

From New Delhi by Paul Zykofsky

Thatcher gets the deep freeze

Her visit to India drew dissension on the Pakistan arms question and immigration policy.

By the end of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's five-day visit to India, the most widely asked question making the rounds in New Delhi was: "Why did she bother to come here in the first place?"

Since her arrival in New Delhi April 15—where she was met by demonstrators chanting "Margaret Thatcher go home!"—little, if anything, was achieved by the visit. On the contrary, it only highlighted the sharp differences between India and Britain. Prime Minister Gandhi even broke with normal practice and responded to Thatcher's speech to the Indian parliament.

The tone for the visit was set at the airport, when Gandhi greeted Thatcher with the reminder that "there are many problems between us"—a phrase which was repeated in almost every subsequent speech.

The most contentious issue was the proposed U.S. arming of Pakistan, which Thatcher had warmly encouraged during her visit to Washington in February. Thatcher repeatedly argued that the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan threatened Pakistan, which "had a right to defend itself."

While conceding Pakistan's right to self-defense, Gandhi expressed concern over the magnitude of arms sales to Pakistan. Gandhi also reminded Thatcher that "past experience"—that is, Pakistan's use of U.S.-supplied weapons in three India-Pakistan wars—showed that such large arms flows would only pose a threat to

peace in the region.

In responding to Thatcher's parliament speech, Gandhi warned that "military solutions are short-lived, spawning new problems with long-lasting and wide-ranging consequences. . . . That is why we feel that advantage should be taken of any opening for discussion. India," she concluded, "is a little wary of containment of one country or another. Such concepts, rather than adding to security, have resulted in destabilization."

India also expressed opposition to the introduction of foreign military forces into the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf region, such as the proposed Anglo-American Rapid Deployment Force Mrs. Thatcher has endorsed. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud, who visited India just before Thatcher, had said he opposed the introduction of foreign troops into the region. A Thatcher spokesman responded: "If you don't have a rapid deployment force, you won't have a force to deploy rapidly."

Thatcher also informed Mrs. Gandhi of her talks with President Reagan and appeared eager to identify herself with what *she* presented as the U.S. policy. She succeeded, as the Indian spokesmen and the press attacked the United States as well as Britain.

One area, however, in which the British felt the full brunt of Indian attacks was on immigration policy. The presentation of a nationalities bill before the British Parliament

and recent racial disturbances there have created heightened concern here, as many Indian immigrants live in Great Britain.

Thatcher, in her speech before the parliament and in her press conference, argued that Britain had a right to exercise immigration policies practiced in many other countries and tried to reassure her hosts that they would not be racially motivated.

But not many Indians were convinced. The *Times of India* wrote: "There is far more that divides than unites Britain and India today on bilateral and international matters and the chasm has widened a lot since Mrs. Thatcher took office. The British Premier has done more harm to race relations in Britain than any other postwar leader there. . . . She has put through a nationality bill that, like all British legislation dealing with immigration, avoids any mention of racialist intent but is in fact nothing if not racial."

As the visit progressed, the Indian press seemed to grow more and more hostile to Thatcher. On the last day of her visit, even the usually staid *Times of India* headlined its lead story "Thatcher Speaks for Pakistan."

Perhaps more revealing of the public importance attached to the visit by India's former colonial masters is the report that when Mrs. Thatcher visited a village near New Delhi, almost no one knew who the visiting VIP was. According to the *Hindustan Times*, "A woman at the woman's center, demonstrating a craft in front of Mrs. Thatcher, was asked if she knew who the lady was. 'Yes, of course, she is the Prime Minister.' Of which country? 'Russia,'