PRITI PATEL

ANDREW MARR SHOW
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PRITI PATEL, MP
Home Secretary

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AM: The Home Secretary, Priti Patel, joins me now in the studio. Priti Patel, we'll talk about the pandemic later on. Let me start with the BBC and the Bashir row. The sons of Princess Diana draw a pretty clear line between that highly controversial interview, the breakdown of her marriage, and then her death. Do you agree with them?

PP: Well, Andrew, I think first of all it's utterly heartbreaking actually when you hear members of the Royal Family, and in fact the Duke of Cambridge and Sussex speaking out in very personal terms about their mother. And it is heartbreaking. But also, coming back to what is going on right now with the Dyson Report that has been published, this is a really, really significant moment of reflection, I think, for the BBC. There is no doubt this world class institution, its reputation has been highly damaged. I would have thought actually members of the British public, but even around the world right now, watching what has happened would clearly be asking the question where is the BBC, you know, the leadership of the BBC at this moment in time? Why aren't they out there publicly giving confidence and building confidence in terms of the publication of this report? But I genuinely believe that the reputation of the BBC has been damaged. Lessons will have to be learned, no question about that. And also there'll be work on regaining trust and confidence, and working with the government as well going forward looking at the mid-term charter review next year.

AM: I guess the question is what should change inside the BBC and around the BBC. Your colleague, Oliver Dowden, the Culture
Secretary, said the government will consider - and I quote - ‘whether further governance reforms of the BBC are needed in the mid-term charter review,’ which as you say is next year. What kind of reforms do you think might be needed?

PP: So absolutely I think the Culture Secretary is absolutely right, around governance, accountability, transparency. But Andrew, I think we also have to reflect we live in the age of multimedia. The role of the BBC, when it comes to its performance, where it stands in a multimedia world - this is the Netflix generation, you know, how relevant is the BBC? Some of the cultural associations with the BBC as well. I’m sure there’ll be many, many issues. But right now I think it is important actually that accountability, trust and confidence, those fundamental pillars, are addressed. And Andrew, you mentioned earlier on that, you know, the BBC did not put anyone up this morning to even answer questions in the same way that I’m going to be answering questions on some of my area in the government later on. But the review has been published, the report has been published, and this is going to be a very significant and serious moment at a time when the reputation of the BBC has been compromised.

AM: Do you like the idea, for instance, of the BBC having a further outside board overseeing the journalism? That’s one thing that Michael Grade suggested.

PP: I think all options will naturally have to be considered and looked at and that comes down to the DNA of governance and accountability in any organisation. But we must always remember the BBC is an international organisation and institution. Very, very well known, respected and trusted, has been for decades and decades around the world. So to move on post this report there’ll be no doubt certain questions and certain elements that will be - well, should be reviewed, I think, with the mid-term charter review next year.
AM: Very tough times for the BBC. Do you think the BBC survives this?

PP: The BBC will have to reflect and learn lessons, as within all walks of life, institutions, companies, corporations, governments, institutions. This report is significant. I think it will go down as one of those key moments in the history of the BBC and lessons will have to learnt from this.

AM: Now, we know that the Met police is looking at the Dyson report and looking at the circumstances surrounding that interview. As Home Secretary, would you welcome a police investigation?

PP: I’m not going to pre-judge anything, Andrew, right now. The Metropolitan Police will do what they have to do. It’s not for me to cross that boundary. What I would say, though, because it’s early stages yet, this report, the Dynson report, has been published, the review itself. I think it’s important that all the component parts, the elements, the BBC, government as well, with the opportunities - and I think we should look at the charter review as an opportunity to really strengthen and bolster and enhance the governance and accountability. Should there be other issues that materialise, then I think they will have to be looked at.

AM: Let’s turn to the pandemic then. Looking at the data coming out from Public Health England, really overwhelmingly positive this morning, there’s no particular reason for us not to think that June 21\textsuperscript{st} remains as the day when we get our liberties back.

PP: Well, this is an important time for us all. You know, we had May 17\textsuperscript{th} in the last week or so, unlocking and people getting back and living their lives. I think we’re all quite reflective right now, as well, over the past 12 months, how we’ve been locked down, the economy shut down, and how we’re not getting back to normal.
And your interview with Jenny Harries showed that as well. First of all, I think the public have been very conscientious and very sensible. We’ve all adopted, you know, hands, space, face, social
distancing etc, which will help, which will absolutely help. The data - obviously we follow the data, we listen to the advice of scientists in government. We'll continue to do that. What I think at this stage, I wouldn't want to pre-empt anything other than to say the data is good and we all need to carry on being very conscientious in our behaviours.

AM: What we know is that despite the data this morning the Indian variant is more transmissible and the vaccines are not quite as effective against it. Given that, are we going to unlock on the 21st, do you think?
PP: Well, we have the road map, and of course the road map has a number of tests that lead to the next stage. So we'll continue to follow the data, look at those tests - those tests are important as to how we move on to the next stage. The other point to make, Andrew, we speak about the variants of concern; of course as a country.

AM: One more time - I'm so sorry to break in. Is the data as we have it today telling us that we will open up on 21st June or not?
PP: The data is positive in terms of where we are, and look at the vaccine information that's been published today about the level of protection against specific variants. But that doesn't mean of course that, you know, it's the green light all the way. There are stages which we will follow. And again I say to the British public, Andrew, who's been incredible throughout all of this, we all have to be conscientious and, you know, all of us that are out and about now, we're distancing, wearing masks, following all the rules. That's part of our normal life now, and that will continue, and that of course will help us to that unlocking on 21st June.

AM: Let's think about the British public, who are hoping to fly away on holiday this summer. As I understand it, on the green list there are just three countries people can fly to who will accept us. One of them is Iceland, one of them is very, very small, that's
Gibraltar, and that leaves one. Is it really the government’s policy that you can fly away for a foreign holiday, but only to Portugal?

PP: First of all, we’ve been in a pandemic and if I may say so, throughout the pandemic we’ve been taking the right approaches to protect the public when it comes to public health. Now, when it comes to travel, international travel, we have the traffic light system. That is there for a reason, in terms of red listing countries where we have variants of concern, all those types of things. We have measures in place to protect the public. When it comes to holidays, of course the public will follow the advice that comes out from the government, green listing for example. But that’s always under review. That list can change and will change.

AM: Are you going to put more countries on the green list?

PP: Well, I can’t speak to you today and say that to you. The list is constantly under review, and the next review point, when that comes up, there’ll be more information published. I will say to everybody just follow the advice from government, look at which countries are listed, and just again be very conscientious as to how we go about our lives, booking holidays, just make sure that, you know, all the information is there and the public have the right information to make that decision.

AM: When did you tell Boris Johnson to put India on the red list?

PP: Well, across government - we made the decision collectively across government for red listing of India, I think, on April 23rd. And that was at a time when clearly we were starting to see that variant of concern around the Indian variant became an issue of concern six days later. But it’s also important to remember the only reason why we know about these variants of concern is because of the level of genomic sequencing that we have. We have the biggest capability in the world in the UK. And so that is how we are able to monitor variants and also put the right protective measures in place to protect the British public.
AM: But there is still a mystery here, because Matt Hancock told me that it was the positivity rates of people coming into this country and being tested that dictated which countries went on the red list and which didn’t. And at the time Pakistan had a positivity rating of 4.6 and was put on the red list, and at the crucial period, which was 25th March through to the 7th of April, the positivity rate for incoming travellers from India was higher than that, 5.2 per cent. So why was Pakistan on the list and India not?

PP: Well, you have to remember as well, there were many measures put in place at the borders even before those countries were red-listed, and even before the positivity rates were identified and even before the particular variant became a variant of concern. So people coming into the country were subject to upstream checks, they checked in terms of covid tests, and also having to quarantine as well. The rules are very, very strict. And of course, Andrew, we work with the data and we do know, of course, when it comes to positivity, variants of concern and the data there is a lag. So we work with the system, and that information was presented to ministers in the right way for the decision to be made around red-listing of all countries in particular.

AM: You rightly mention data. What the data tells us is that the Indian variant is spreading around the country and is on course to become the dominant variant in this country, that it came in through large numbers of people coming into this country from India who were not checked properly. And that is really down to the government, down to the borders. Matt Hancock told me the positivity tests were the crucial thing, and yet India was higher on those tests than Pakistan was. There’s still a mystery over this.

PP: That’s not quite correct in the sense that the variant - it wasn’t just India, this is Pakistan and you also remember Kenya and Bangladesh were also on the list. And they’re all red-listed. I emphasise again it’s not that people were not checked, that is not
correct to say that. There are plenty of checks. Upstreaming, people could not get onto an aeroplane until they’d been tested, provided certification, and in fact airlines are fined if they’re not providing that information through the system. Of course people are checked at the border as well. So there are arching checks. In-country checks, there are managed quarantine processes as well. So people are checked and the system is in place to make sure that we check. And you also mentioned about the variant of concern in the UK; of course there is a great deal of work taking place in terms of testing and jabbing. And the jabbing is so important to making sure we get people protected.

AM: I’d like to stay with the Indian variant, however, because we know there are at least 3,424 cases and probably a lot more than that by now of the Indian variant inside the UK now. Do you know how many of those came directly from travellers coming from India?
PP: Well, at this stage I don’t, no. But we will have that data and it won’t just be about travellers from India, because the Indian variant of course, as I said, neighbouring countries were also red-listed because of the variant of concern as well. So government has that data. But I think importantly when it comes to protecting our country and our public, we have all the measures in place, not just at the border but upstream and in countries, so when you look at particular communities that are affected we have the surge testing and we have greater vaccination programmes taking place. And the information, the data published today, shows of course that the vaccine is providing protection against this particular variant.

AM: But this system is not working in the sense that the Indian variant came into this country and is spreading fast. Since 15th February nearly half a million people, international arrivals, have been told to quarantine at home. Do you know how many of them went unchecked?
PP: Well, we have checks in place for the managed quarantine service and people checking - people at home, who are self-isolation at home.

AM: And is that just a phone call?

PP: It's not a phone call. It is a vigorous system led by Public Health England and it is called - it is checked, people do receive checks at home. And I think I should just -

AM: Not many.

PP: Well, people are receiving checks at home. I think also, Andrew, let’s put this into context, the British public, the British public have been following government advice and rules throughout this pandemic. We have stepped up all checks. We do not live in a police state, we live in an open society where actually -

AM: No, but we also know an awful lot of people are just ignoring this.

PP: well, actually, not when and let’s not forget there are wider checks, not just the checks at home, but the checks that have been taken upstream, but also as people arrive in the country. And it’s that information that then goes to Public Health England which then enables the additional checks to be taking place. So I do not think it’s right - and it’s not the right characterisation - to look at checks in isolation. One check at home and move further upstream.

AM: But you don’t know how many have been physically checked.

PP: We do have that data, Andrew.

AM: So how many have that half a million have been physically checked?

PP: I don’t have that information here. Government does have that data. It’s with Public Health England because they are the ones that see all those checks.

AM: Going right back to the beginning of this pandemic, you wanted to close the borders very early on. Why did the Prime
Minister overrule you? What reasons did he give right at the beginning?
PP: Well again, we follow data and the advice that comes through from the scientists and that has determined our strategy and our policies, Andrew, from day one.
AM: But your advice was different from the Prime Minister’s view.
PP: Well, we can all have
AM: I want to know why he overruled you.
PP: Well, it’s not about being overruled because all our decisions are collective decisions made across government, and those decisions are based on information that is provided to all ministers based on SAGE, based on good colleagues like Jenny and many others who effectively, as you heard from Jenny Harries today as well say that information comes to government ministers, based on data and based on taking the right and appropriate measures. And let’s not forget, Andrew, back in January last year there was advice going to the British public around travel, advice around the borders and it’s how that advice is aggregated that then leads to the collective decision making. Whether it’s borders or other aspects of the pandemic that you know we’ve all experienced and we’ve all been involved in.

AM: Can you now admit as government that herd immunity was the policy until March?
PP: Not at all, no. Absolutely not. Our policy from the outset Andrew, the policy and the strategy –
AM: So is why Dominic Cummings telling us that that is true?
PP: Well I can’t speak for Mr Cummings and one individual.
AM: So if you say it’s not true, he said was on all the graphs, it was on all the paperwork in those crucial meetings. Presumably therefore he cannot be bringing hard evidence of this. If you say it’s not true.
PP: So what I would say to this, I’m not going to comment on what Mr Cummings is going to say or also what is being speculated about right now. I think it’s important and the British
public will know this, Andrew, we all remember the intensity of the pandemic when the pandemic hit last year.

AM: We do but I’m asking you about the decisions.

PP: And the decisions that were undertaken in government – and by our Prime Minister, rightly so – collectively he showed great leadership at a very difficult time, closing the economy down, locking the country down as well. Big, big unprecedented decisions that were based on data and evidence. And our strategy was always about protecting public health. Saving lives and protecting the NHS. And all colleagues, absolutely all colleagues involved in those meetings and discussions, working with the Chief Scientists and Chief Medical Officers will absolutely recognise that, from the very difficult discussions that we had and Andrew, at a time of a crisis when government is making very, very tough decisions, difficult decisions, we put public life and protecting the public at the forefront of all those decisions.

AM: You have found to have broken the Ministerial Code, the Prime Minister is under investigation over the Ministerial Code. Does the Ministerial Code still matter?

PP: Well, look. I mean the Ministerial Code itself is there for a reason and there’s working taking place right now in terms of reviewing that. Now I think

AM: Reviewing the Code?

PP: Well I think, I think at this stage, you know this isn’t about breaking codes and things of that nature. We’re all just getting on in government doing very difficult jobs actually, coming out of this pandemic – you’ve just asked me about decisions that were made last year – and all ministers currently are focused on getting on doing that job.

AM: Final question. Nicola Sturgeon has asked you to stop the deportation of people from Glasgow because of community hostility to that there. Are you going to do that?
PP: Well, the government, the government has a responsibility to remove people from the United Kingdom with no legal status to be here.

AM: So that’s a no?

PP: And that includes some of the individuals, foreign national offenders and people that have brought great harm to our country. So we will continue to enforce our laws and legislation to remove those with no legal basis to be in the UK.

Ends