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From: Creon Butler

Date: 17 January 2006

[REDACTED]

Michael Arthur

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] SIT REP 17 JANUARY

As I reported to you by phone earlier this evening, [REDACTED] (Joint Secretary, West Europe) telephoned me this evening formally to register official concern at the treatment of [REDACTED] on the Big Brother TV Show. I said I would report the call to London.

Drawing on DCMS briefing, I noted that there had been an enormous number of complaints by the British public in response to the TV show. This showed how the British public viewed the behaviour on the programme. I understood that there would be an investigation by Ofcom in view of the complaints, and it would be for Ofcom to decide whether and what kind of action to take. There might also be other investigations.

I also briefed [REDACTED] on the line the High Commission Press spokesman was taking in response to media interest (see below) and noted that the Chancellor had also commented on the matter in Bangalore.

[REDACTED] asked, in particular, what, if any, laws might have been broken and who was being investigated – Channel 4, or the individuals who had made the comments on TV. I said I would seek further guidance on this from London.

Following your e-mail response, I called [REDACTED] again this evening. I confirmed that her statement of concern had been registered with London and updated her on the further ministerial statements on the issue made in London and the 16,000 complaints received by Ofcom (more than double the

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number for any previous complaint). Ofcom would no doubt therefore be giving the investigation priority. Any police investigation was likely to follow that by Ofcom.

There has been intense media interest in this incident given the combination of allegations of racism and a Bollywood star, with the story leading on most of the major news channels over the last two days. The minister of state at the MEA and the minister of Information and Broadcasting have both given on-camera comments expressing concern. We have also heard that several news broadcasters are organising shows over the next few days to debate the issue and the wider question of racism and diversity in the UK.

The Chancellor (visiting) has been asked about the case and gave the following quote which is now being picked up widely and which we have fed to the wire services:

Chancellor Gordon Brown said:

- We have had already complaints from 10,000 viewers in the UK about these remarks and the UK is and has always been a fair and tolerant society. Anything that detracts from that should be condemned.

In addition, drawing on DCMS press lines and in consultation with the Press Office, we have deployed the following additional lines:

British High Commission spokesman:

- We value greatly the role played by the British Indian community in the UK. It goes without saying that the British Government deplores racism of any kind.
- This is rightly a matter for Ofcom, the independent broadcasting regulator in the UK. They will look into the matter and publish their decision in due course. Ofcom has received over 10,000 complaints - the highest number of complaints ever received. This indicates just how appalling the British public finds this behaviour.
- We don't censor broadcasters, but we do expect them to be responsible. If they fail in that, Ofcom can take action.

Creon Butler  
Deputy High Commissioner

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