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TELEGRAM NUMBER 782 OF 2 NOVEMBER

YOUR TEL NO 867: UK SIKH REACTION TO MRS GANDHI'S MURDER

1. I ASKED THE INDIAN ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER, JOHARI, TO CALL ON ME AT 1530 HOURS TODAY IN ORDER TO TELL HIM OF THE VARIOUS STEPS WE ARE TAKING TO DISCOURAGE INFLAMMATORY STATEMENTS BY SIKH EXTREMISTS AND TO ENSURE GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ASIAN COMMUNITY AND THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES.

2. I FIRST HANDED HIM A COPY OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT MADE ON HER DEPARTURE FOR DELHI (TEXT ALREADY TELEGRAPHED TO YOU). JOHARI EXPRESSED APPRECIATION AND SAID THAT HE WAS SURE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT WOULD PROVE HELPFUL. HE ADDED THAT THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT WERE VERY CONCERNED AT THE BIZARRE AND TASTELESS BEHAVIOUR OF THE SIKH EXTREMISTS AND AT THE WAY IN WHICH THE BRITISH MEDIA HAD PLAYED UP THEIR INFLAMMATORY STATEMENTS. THE MEDIA HAD MADE IT THAT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO COPE WITH AN EXTREMELY DELICATE SITUATION.

3. I STRESSED THAT WE WERE VERY ALERT TO THE NEED TO DO EVERYTHING WE COULD TO KEEP THE SITUATION CALM. I REFERRED TO THE ACTION TAKEN BY THE BRITISH POLICE IN THEIR LIAISON WORK WITH THE ASIAN COMMUNITY AND SAID I WAS GLAD TO SEE THAT MODERATE SIKH LEADERS HAD ALSO CALLED FOR RESTRAINT.

4. JOHARI SAID IT WAS CLEAR THAT THERE WAS A SMALL NUMBER OF EXTREMISTS WHO WERE INTERESTED IN KEEPING THE POT ON THE BOIL. FOR ITS PART, THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT WERE DOING ALL THEY COULD TO RESTORE CALM. BUT THE MEDIA EXPOSURE GIVEN TO CHAUHAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES HAD CREATED A PROBLEM. THE HIGH COMMISSION WERE SENDING THE FCO A CATALOGUE OF STATEMENTS MADE BY CHAUHAN IN THE HOPE THAT HMG WOULD AGREE THAT THERE WERE GROUNDS FOR PROSECUTION. IF ACTION COULD BE TAKEN AGAINST CHAUHAN THIS WOULD HAVE A VERY SALUTARY EFFECT.

5. I REMINDED JOHARI THAT WE HAD LOOKED VERY CAREFULLY AT CHAUHAN'S EARLIER STATEMENTS BUT HAD BEEN ADVISED THAT THERE WERE NO GROUNDS FOR PROSECUTION. JOHARI SAID THAT CHAUHAN HAD NOW ADMITTED THAT HE HAD HAD CONTACT WITH A SECRET ORGANISATION CHARGED WITH THE TASK OF ASSASSINATING MRS GANDHI: SURELY THIS WAS SUFFICIENT REASON TO CHARGE HIM WITH COMPLICITY IN THE MURDER? I TOLD JOHARI THAT I WAS NOT AWARE OF THIS STATEMENT BUT THAT WE WOULD OF COURSE EXAMINE IT CAREFULLY. WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED THE INDIAN NOTE (REPORTED SEPARATELY), AND ARE CONSIDERING THIS URGENTLY WITH THE LAW OFFICERS.

6. JOHARI RAISED THE SIKH DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE THE HIGH COMMISSION ON 31 OCTOBER AND THE SLOWNESS OF THE POLICE IN DISPERSING IT. I EXPLAINED THAT THE POLICE WERE NOT EMPOWERED TO STOP DEMONSTRATIONS. HOW THEY COPE WITH THEM WAS ESSENTIALLY FOR DECISION BY THE MEN ON THE SPOT. I ADDED THAT ON THE BASIS OF THE REPORTS I HAD RECEIVED, THE POLICE MIGHT HAVE BEEN RATHER SLOW IN MOVING THE DEMONSTRATORS ON. ON THE QUESTION OF TREATMENT OF SIKH EXTREMISTS BY THE MEDIA, I POINTED OUT THAT HMG DID NOT CONTROL THE PRESS AND BROADCASTING AUTHORITIES. WE HAD, HOWEVER, GIVEN THE BROADCASTING AUTHORITIES THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE ADVICE ABOUT THE PRESENTATION OF STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS BY SIKH EXTREMISTS.

7. JOHARI EXPRESSED APPRECIATION. HE SUGGESTED IT WOULD ALSO BE USEFUL IF THE POLICE COULD KEEP ABEAST OF STATEMENTS BY CHAUHAN AND OTHERS IN THE LOCAL VERNACULAR PRESS. I AGREED AND UNDERTOOK TO DRAW THIS TO THE ATTENTION OF THE POLICE AUTHORITIES. I SAID I UNDERSTOOD THAT THE HIGH COMMISSION HAD THIS MORNING BEEN THE SUBJECT OF A BOMTHREAT. JOHARI CONFIRMED THIS. THE POLICE HAD TAKEN PROMPT ACTION TO CLEAR THE BUILDING AND SEARCH FOR ANY EXPLOSIVES. NOTHING HAD BEEN FOUND.

8. FINALLY, I TOLD JOHARI OF THE DECISION TAKEN BY THE HOME SECRETARY TODAY, IN RESPONSE TO AN APPLICATION FROM THE POLICE, TO BAN ALL MARCHES IN THE BOROUGH OF EALING (WHICH INCLUDES SOUTHALL) FROM 1800 HOURS TODAY UNTIL 12 NOVEMBER. THIS WOULD PREVENT ANY SIKH CELEBRATIONS IN THE AREA

BUT WOULD ALSO, AS I UNDERSTOOD IT, PREVENT A HINDU PROCESSION OF REMEMBRANCE FOR MRS GANDHI. THE POLICE WOULD BE WILLING TO HAVE THAT PROCESSION TAKE PLACE ELSEWHERE IN LONDON. JOHARI SAID HE WAS VERY PLEASED TO HEAR OF THE HOME SECRETARY'S DECISION.

9. IN CONCLUSION, I ASSURED JOHARI THAT WE WOULD CONTINUE TO DO ALL WE COULD TO ENSURE PEACE AND CALM. JOHARI'S MANNER THROUGHOUT OUR DISCUSSION WAS RESTRAINED AND COURTEOUS. HE WAS OBVIOUSLY PLEASED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT AND BY THE HOME SECRETARY'S BAN ON MARCHES. OUR MEETING SEEMED TO HAVE THE EFFECT OF REASSURING HIM THAT WE HAVE THE INDIANS' CONCERNS VERY MUCH AT HEART. BUT THE HIGH COMMISSION WILL CLEARLY CONTINUE TO PRESS US TO FIND A WAY OF TAKING ACTION AGAINST CHAUHAN, BUT AT FIRST SIGHT THEY HAVE STILL NOT (NOT) GIVEN US ENOUGH TO GO ON.

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