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CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held at 10 Downing Street on

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER 1984

at 9.30 am

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Lord Hailsham of St Marylebone
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP
Secretary of State for Education and Science

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Tom King MP
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Peter Rees QC MP
Chief Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham
Minister without Portfolio

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THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General (Item 4)

Mr John Gummer MP
Paymaster General

The Rt Hon Paul Channon MP
Minister of State, Department of Trade
and Industry (Item 5)

Mr Norman Lamont MP
Minister of State, Department of Trade
and Industry (Item 4)

Mr John Cope MP
Treasurer of the Household

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr P L Gregson (Items 4 and 5)
Mr D F Williamson (Items 2 and 3)
Mr B G Cartledge (Items 2 and 3)
Mr M S Buckley (Items 4 and 5)
Mr C J S Brearley (Item 1)
Mr R Watson (Item 1)

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1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons during the following week.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the Prime Minister had already sent a message of congratulation to President Reagan on his remarkable achievement in the Presidential Election on 6 November. The scale of Mr Reagan's victory had been at the highest end of the range of expectations before the election. It was right that the British Government should acknowledge the extent of the President's triumph and record their desire to maintain the unique degree of consultation and co-operation which characterised the United Kingdom's relationship with the United States. The outcome of the Congressional elections had been less clear-cut. Although the Republican Party had re-couped 15 of the 26 losses which it had sustained in the House of Representatives in 1982, the Republicans had suffered a net loss of two seats in the Senate. All the signs were that President Reagan would maintain, in his second term, his attempts to construct a better relationship with the Soviet Union: but the defeat in the election of Senator Percy (Illinois), the former Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the possibility that Senator Helms (North Carolina) might replace him in that role could prove to be a complicating factor. It was difficult, at this stage, to forecast what action, if any, President Reagan would take to curb the United States budgetary deficit.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the internal situation in India, following the assassination of the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, was now calmer. The new Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, had taken a number of steps to assert his authority, including putting an end to Governmental interference in reporting by foreign journalists, following representations by the British High Commissioner. The repercussions of Mrs Gandhi's murder nevertheless continued to create serious problems in the United Kingdom, not least with regard to the activities of the Sikh leader, Dr Chauhan. The possibility of instituting legal proceedings against Dr Chauhan was being urgently considered but it was clear that Dr Chauhan himself had access to very competent legal advice. It was important that the British Government should continue to express the dismay and shock with which they viewed inflammatory comments and provocative behaviour by Sikhs in the United Kingdom; the statements made by the Prime Minister before and during her visit to Delhi for Mrs Gandhi's funeral had been very helpful in this respect. A march by Sikhs in central London, to mark the anniversary of the founder of their religion, had apparently been postponed for the time being; but the Indian High Commission had made it clear that if it took place it would have a most severe effect on relations between the United Kingdom and India.

In a short discussion it was reported that the Attorney General had been sent a collection of the evidence on which possible legal proceedings against Dr Chauhan might be based; but the chances of securing a prosecution

did not at this stage seem strong. The fact that Dr Chauhan had already been resident in the United Kingdom for 11 years could be an obstacle to his possible deportation. Although the Internationally Protected Persons Act of 1978 created the possibility of prosecution for incitement to murder, and although the law would be applied as rigorously as possible, it remained to be seen whether the evidence against Dr Chauhan was adequate for the purpose. So far as the proposed Sikh march was concerned, the position was that the possibility of holding it in central London on 18 November was still being considered by its organisers: if they decided to go ahead it would be open to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to apply for it to be banned. It was not acceptable that the quarrels of India should be transferred to the streets of London, and every effort should be made, including contacts with leaders of the Asian communities, to prevent this. It was clear that manifestations by Sikhs in the United Kingdom could have a serious effect on relations with India, including trade.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that international efforts to ease the famine in Ethiopia were continuing; the appointment of a relief co-ordinator by the Secretary-General of the United Nations should have a useful effect. The promptness of the United Kingdom's relief measures had led to a substantial response by other countries and it was to be hoped that this would be sustained. There was some risk of pressure from the Ethiopian Government, probably at Soviet instigation, to move the Royal Air Force Hercules aircraft involved in the relief operation away from Addis Ababa, particularly during the period of the conference of the Organisation of African Unity, on the grounds that the facilities at the airport were inadequate for the number of aircraft now using it. There was therefore a contingency plan to transfer the aircraft to Djibouti if necessary; but no formal request for a move had yet been received.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the elections which had been held in Nicaragua on 4 November had been reported in relatively favourable terms both by the press and by Members of Parliament who had been present in Nicaragua as observers. There had been a high poll, of up to 90 per cent in some areas, and the electoral mechanisms appeared to have functioned reasonably well. This picture did not, however, take account of events in the period leading up to the elections, which had been characterised by pressures on the electorate by mobs organised by the Sandinista regime; the Sandinista Minister for Home Affairs had gone so far as to describe the mobs as "divine". The fact that smaller opposition parties had won nearly one-third of the popular vote had tended to distract attention from the fact that the main conservative and liberal opposition groups had not participated in the elections at all.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the arrival in a Nicaraguan port of a Soviet merchant ship which might be delivering military aircraft had apparently taken the United States Government by surprise.