

May Lauds British Indians

"The Indian community is a very important part of our society here in the UK. I want to see a country where how far somebody gets on is about their talents and their willingness to work hard, regardless of their background"... Prime Minister Theresa May told Asian Lite. The following is the full interview:

What role do you see for India after Brexit?

Well, I want to ensure that we build on the very strong relationship that we already have with India. I was very pleased to visit India last November, to take a trade mission to India. I had lengthy discussions with Prime Minister Modi about how we can work together: there is UK investment in India, there is Indian investment in the UK. We want to see more trade between our two countries and we have already set in motion work to see what we can do to encourage trade even before we leave the European Union.

Your new manifesto mentions bearing down on non-EU migration, and visa as you know is an important issue in India. Will there be improvement in the visa offer for Indians, as promised by some members of your cabinet during the EU referendum campaign?

We have already made quite great strides in what we have provided in India, with the priority services, which are now being extended to the type of visas they cover. We are helping people to get swifter and smoother process of applying for visa for coming to the UK. We are maintaining our commitment to bring the levels of net migration down to sustainable levels. Of course, what we will be able to do once we leave the EU is set rules for people coming from within the EU. We always look across the immigration system to ensure that we are enabling, welcoming the best and brightest to come to the UK, but that we are working to ensure that the system works fairly and properly for everybody.

You said during your visit to Delhi that further improvements to the UK visa will be considered if at the same time the return of Indians with no right to remain in the UK can be speeded up. Has there been any new initiative on this?

Yes, the Home Office is still looking at it, discussing various ways in which that process can be improved. It is something I have said internationally, that I think where there are people who are in a country illegally, they should be returned, but it is a question of getting a smoother process so that people aren't spending quite so long waiting to be returned.

The previous Conservative leader (David Cameron) had promised BME communities that there would be 20 per cent reservation in retirement seats. We don't quite see that reflected in this election.

We have some good BME candidates standing in seats. Of course, this was a very rapid process of putting candidates in place because of the election being called at short notice. I have been heavily involved in doing a lot of work on getting more women as Conservative members of parliament and what we are looking at as a party is how we can perhaps use that experience and provide support to get more BME candidates in future.

BME are under-represented in judiciary, armed forces, judiciary and civil services. Is this something you intend to take up in future?

Yes, starting under my predecessor as prime minister there was a real push to increase diversity in judiciary.

I know this is something that the current Lord Chancellor has taken up as well. The Indian community is a very important part of our society here in the UK. I want to see a country where how far somebody gets on is about their talents and their willingness to work hard, regardless of their background.

The Indian community has moved towards your party in recent election, do you see this increasing, because there are some issues such as the caste law coming up, which is a sensitive issue for the community.

I recognise the sensitivity on the caste issue and there is a consultation taking place. There was wording put into the relevant legislation in the House of Lords by Labour and Liberal Democrats working together on that, but I realize how sensitive this issue is. So we will look carefully at the consultation when it comes back. But in the wider issue for everybody, as much for the Indian community as for anybody in the UK, there is a very clear choice in the election, about who will provide a strong and stable leadership to take us through Brexit, to get the right deal, but take us beyond Brexit, looking at a truly global Britain, making those trading links with other parts of the world.

Can we expect more Indian faces in the cabinet?

(Laughs) I got to win an election before I start to decide who is sitting around at the table.

Will the commitment to 0.7 per cent of national income as foreign aid continue?

Yes, the 0.7 per cent of national income we will continue to be committed to, and we think that's important. There are children around the world that are being educated because the support the UK has been giving aid, there are people getting clean water and supplies because of what are able to do and I think that's important for us. It is also important in the countries where we focus we are helping to support the economies and good governances in those countries to encourage stability.

British aid to India has now almost been stopped, but there are some projects continuing. Is this something that will be looked at in future?

We have to look where the money is most needed and where the money can be most effective. India has changed of course as a country. It's a hugely dynamic economy; when I visited there last November there were fantastic businesses that I met and I think India itself is dealing with the issues within India.



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