



Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Agree that an invitation to
Mrs Gandhi to visit this
country early next year should
be part of your briefing?

30 March 1981

Dear Michael

Re: 31/3 Yes mb

INVITATION TO MRS GANDHI TO VISIT THE UNITED KINGDOM

When Lord Greenhill visited India last September as a special emissary of the Prime Minister he told Mrs Gandhi, as authorised, that Mrs Thatcher hoped she would visit London in connection with the Festival of India in 1982. The two Prime Ministers are of course joint patrons of the event. Mrs Gandhi did not respond directly though she appeared to favour the idea.

It is for consideration whether the Prime Minister, during her visit to India next month, should issue a more formal invitation to Mrs Gandhi. This depends partly on the general desirability of Mrs Gandhi's visiting this country and partly on the desirability of linking the visit with the Festival.

Good relations with India are likely to be important to us in 1982 for the same mixture of political and commercial reasons as they are now. An invitation to Mrs Gandhi would be a natural way of following-up the Prime Minister's own visit to India. We are partly but not firmly committed by Lord Greenhill's remarks to Mrs Gandhi last September.

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PS/Prime Minister
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There is the risk that Mrs Gandhi will be a more controversial figure in a year's time than she is now. There are no current signs that she is contemplating a return to the personal rule of the Emergency period but the course of internal developments in India is, as always, unpredictable. If, as seems likely, the Reagan administration seek much closer relations with Pakistan, India may drift further toward the Soviet Union. But this is very speculative and none of it may happen. The best judgement we can make at present is that our interests would be likely to be served by a visit by Mrs Gandhi in 1982.

A visit would not necessarily have to be linked with the Festival. It is difficult to assess now how effective the event is likely to be. The Festival Organising Committee are having some difficulty in finding funds for the ambitious programme now envisaged. In practice it is likely to consist of an opening Gala concert in the Festival Hall on 22 March and major exhibitions in a number of museums. Certain other ideas for music and dancing performances may have to be dropped because of the financial difficulty. But the major events, which are financially secure, should ensure that the Festival is reasonably successful. There is certainly considerable Indian enthusiasm for the event (and Mrs Gandhi is thought to be taking a keen personal interest), and the chances are reasonably good that it will turn out to be what the organisers hope - a striking manifestation of Indian culture which could do much for the image of India in Britain and demonstrate a lively British interest in things Indian.

Although we cannot be confident at this stage that the Festival will be a success (we are taking steps to help the organising committee in various ways but have had to turn down a request for financial support), we think the risks of disappointment are fairly small.

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In Lord Carrington's absence, the Lord Privy Seal therefore recommends that during her visit to India the Prime Minister should formally invite Mrs Gandhi to pay an official visit to the United Kingdom during 1982 and express the hope that the visit could embrace the date of 22 March so that the two Prime Ministers, as patrons of the Festival, could attend the Gala opening on that day. If that date proves difficult for Mrs Gandhi, which it may since the Indian Parliament is likely to be in session, officials could explore other dates and some other means of linking the visit with the Festival.

Tom ev

Michael Arthur

M A Arthur



30 MAR 1941



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ONPASS TEN DOWNING STREET AND FOREIGN OFFICE NEWS DEPT
FROM ENSOLL NEW DELHI

ONLY THING ADDED TO THATCHER'S BANQUET SPEECH TONIGHT
15 APRIL, WAS INVITATION TO GANDHI TO COME TO UK FOR OPENING OF
FESTIVAL OF INDIA IN SPRING 1982.

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TO ROUTINE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 335 OF 3 APRIL.

MY LETTER TO LORD N GORDON LENNOX OF 20 MARCH: FESTIVAL OF INDIA

1. THE INDIAN COORDINATOR, NIRMAL SINGH, CALLED ON ME YESTERDAY EVENING ON THE INSTRUCTIONS OF MRS JAYAKER, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE INDIAN FESTIVAL COMMITTEE AND A CLOSE FRIEND OF MRS GANDHI'S. HE WAS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT HIS RECENT VISIT TO BRITAIN AND THE WAY IN WHICH THE FESTIVAL PLANS WERE DEVELOPING. IT EMERGED THAT WHAT WAS PRINCIPALLY ON THIS MIND WAS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FESTIVAL WOULD BE MENTIONED DURING THE PRIME MINISTER'S FORTHCOMING VISIT AND SPECIFICALLY WHETHER AND WHEN AN OFFICIAL INVITATION TO MRS GANDHI TO ATTEND THE FESTIVAL WOULD BE ISSUED. MRS JAYAKER HAD DISCUSSED THE PROSPECTS WITH MRS GANDHI. THEY WERE AWARE THAT LORD GREENHILL HAD ON INSTRUCTIONS TOLD MRS GANDHI LAST SEPTEMBER THAT IT WOULD BE SPLENDID IF SHE CAME TO THE FESTIVAL. BUT MRS GANDHI FELT SHE NEEDED A MORE SPECIFIC INVITATION. SHE HAD PENCILLED INTO HER DIARY A VISIT TO LONDON TO ATTEND THE GALA PERFORMANCE AND THE OPENING OF THE FESTIVAL ON 22 MARCH 1982. NIRMAL SINGH WAS IN EFFECT ASKING WHETHER THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD BRING SUCH AN INVITATION WITH HER AND WHETHER I WOULD MENTION IT DURING MY FORTHCOMING VISIT TO LONDON. I UNDERTOOK TO DO SO.

2. MRS GANDHI HAVING BEEN INVITED TO BECOME JOINT PATRON WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE FESTIVAL AND HAVING ACCEPTED AND THIS HAVING BEEN ANNOUNCED IT SEEMS INEVITABLE THAT SHE SHOULD BE FORMALLY INVITED TO ATTEND THE FESTIVAL. I HAD HITHERTO THOUGHT THAT MRS GANDHI MIGHT HAVE PARLIAMENTARY DIFFICULTIES IN BEING AWAY FOR A FEW DAYS IN MARCH WHICH IS THE TRADITIONAL MONTH FOR THE DISCUSSION OF THE BUDGET AND DEPARTMENTAL ESTIMATES. THIS COULD OF COURSE STILL BE THE CASE BUT NIRMAL SINGH ASSURED ME THAT MRS GANDHI HAD SET ASIDE TIME FOR A VISIT TO LONDON OF THREE OR FOUR DAYS STARTING ABOUT 22 MARCH. I STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT THE PRIME MINISTER SHOULD GIVE A PERSONAL INVITATION TO MRS GANDHI TO THIS EFFECT DURING HER VISIT HERE.

THOMSON

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SIR J GRAHAM

LORD N.G. LENNOX
MR DONALD

THIS TELEGRAM
WAS NOT
ADVANCED

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India JP

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

1 April, 1981.

Invitation to Mrs. Gandhi to visit the UK

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to me of 30 March. She agrees that a formal invitation to visit this country should be issued by her during her visit to India later this month.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

M.A. Arthur, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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