

Diana's mine victory

By ARUP BISWAS

PRINCESS Diana threw John Major's government into confusion with her backing for a worldwide ban on landmines, according to secret U.S. communications.

Pictures of the princess in protective clothing for mine clearing dominated the media during her trip to Angola in January 1997, winning wide public sympathy for the Red Cross campaign.

Her actions were seen as controversially endorsing Labour policy for Britain to lead the way, while the then-Conservative government's position was not to support a ban until all countries had signed a deal.

The extent of dismay in Downing Street is laid bare by cables at the time from American ambassadors to the U.S. Secretary of State, Madeline Albright. They have just been released under U.S. freedom of information rules.

They show the Americans believed Diana came out the winner over the then Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, when junior defence minister Earl Howe – a hereditary peer not related to the former Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe – accused her of being a 'loose cannon' and 'ill-informed on

Secret cables reveal how her Angola trip wrongfooted Major

Mr Rifkind had 'stepped in to cool things off,' wrote Mr Steinberg. He concluded: 'She was excited about the results and talking about more visits to Vietnam, Cambodia, Kuwait and return engagements in Angola.'

'No one can come to Angola and see the human devastation caused by landmines and not be moved. We

have told the British ambassador how seriously the United States' government takes this problem and how much we appreciate Diana's support.'

The Americans later cooled on the idea of a landmine ban, while Labour has since banned their use by the British military and urged other countries to follow suit.



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'Excited about the results'

the issue of anti-personnel mines'

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