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DESKBY 090930Z

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 926 OF 9 NOVEMBER

MIPT: CHAUHAN

1. TEXT OF BBC DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S LETTER AS FOLLOWS:

BEGINS:

DEAR HIGH COMMISSIONER,

File. Indian High Commissioner

I AM WRITING TO EXPRESS MY DEEP SORROW AND DISTRESS AT THE NEWS OF THE DEATH OF MRS GANDHI. I RECALL SO WELL MY MEETING WITH HER EARLIER THIS YEAR DURING MY MEMORABLE AND HAPPY VISIT TO INDIA. ONE COULD NOT FAIL TO BE IMPRESSED BY HER DIGNITY.

MRS GANDHI'S DEATH WAS A GREAT SHOCK TO THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY AND WE SOUGHT TO REFLECT THIS IN OUR BROADCASTS. YOU MAY KNOW THAT BBC 2 AND RADIO 4 ON SATURDAY MORNING CARRIED COVERAGE OF THE FUNERAL CEREMONIES FOR MRS GANDHI. ON THE DAY OF THE ASSASSINATION THERE WAS EXTENSIVE BROADCASTING ON BBC RADIO AND TELEVISION OF THE EVENTS IN INDIA AND THE WIDESPREAD SORROW AND REVULSION AMONGST BRITISH AND WORLD LEADERS.

ALTHOUGH I KNOW THERE HAS BEEN ANGER AND CONCERN IN INDIA, AND INDEED IN THIS COUNTRY, AT THE UNRESTRAINED AND TO MANY OF US DEEPLY DISTATEFUL PUBLIC RESPONSE OF SOME SIKHS TO MRS GANDHI'S DEATH, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT THE BBC SHOULD REPORT THIS IMMEDIATE REACTION WITHIN A SMALL PART OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE ASSASSINATION WAS ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT BY TWO SIKHS MEMBERS OF MRS GANDHI'S BODYGUARD.

I WOULD EMPHASISE THAT THIS WAS ONLY A VERY SMALL ELEMENT WITHIN THE COVERAGE AS A WHOLE, WHICH CONCENTRATED ON THE SENSE OF GRIEF AND LOSS AT THE DEATH OF MRS GANDHI. INDEED, MANY CONTRIBUTORS TO OUR PROGRAMMES STRESSED THE NEED FOR ALL INDIANS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR RECONCILIATION.

I KNOW THAT THE INTERVIEWING OF DR JAGJIT SINGH CHAUHAN ON RADIO LONDON ON 31 OCTOBER HAS CAUSED PARTICULAR DISMAY AND ANGER. I REGRET VERY MUCH THAT DR CHAUHAN'S CLAIM TO BE A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KHALISTAN GOVERNMENT AND, INDEED, HIS STATUS WITHIN THE SIKH COMMUNITY, WAS NOT CHALLENGED WITHIN THE PROGRAMME: AND I SHARE THE DISTASTE OF SENIOR REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AT THE SENTIMENTS EXPRESSED BY HIM, AND I HAVE MADE CLEAR MY RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF CARRYING THE INTERVIEW AT ALL.

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MAY I ASSURE YOU THAT THERE IS NO QUESTION OF DR CHAUHAN BEING INVITED TO BROADCAST AGAIN WITHOUT THE PERSONAL PERMISSION OF MY ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL, ALN PROTHEROE. ONE FURTHER POINT, DR CHAUHAN HAS NOT BROADCAST ON THE WORLD SERVICE OR ON ANY OF THE INDIAN LANGUAGE SERVICES OF OUR EXTERNAL SERVICES. IN FACT, THE INTERVIEW WAS USED ONLY ON OUR RADIO LONDON LOCAL STATION: IT WAS NOT RE-BROADCAST ON NATIONAL RADIO.

YOUR SINCERELY (ALASDAIR MILNE)

ENDS

WADE-GERY

LIMITED

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SCU
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PS
PS / LADY YOUNG.
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