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DESKBY 010800Z

FM NEW DELHI 010550Z NOV 84

TO IMMEDIATE DESKBY FCO

TELNO 849 OF 01 NOVEMBER 1984

INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, DHAKA, COLOMBO,
KATHMANDU, ISLAMABAD.

INFO SAVING BOMBAY (ACTIONED), CALCUTTA (ACTIONED) AND MADRAS
(ACTIONED)

MY TELNO 845 : AFTERMATH OF MRS GANDHI'S DEATH

RAJIV GANDHI'S CABINET HELD ITS FIRST MEETING YESTERDAY EVENING.
ITS COMPOSITION HAS STILL NOT BEEN MADE CLEAR, BUT THE ASSUMPTION
IS THAT FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST ALL MRS GANDHI'S MINISTERS
ARE CARRYING ON IN THEIR OLD JOBS. AS WELL AS FIXING THE FUNERAL
FOR 1630 ON 3 NOVEMBER (MY TELNO 845.), THE CABINET DECLARED 12
DAYS OF NATIONAL MOURNING UP TO AND INCLUDING 12 NOV. IN DELHI
IT ALSO BANNED FOR THREE DAYS ALL PROCESSIONS AND MEETINGS AND
THE CARRYING OF LETHAL WEAPONS. DESPITE THIS, LAST NIGHT'S
ANTI-SIKH RIOTS IN DELHI AND ELSEWHERE SEEM TO HAVE BEEN FAIRLY
SEVERE. THE ARMY HAD TO BE CALLED IN TO HELP THE POLICE IN CALCUTTA
AND AGARTALA, AND CURFEWS WERE DECLARED IN SEVERAL NORTH INDIAN
TOWNS. A NUMBER OF CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN REPORTED. POLICE FIRING
HAS OCCURED AS FAR SOUTH AS MADRAS.

2. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER THE ASSASSINS WERE WORKING ON
THEIR OWN OR AS PART OF A WIDER CONSPIRACY. THE GOVERNMENT HAVE
ANNOUNCED THAT ONE WAS A SUB-INSPECTOR WHO HAD WORKED FOR MRS
GANDHI FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND THE OTHER A CONSTABLE ONLY RECENTLY
APPOINTED TO GUARD HER. ONE IS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN KILLED ON
THE SPOT, AND THE OTHER INJURED. PAKISTANI INVOLVEMENT IS
INEVITABLY BEING ALLEGED, THOUGH NOT SO FAR BY THE GOVERNMENT.
IT IS BEING RECALLED THAT THE PUNJAB POLICE CLAIMED LAST WEEK
TO HAVE ARRESTED MEMBERS OF AN ASSASSINATION SQUAD ON THEIR WAY
FROM LAHORE TO DELHI, WHO WERE SAID TO HAVE ADMITTED BEING TRAINED
IN PAKISTAN. THE BORDER IS APPARENTLY CLOSED. WHAT SOUNDS
LIKE AN EXEMPLARY STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT ZIA, AND HIS DECLARATION
OF NATIONAL MOURNING, HAVE BEEN MENTIONED IN THE PRESS THOUGH
NOT PROMINENTLY. WILD RUMOURS ABOUND: EG THAT PAKISTAN HAS
RECOGNISED A SIKH SEPARATIST GOVERNMENT IN EXILE.

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3. OFFICIAL GOI SOURCES ARE QUOTED BY THE PRESS AS NOT RULING OUT A LINK BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATION AND PRO-KHALISTAN ELEMENTS ABROAD, AND AS RECALLING CHAUHAN'S PREDICTION ON THE BBC IN JUNE. NEITHER HIS LATEST PRONOUNCEMENTS NOR OTHER SIKH REJOICINGS IN THE UK (YOUR TELNO 747) HAVE YET BEEN PICKED UP HERE. BUT WE SHALL BE IN FOR A BUMPY RIDE WHEN THEY ARE.

4. RAJIV'S TELEVISION BROADCAST TO THE NATION IN BOTH HINDI AND ENGLISH LAST NIGHT WAS A BRIEF AND DIGNIFIED APPEAL FOR RESTRAINT AND SUPPORT. IT WAS MARRIED BY BEING PUT OUT MORE THAN AN HOUR LATER THAN ANNOUNCED, AND BY HIS HURRIED AND NERVOUS DELIVERY. THE PRESIDENT ALSO BROADCAST.

5. ONE OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S EARLIEST PRIORITIES MUST BE TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE GENERAL ELECTION, WHICH IS (ON MOST BUT NOT ALL CALCULATIONS) DUE TO BE HELD BY MID JANUARY. THE ASSASSINATION AND CONSEQUENT TRANSITION OFFERS WHAT WOULD BE WIDELY SEEN AS A CONVINCING EXCUSE FOR POSTPONING THE ELECTION IF THAT IS WHAT RAJIV AND HIS ADVISERS WANT. PARLIAMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE RECALLED FOR THE PURPOSE: IT WENT INTO RECESS AT THE END OF AUGUST AND MRS GANDHI WAS SAID TO HAVE DECIDED NOT TO HAVE ANOTHER SESSION BEFORE GOING TO THE POLLS. BUT THE ASSASSINATION WILL ALSO HAVE GENERATED A LARGE POTENTIAL SYMPATHY VOTE FOR RAJIV AND THE CONGRESS (I) PARTY, WHICH HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY WISH TO CASH IN ON BEFORE IT DISSIPATES. AN EARLY ANNOUNCEMENT OF DECEMBER ELECTIONS IS THEREFORE THE LIKELIEST PROSPECT.

6. THERE MUST OF COURSE BE A REAL DANGER THAT RAJIV TOO WILL BE ASSASSINATED. THE SIKH EXTREMISTS HAVE FOR MONTHS MADE CLEAR THAT HE IS NO.2 ON THEIR HIT LIST: AND HE CANNOT CAMPAIGN IN THE DEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENT OF AN INDIAN ELECTION WITHOUT CONSTANTLY EXPOSING HIMSELF.

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