT OF RASGOTRA'S REMARKS THAT SUCH PEOPLE SHOULD BE ADVISED TO TRAVEL AND VISAS WILL BE ISSUED ON THEIR ARRIVAL. WE SHALL PRESS THE MEA TO BE AS HELPFUL AS POSSIBLE FOR ALL SUCH ARRIVALS WITHOUT VISAS FOR AT LEAST A WEEK. WE SHALL COMMENT FURTHER WHEN WE HAVE SEEN THE TEXT OF THE REGULATIONS.

7. FCO PLEASE PASS TO ALL CONCERNED GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, INCLUDING OT4, DTI AND BRITISH COUNCIL.

SAMUEL

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