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On Other Pages

COMMENTS	2
VIEW FROM DELHI	
SHADOW CONFRONTATION	
FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT	5
BIHAR	
'THE GOOD EARTH'	
N. K. SINGH	6
UTTAR PRADESH	
VAGARIES OF A VIDYAPITH	
INDUKANTA SHUKLA	7
CALCUTTA DIARY	
CHARAN GUPTA	8
THE SMALL FAMILY NORM AND LITERACY—II	
ASOK MITRA	10
THE PRESS	
FULL CIRCLE IN PAKISTAN	13
'HEADLINE' FOR SQUAD-31	
BY OUR DRAMA CRITIC	15
NEW RELEASES	
PRABODH KUMAR MAITRA	16
EXHIBITIONS	
BY AN ART CRITIC	16
LETTERS	17

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UNEASY PEACE

THERE is nothing like martial law, it seems. A few hours after Yahya Khan took over in Pakistan the mounting violence and chaos, "the reign of terror" came to an end. Let there be peace, the general ordained, and there was instant peace—so report the newspapers. Isn't the Stock Exchange looking up? Aren't office-goers vying with each other to sign the attendance register on time? Of course some trouble-makers will always be there. The All-Party Students Action Committee, so far the most militant body, has been banned, labour leaders have been rounded up and mass arrests are taking place. Signs of returning order and sanity are getting headlines in the papers—though workers in mills near Dacca have the audacity to go slow — but what is exactly happening behind the curtain is unlikely to come to light. As a foreign correspondent reported over the telephone—he could talk about hockey and basket ball, about the rest he would have to be dumb.

The pre-martial law "chaos and anarchy" was described in lurid detail almost every day—so many noses chopped off, eyes gouged out, so many people speared, nailed, burnt to death, or thrown into the river and so on. Wasn't it just hell? There might have been violence and excesses. Under the swing of the movement and the shadow of famine people meted out rough justice to criminals, basic democrats, political careerists and profiteers. Also, the lumpen proletariat fished in the troubled waters, encouraged by the regime and operating with foreign funds, to provide an excuse for the military take-over, preparations for which had been afoot from the beginning of March. The split at the Round Table Conference between the Western and Eastern leaders over the question of regional autonomy and the stories of anarchy in East Pakistan provided the pretext to strike. There must be loud sighs of relief in Moscow, Washington, London and New Delhi.

What the papers left out or played down was the mass action and heroism of the people, the 600 or so killed in firings in East Pakistan, the thousands of demonstrators, including countless women, who defied the curfew and dared the military at midnight in Dacca, the unprecedented dedication, stamina and sacrifice of millions in the struggle against the regime, the students and others who vowed to free Mujibur Rahman and Moni Singh, the police and the army knowing that there would be no

stopping them—for the masses on the move the sky then was the limit. And just before the military crack-down students had started sending peace committees to the villages and also set up bodies to fight the right reaction. It is the heroism, tenacity and sacrifice of the people that will be remembered, and not the excesses that accompany any mass upsurge.

There are many parallels between the French uprising of last year and the movement in Pakistan: both began over university reform, were turned, at student initiative, into a struggle for the restructuring of the regime and were later reinforced by working-class (and peasant)—action for economic gains. General Yahya Khan is now trying to ape de Gaulle by adopting a carrot-and-stick policy. Concessions are being made to certain sections of the population. But he knows that the volcano may erupt again. In West Pakistan, his soldiers may try to look like "your brother", but in the East they are hostile, alien forces posted to prop up the bureaucratic-military elite. This elite was not prepared to go beyond a parliamentary system based on universal adult franchise, a step forward no doubt but by no means a solution to the crucial problem of regional autonomy. Very few West Pakistanis, the Punjabis in particular (of the two provinces that were partitioned, both the Punjabs have done very well, thanks to defence and other spending, while the two truncated Bengals have rotted) are prepared to lose the eastern colony they have sponged on for so long. The RTC was devised to gain time and give an air of legitimacy to a reformed regime in which the DAC politicians would share power and continue to exploit East Pakistan. Ayub Khan knew that these politicians of shady vintage would be useful in driving a wedge between the West and the East and when the rift became loud the armed forces struck. The democratic movement in Pakistan would have gained further momentum and been different today if the RTC had been boycotted by East Pakistan and an underground organisation of hard-core militants set up.

The peace that Yahya Khan has ordained will be an uneasy peace. The people who have had a measure of their Promethean power—and also limitations—are unlikely to sit with folded hands. Their task is harder, as the armed forces will work in closer league with right reaction; and perhaps East Pakistan will have to go it rather alone in fighting the battle for autonomy. In her struggle she will have to look to student power and the power of the workers in the West, not to the decrepit, crafty politicians there. It is they who have shattered the 1947 concept of a rigid, unitary Pakistan, and in the process helped people to remember that the original concept was quite different, that it is much nearer to the present demands and aspirations of the democratic movement.

The Neglected Part

The exodus of UF Ministers to New Delhi has begun. Much stout-hearted optimism will be necessary to expect that these visits will bring any relief to the State; the frequency of air journey will only be matched by the frequency of disappointment. Maybe both have their utility, for they are part of the UF Government's quest for identity, of establishing that it differs from the previous regimes in the State and the present regime at the Centre in many ways. But there must be a positive way of making the same point so that the people may feel in their daily existence that the Government they have chosen is fundamentally different from what they had before and the change is indisputably for the better.

Even in its confrontation with the Centre the UF Government has so far been able to score only minor points. Mr Dharma Vira has been withdrawn from West Bengal, though not formally yet, but in his place some one is proposed to be inducted about whom practically nothing is known here. Efforts are being made to project the proposed incumbent as a

liberal who will take to the UF regime as fish does to water. But that does not mitigate the affront done by the Centre in rejecting the panel out of which the State Government wanted Mr Dharma Vira's successor to be selected. In spite of the Congress party's support in the State Assembly to the UF resolution for abolition of the Upper House, the proposal is gathering dust in New Delhi; it seems the Central Government will not have the time during the current session for a parliamentary enactment to abolish the West Bengal Council. Mr Chavan has shown unaccustomed promptness in turning down the suggestion that the CRF and other foreign police units should be withdrawn from West Bengal. If the UF Government opposed their deployment, they would rather hibernate here than do duty elsewhere. The Union Home Minister's proposal may not be as innocent as it looks on the surface. There are already several battalions of the Border Security Force, a para-military organisation controlled entirely by the Centre, in the State; an industrial security force is in the offing; and with the proposed headquarters of the CRF in Durgapur the Centre seems bent on retaining a formidable force of armed policemen to do its bidding in West Bengal. The Prime Minister has agreed to discuss the matter in New Delhi this month; but there is no likelihood of the demand being conceded, especially after the timidity displayed by the UF in handling the Dharma Vira episode. The outlook for greater financial devolution from the Centre is no better, however cogent the State Government's memoranda to the Centre and the supposedly independent Finance Commission under a former Congress Minister may be.

It seems no agitation against the Centre to secure for West Bengal its legitimate dues is on the immediate agenda of the UF. Whether it will ever be is a difficult question; the Kerala example may be a pointer, a damper too. It has been said that the UF's conflict with the Centre is an extension of the class war; perhaps it is a kind of class war which has to be fought in air-conditioned

comfort around conference tables. Not all will agree; but even those who do cannot help expecting something more from the UF Government to sustain their spirits. The decision to place the rates of dearness allowance granted by the State Government at par with those of the Centre removes a hoary discrimination. Some other States have already done it. But it will benefit about four lakh people only, a fraction of those who look up to the UF for amelioration. The tram fare has been reduced by two paise; there is, however, another way of looking at it, for even the reduced fare is three paise higher than what the passengers had been paying last year. If anything is being done to keep rice prices in check in the rural areas in the lean months ahead, it is not known to the public. Much has been said about land reforms but action is yet to match the promises. Confrontation with the Centre is only one part of the UF pledge, though it makes screaming headlines in newspapers; the other is to give some relief to the people despite the constitutional limitations. The latter should be neither ignored nor delayed. And there is need for ceaseless vigilance and even sterner action to curb the communalists.

The Wheat Lobby

The kulak lobby is at it again. The furore over the Agricultural Wealth Tax and the proposed excises on power-driven pumps and fertilisers has abated, following Mr Morarji Desai's promise to 're-examine' the issues involved. There is however no lack of other targets of wrath. The latest rumpus is over the recommendations of the Agricultural Prices Commission on the level of procurement prices for wheat. Wheat prices in the open market have fallen 30 to 40 per cent over the last twelve months. The Commission, poor thing, therefore thought that it could safely recommend a reduction in the Government purchase price across-the-board by around 9 per cent.

Since the grain will be plentiful this year, and there are notions floating around that this country should be self-sufficient in food as well as build a buffer to cope with the bad years, the Commission also recommended that procurement of wheat should be 1.5 million tonnes more than last year.

From the point of view of the kulaks, nothing could be more scandalous than these recommendations. A group of forty to fifty MPs have reportedly asked the Prime Minister to dismiss the Commission; angry discussions have followed on the floor of Parliament. Not only will the kulaks not agree to any lowering of prices; they have demanded that procurement prices be raised over last year's level, never mind the trend on the open market.

This week, the Chief Ministers of the wheat-producing States are meeting in New Delhi to arbitrate on the Commission's recommendations. The manner in which invitations to this Conference have been doled out is altogether queer. Only the Chief Ministers of the wheat-producing States have been called; the deficit States, who are the bulk consumers of the grain, have been mostly left out. This invidiousness offers ground for suspicion that a conspiracy is being hatched; perhaps a new set of procurement prices—higher than last year's—will be decided at the conference, and sprung on the consuming States as *fait accompli*.

The motive for all this is not far to seek either. The production of wheat is concentrated in States which are either with the Congress, or further to the Right. In contrast, the States deficit in wheat are generally arraigned against the Congress. A refusal to lower procurement prices—and, in fact, manoeuvring to raise them—may therefore be an act of deliberate value-judgment: the Congress way of favouring those States which are politically on this side of the fence and of punishing those which are non-conformist. It is thus altogether conceivable that we will this year witness the phenomenon of consumers being called upon to pay

prices higher than last year's despite production reaching a peak and despite the reduction in the unit cost of cultivation resulting from the spread of the high-yielding varieties.

If procurement prices are raised, consumer prices can still be kept low only if the procured grain is put away in the buffer and public distribution consists mostly of imported wheat, which costs less. It is therefore a Hobson's choice which New Delhi would like the consuming States to face: if they want to distribute local grain, they must pay high prices; if, on the other hand, they want prices to be kept low for the consumers, they must implicitly concur in the indefinite postponement of the goal of self-sufficiency.

This is an extraordinary situation. Each year, the tax-payers are doling out more than Rs 500 crores for financing the so-called New Agricultural Strategy. The rationale for such an investment is that there will soon be more of food in the country, allowing us to dispense with imports. But if there is going to be a ganging up between the Centre and the surplus States to make this either impossible or unduly costly to the consumers, the basic question to ask then is whether the Strategy itself should not be given the go-by: the citizens of India are not for burning so that a handful of kulaks may continue to enjoy gracious living.

The Big-Four Meeting

Israel considers the impending four-Power meeting on the Middle East a wholly irrelevant matter because none of these four are Middle Eastern Powers. The posture, however cynical it appears, is puppetry brought to perfection. Born with the blessings of these big four and nurtured by American money thereafter, Israel is most likely to crumble if and when the American protection is removed. But it serves American interests if Israel, now and then, trumpets an independent stand, enabling the USA to manoeuvre better.

By now it is evident that there cannot be a solution of the Middle East problem, least of all a political one. The Arabs have two distinct goals. The Arab Governments have their short-term goal, to obtain the implementation of the Security Council resolution of November 22, 1967. This is necessary for the face saving and survival of their regimes. The Arab people have their long-term goal—to wipe out the State of Israel, which they consider a mere cover for an imperialist base in the Middle East. Israel is aware of both these two stands. In view of the Arab long-term goal, she cannot implement the Security Council resolution without endangering her own security. The postwar frontiers are absolutely necessary for meeting the Arab military challenge effectively.

The big four cannot be unaware of these antagonistic stands. Then why this meeting? Probably they consider that there is no other way of postponing the war which is anyway inevitable than holding talks now and then which might serve as a sop to the overreaching ambitions of the Arabs and Israelis. A periodical summit and a periodical postponement of the war are necessary till the big four are themselves prepared for a showdown. Till then the gimmickry would continue.

In the mean time Washington has threatened Tel Aviv of dire consequences if nasty acts like bombarding Jordanian villages are continued. The threat would not have sounded so affected, if the whole world did not know anything of the American decision to sell 10 Phantom bombers to Israel and to train 120 Israeli pilots in the use of these Phantoms. If supplying arms to Israel is not encouragement of the aggression, what is?

De Gaulle has made known his decision to suspend deliveries of arms and spare parts to Israel. A notable gesture of sympathy towards the Arabs indeed. But, while holding back the 50 Mirage jets, de Gaulle has made an irrevocable contribution to making Israel a nuclear power. The French have built a research reactor in Israel secretly and de Gaulle has

not demanded any undertaking from Israel that the reactor would not be used for nuclear weapons. Israel has been working over the plant, she has developed a uranium industry and is now reported to be well advanced on a nuclear weapons programme. While Russia has induced all the Arab Governments to sign the non-proliferation treaty, the USA has made no such attempt to persuade Israel who has bluntly refused to sign it. The inference should be obvious.

The big four are however optimistic about the impending meeting. There is a vague reference to a package deal, originally devised by Russia and now revised by the USA. A rumour is in the air that the USA has already obtained secret consent from Israel that she would implement the Security Council resolution if the Arabs are made to swallow the package. But then what was the famous resolution itself? According to the Arabs, the resolution means that Israel must go back to her pre-war frontiers. To Israel, it means simply that peace must be restored in the Middle East and she thinks that the resolution does not mention vacation of the occupied territories. The big four meeting may produce, if not peace in the Middle East, an illuminating semantic exercise on the resolution.

Anguillan Farce

Though an accord has now been reached, what happened in the tiny Caribbean island of Anguilla belongs to the realm of Absurd Drama. The pre-dawn swoop on the island involving red-bereted British paratroops, Royal Marine Commandos and the Scotland Yard, had all the trappings of an operation by U.S. marines and the Air Mobile Cavalry Division in some South Vietnamese cities besieged by the Vietcong. The minor difference lies in the fact that the target of Her Majesty's valiant fighters was 6,000 helpless black islanders. They might be unarmed but had'nt they seceded from the Associated States of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla and taken the danger-

ous path of unilateral declaration of independence? The British sense of legality and justice which was outraged, for Britain was responsible for the external relation of the Associated States and she could not discharge that responsibility "unless good government was restored in Anguilla". Moreover the British, who had apparently taken charge of looking after the wellbeing of the Caribbean islands could not be indifferent, the British Foreign Secretary Mr. Michael Stewart, argued, to the "danger of fragmentation". The show of force was necessary because, as he said, "there was a danger that somewhat disreputable characters from outside the States, possessing arms, were exercising influence on those who purported to be its government." Though the action was taken in the interest of the Anguillans it had been stated that the military presence would be "very brief".

Mr Stewart felt relieved that the invasion was bloodless. The fact that not a pebble was thrown at the British force of occupation had been most embarrassing for them. To justify this farcical show of strength they put out stories of "hoodlum" resistance. These "hoodlums" were reportedly very careful not to touch white skin but only the black Anguillans "sympathetic to the British". Though the Anguillan leader, Mr Ronald Webster, appealed to the U.N., Britain made it known that the U.N. Special Committee on Colonialism would be refused entry in Anguilla. But the Foreign Office must have realised how they had made fools of themselves. This was indirectly admitted by despatching Lord Caradon, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to Anguilla. Mr Webster had all along been demanding that a Minister from London should come to the island for talks on its future status.

The Anguillan farce seems to be petering out, but the significance of the British move cannot be overlooked. Two hundred thousand whites in Rhodesia might twist the tail of the British lion with impunity, but all the British valour was reserved for 6,000 unarmed black people of Anguilla.

The irrepressible Mr Stewart said that an attempt to solve the Rhodesian problem by force would result in "destruction of life and property" and "embitterment". In fact the desire to imitate the tough Americans proved

irresistible when the subject in question was unable to strike back. British pragmatism consists in behaving with Gandhians in a Bismarckian way and with Bismarckians in a Gandhian fashion.

View From Delhi

Shadow Confrontation

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

A confrontation is inherent in the present pattern of Centre-State relations but is any of the States serious about forcing one, on any issue for that matter? The Durgapur developments have forced an awkward situation for the West Bengal Government and the United Front leaders had to announce with great fanfare the venue and time for a confrontation—New Delhi, April 18, and the issue is the deployment of the Central Reserve Police units in a State.

But what is there to confront the Centre on is not very clear because the Home Minister has made it plain that if a State Government does not want to utilise the CRP it was another matter but there was no question of withdrawing them just because a State Government cannot stand its presence. The only issue to be settled therefore is whether the Centre has the right to deploy CRP units in a State without the consent or the permission of the State Government. This issue was already settled when the Centre moved CRP units into Kerala on the eve of the September 19, 1968 strike of the Central staff. There was no serious objection to it then. And does it make much difference, even politically, whether the firing on workers in Idikki was by the CRP units or the State police units? The West Bengal stance sounds a little comical, for another reason. Someone in the Government remembered, after the Durgapur incidents, that the Uttar Pradesh Armed Constabulary was billeted in West Bengal. It has been there

right since the days of President's Rule and no one thought of seeking its pack-up from the State.

The hardened cynic should be pardoned his undue circumspection if he were to think that the much publicised confrontation to come on April 18 is likely to turn out to be yet another of those damp squibs. Leaders who talk loud and big in their State capitals behave so timidly the moment they reach New Delhi. All the bravado outside is for the consumption of the gullible public.

To recall a bit of history, the CRP has its origin in the Crown Reserve Police started with a single battalion in 1939 to assist the native States in their law and order functions. The Home Minister at the Centre puts himself now in the position of a modern Viceroy and orders the CRP units into the States on the strength of the Home Ministry's assessment of the law and order situation. Will West Bengal tell the Centre that there is no need for a private army of the Home Ministry under the label of a Central Reserve Police? Mr Jyoti Basu's party is the main component of the United Front in Kerala but no such demand has come from it so far. Mr Namboodiripad's only objection regarding the CRP did not relate to its deployment in any part of the country. His grievance was that the Centre did not extend to him the courtesy of consultation on what is essentially a law and order problem before sending the CRP. There was serious apprehension in Madras State during the

language agitation about the presence of the CRP units but even Mr Annadurai did not have the courage to demand their recall.

Perhaps West Bengal would not have bothered, (or even known of the existence of CRP units in the State) but for the clash at Durgapur. Most certainly Mr Chavan will say "no" to the State leaders' demand and they know it, but a shadow confrontation is necessary to keep the United Front's anti-Centre image.

"Shock Defeat"

Last week's "shock" defeat for the Government in the Lok Sabha over the Assam Reorganisation Bill was not a real shock after all. All that the episode underlined was that the legislators have no time to legislate. More than a question of decorum in the House, it is invariably the issue of a quorum. And by consensus the quorum rule is not to be insisted on in the Lok Sabha though it amounts to flouting the Constitution.

The Assam Bill needed the presence of at least half the members in the House and the support of at least two-thirds of those present to get through. The Congress does not have a two-thirds majority in the House with the shrinkage of its strength in the 1967 polls. So necessarily it had to depend on the support of some of the Opposition groups to see the bill through. The Opposition's indignation at the bill fiasco and the demand for resignation of the Government on this score sounded bizarre. When 262 members were needed in the House, only 261 were present at the division. What a pity, one of the Ministers could not be in because he was busy nursing his dog and what an inopportune time the dog chose to be ill! That forced the Congress into tantrums. But a little arithmetical exercise would reveal something. The Congress has a strength of 281 in the House and when the debacle came that day, 217 of its members were present which is good proportion because the Opposition which claims a strength of about 240 could present

only 44, of which 15 belonged to the Jana Sangh.

It was a technical defeat and all the profound perorations about the episode as such were misplaced. What nobody cared to ask is why there was such a poor turn-out for a crucial bill—the first constitutional amendment needing a two-thirds majority the Government was attempting ever since the Congress was reduced to the status of a simple majority party in 1967? The House is near full when it comes to agitation business, a call attention, an adjournment or a no-confidence motion, or even a short-notice question. But when it comes to hard legislation, a kind of lethargy overcomes even the Opposition. The Government's defeat related to securing the presence of half the membership for the division on the Assam bill's operative clause. It was not the pattern of voting or the nature of division that forced a defeat on the Government.

After over a year, the Lok Sabha heard the muted voice of secession echoed by a DMK member who

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obviously was not for secession. He was right when he said that the impression was being created in his home State of Tamil Nadu that the DMK has let the people down on the language issue. It would be a tragedy if the DMK failed to solve the issue because the people would be forced to think of secession, he warned. The logical consequence of the DMK's failure would be the resurrection of the secessionist demand. That is what the DMK seems to dread most.

The Centre is impervious to the problem because its accent is on accelerating the pace of Hindi's ascendancy while the outstanding issue around the controversial Language Policy Resolution of Parliament does not appear to be its concern any more. A Government spokesman is on record with the statement that the Centre would not take the initiative towards a consensus on eliminating the unequal burden on the non-Hindi entrants to Central services.

Another serious development to which the Centre is impervious is the Telengana agitation. After the Chief Minister's talks with the Centre, it appeared that the Central leadership dare not lay the line for the visiting satrap because the Prime Minister owed her 1967 election partly to him and whatever he told the Centre was accepted as gospel. The Centre's initial concern wore off into complacency and the movement building up around the slogan of a separate Telengana is sought to be dismissed with the same callousness as is shown towards the Nag Vidarbha agitation in Maharashtra. Sub-regional conflicts perhaps presage Centre-regional conflicts but after all New Delhi is something like the Moghul court of Aurangzeb's days. The disintegration of an Empire began with the revolt of the infra-structure in the Deccan plateau.

March 30, 1969

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Bihar

'The Good Earth'

N. K. SINGH

AFTER the black years of famine the peasants of Bihar have learned a lesson. There is a 'green-revolution' here also. Food production is expected to increase by 7½ lakh tons this year. But the ancient question remains: To whom does this crop belong? Who has the right to enjoy this paddy, this wheat, this maize, this arhar?

Of course those who work on the fields from dawn to dusk with their whole families, including the kids. They should be the masters of this green treasure. Now-a-days even the Anand-Margis are urging an end to exploitation. Doesn't it show that everybody wants to end exploitation and is looking to socialism? And so everybody in India, from Acharya Vinoba Bhave to Kanu Sanjal, from Mrs Indira Gandhi to Miss Ajitha are working, or at least seem to be working, for the same slogan—'Land to the tiller'.

But then different people have different methods. Sant Vinoba asks people to wait and not hurry and spoil all the things he has done for them. He assures the peasants that they will get their land after he has finished his various donation-programmes—Bhoodan Gram-dan, Prakhhandan, Zilla-dan, Prant-dan and so on.

But the Acharya is always a bit late. Things happen and then he appears on the stage with his pupils, who eat more but work less. Was there no exploitation in Telengana before the revolt started there? Was the exploitation of the Naxalbari peasants started just a few months before their movement? No, the roots are as old as history itself. Where was the Acharya when the 'bloody communists' were creating a mess in those places?

The Dangeites and the Marxists are said to be waiting for the day when they will capture power. Then they

APRIL 5, 1969

may be able to pass laws like the Buteidari Bill, which is nothing but a conversion from feudalism to capitalism. But as something is better than nothing, the peaceful ones are waiting for the day. For how long? Twenty-two years have passed. For, long 22 years India has witnessed parliamentary revolution, air-conditioned style.

Here come the Naxalites, the so-called extremists who say 'Down with votes, MLAs, MPs, Parliament and Assembly.'

Bihar is also moving. The progress is slow, but it does not matter, after all, things are in motion. Once again after the elections the revolutionary peasants are taking their own crop from the zamindars with the help of arms.

Police files are full of crop-looting cases. God knows how many. At least four or five hundred cases. In Bihar the main targets for 'the Red Revolution in the Green fields' are Champaran, Monghyr and Purnea districts.

Bihar has got both the 'Raja press' and the 'jute press'. Both are busy reporting the setting up of so-called Kisan Sabhas to stop crop-looting. The 'Kisan Sabhas' are working under the leadership of such famous peasants as the Raja of Kursela, the Raja of Ramgarh and the Raja of... They own just a few hundred thousand acres.

Near Khagaria (North-Bihar) a band of one hundred people raided a land belonging to a Marwari who is a zamindar-cum-businessman. They cut the crop and then with patience heard a speech given by the group leader (a loudspeaker was provided on this occasion). The people were unarmed except for a few hand-grenades. This is just an example. Hundreds of cases like this are being filed in police stations in rural areas. Papers publish these incidents with screaming headlines—'Naxalites Active Again.'

In Bihar three Naxalite groups are working. Of them two are major groups. One belongs to the Co-ordination Committee of Revolutionary Communists, whose Bihar leader is Mr S. N. Sinha or S. N. Another is a guerilla-type group under the leader-

ship of Comrade B. K. Azad. The two groups do not co-operate with each other. Comrade Azad suspects SN as an agent of the Dangeites. He is against the manner in which the Co-ordination Committee was formed.

Both groups have got their own working fields. Azad's group is more active in his home area, Monghyr district, while the Co-ordination Committee has a good hold in Champaran district.

Ranchi has got tantalising possibilities for guerilla war and training camps. But no move has been made by the reds in Ranchi ever since the

Uttar Pradesh

Vagaries Of A Vidyapith

INDUKANTA SHUKLA

THE Kashi Vidyapith was full of commotion when all teaching and non-teaching staff struck work in many. The Vice-Chancellor invited the PAC so that he could wrest from the employees the keys to various offices and cupboards. This, among other things, polarised the division and defiance which had been so far shored under the Carpet of apathy and acquiescence. The presence of the armed police on any campus is an irritant, obnoxious alike to the students and teachers.

The Vidyapith, in the UGC parlance, is not a university, but only deemed to be one. This wire drawing may satisfy the officials in the glass-panelled upper-storey of the UGC building in New Delhi, but this is neither here nor there. The UGC has been recurringly doling out grants to this institution on the basis of an equivocation and through artificial respiration keeps alive an educational oddity, for the Vidyapith is nothing less.

In fact, the Vidyapith bristles with questions. As against the extremely sensible recommendation of the Wadia Committee of the UGC that it confine itself to teaching only social work and sociology and thus distinctively establish its *raison d'être*, the authorities there went ahead con-

trarily and started several departments in the humanities. With a mammoth central university like BHU already here, and with half-a-dozen degree colleges affiliated to it and Gorakhpur University, there was no justification for the Vidyapith going the same way. Associated with the names of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Acharya Narendra Deva, Dr Keshkar and Mr Kamala Pati Tripathi among its students and teachers, why should it have abandoned its original aims and rushed into the queue for ordinary university status with nothing to set it apart from the prolific crop of educational curiosities called university in post-Independence India? Why, again, did it drain itself dry by paying a fat four-figure salary to its Chancellor? Nowhere else does the Chancellor of a university have to be paid.

Income from fees (1,600 students) and the Trust that runs it leave it with an annual budgetary deficit of nearly Rs. 6 lakhs. There are 140 employees including 75 teachers. The deficit is met by the UGC. But the Vidyapith has itself to blame for its dilatory submission of accounts to the UGC which in its turn withheld grants, leading to the present imbroglio. To add to this sore, as though, the Vidyapith spent away the Com-

mission grant of Rs. 25 lakhs for construction and disbursing the salaries.

Salaries in arrears being chronic the staff have not been paid for three months, sub-standard quality of education, irregularities not only in expenditure but also in appointments, arbitrary increments, promotion to favourites—make it an institution of iniquity.

There are only two ways out of the impasse. One: let it boldly deny itself the dole from the UGC and eke out for itself a career of less imitational, less fashionable but more functional and fruitful kind which will assure it an individuality and make it self-sustaining. Two: let the UGC come boldly forward to streamline and establish it as a school of social work and sociology before giving it recognition and grants. Temporising with anything less drastic will be an inadvisable expedient.

To give tourism in UP a big boost a Rs. 2-crore scheme is under way. Some of the grandiose items are: air-conditioned buses between Delhi and Agra, beautification of Corbett Park, augmenting by 200 the present fleet of 340 buses etc. etc. But the craziness of it all will be more evident from the following examples: (1) Varanasi has a UP Government Tourist Bungalow, efficiently run, with reasonable tariff. But its approach road abounds in pot-holes and gaping surfaces rattling the bones of passengers in a taxi or rickshaw. A wrangle has been on as to who should undertake the repairs—the Municipal Corporation, the State Government, or the residents there! Dormitories on the route to Badrinath and Gangotri may be useful, but are not so urgent as the repairs on this road. But those setting priorities at the State level seem to be having their own brand of what is called commonsense. (2) Years ago, the Government of India acquired a piece of land in the Cantonment for building a tourist hotel. Bureaucracy, perhaps, in league with the vested interests, has seen to the plan being practically frozen. This gives a wide berth to the private hoteliers to monopolise hosting at their own fabulously high tariff.

Calcutta Diary

CHARAN GUPTA

GOD alone knows how many thousands of troops were flown into East Pakistan by General Yahya Khan over the last fortnight. God knows—and some others ought to have known: I mean Mrs Gandhi and her immediate colleagues in New Delhi. Were these troops airfreighted along a circuitous route, first flown down south, then east skirting Ceylon, and north again till the Kurmitola military airport at Dacca? Or, were these troops flown across the territory of India, with the tacit approval of the Government of India? Only two alternative conjectures are possible: (a) the Pakistani troops were specifically allowed air transit facilities following a request from the Military Law Administration at Islamabad, (b) Indian intelligence is altogether too poor to detect the movement of foreign military aircraft—or of foreign civilian aircraft carrying military personnel—across the country's airspace. Since the second conjecture is scarcely believable, one can conclude that New Delhi readily gave permission to the Islamabad authorities to move as many divisions as it felt necessary to crush the rebellion in East Pakistan. Mr Dinesh Singh's denial on the floor of Parliament of such troop movements was at best perfunctory, and his statement conceals more than it reveals.

Mrs Gandhi says that what is happening in Pakistan is that country's internal affair. But already the docile set of political correspondents have been fed stories about how much it is in India's interest that a stable regime ensues in the neighbouring country. For stable read military. New Delhi prefers a military establishment in Pakistan—and one which will assert itself swiftly—to any continuous turmoil, especially a turmoil which might end up in a socialist set-up, particularly in East Pakistan. Fear of social change is a great leveler, it not only brings the Indira

Gandhis and the Morarji Desais together, it also persuades them to welcome gleefully the reign of the Ayubs and Yahya Khans elsewhere. It is altogether on the cards that perhaps, on the sly, some kind of joint policy planning has already been initiated between New Delhi and Islamabad regarding how to checkmate the rising surge of socio-economic pressure in the eastern regions of both the countries. The spectre of Bhashani is a shared spectre, and if East Pakistan goes down to defeat, the relief would be as pronounced in New Delhi as in Islamabad. Whether there would be a similar reaction in both Washington and Moscow is a thing which is best left to speculation.

Mrs Gandhi can even proffer a very matter-of-fact reason for her implicit support of the Yahya Khans. Both Bhutto and Bhashani have threatened to go back on the Tashkent Declarations, and to ignite once more the Kashmir issue. Even if ideology were not involved, the authors of such dangerous ideas need to be silenced. Perhaps Mrs Gandhi has therefore decided to cooperate in the Operation Silence. The dangerous men who talk of self-determination for the Kashmiris do not deserve any sympathy. After all, the concept of the Governor's discretionary powers is fast supplanting the commonsense ideas regarding the limit of power of the duly elected representatives of the people. From the Governor's discretionary powers to an army general's arbitrary discretions is only one short stop. Coming events cast their shadow; initially, the shadow is cast in your neighbouring country.

* *
A Jana Sanghite leader has already gone on record welcoming the enforcement of martial law in Pakistan, which will, he hopes, now be saved from the danger of a Leftist

APRIL 5, 1969

take-over. There will be similar jubilation amongst the believers of the Swatantra and PSP line; for the bulk of the Congressmen too, Yahya Khan's intervention has meant the salvaging of a sticky situation. But what above the Leftists? There are nearly four dozen members of the Lok Sabha belonging to the two communist parties. No one at first bothered to find out whether the crack Pakistani divisions were flown across India's sky; let the peasants and workers and students of Dacca and Mymensingh and Khulna and Chittagong and Rajshahi be shot, liquidated, hanged, crushed by tanks—our official communists could not care less. This atrophy of thought and action on their part is indeed bizarre. If a rumpus could be raised earlier on the floor of Parliament, maybe Mrs Gandhi could have been put a little bit on the defensive. This could have allowed the young insurgents in East Pakistan a breathing time, which could be used by them to re-group their forces and re-draw their strategy in the new situation. But, no, not even one little finger was lifted to provide the East Pakistanis with the breathing time. This is the era for *national* communists; everyone fends for himself, and desists from helping the comrades across the border. Besides, those across the border may as well be the wrong kind of comrades. After all, going by the newspapers, both Bhashani and Bhutto are supposed to be "pro-Peking". Why stick your neck out for people who are not quite "correct"?

* *

It is all a great tragedy. We are hardly 40 miles away from the East Pakistan border, Khulna will be barely 80 miles away, Dacca some 170 miles, and yet, we have to tune in to Radio Australia to get the news of what is happening there, and have to depend on the British Broadcasting Corporation for commentaries on happenings. Either we don't care to learn on our own about the cataclysm in Pakistan, or we don't dare to learn. Perhaps it is the latter. Ensnared in our petty-bourgeois preju-

ices and foibles, we are perhaps reluctant to acknowledge that, across the border, those brave men and women have carried forward the struggle to a stage much further than ours, the struggle for political emancipation has been converted into one for sweeping social change, the call for altering the political relations has been swamped by the demand for a total overhauling of the existing social relations. From whatever information has been allowed to be leaked through, it is also clear that the peasantry is proving itself to be much more acquainted with the realities of class relations than the turbulent urban middle class, and than even the 'de-classed' students.

By leaving them in the lurch, we are demonstrating a moral cowardice whose sin can never be washed away. For people in West Bengal, the moral problem is certainly very much more acute. It would be idle to pretend that, with the partition of the country, we might as well forget our links with the tract across the border, and with those who inhabit the tract. However much Mr Chavan may shout from New Delhi, our connections with East Pakistan are there, and will remain. We will continue to share the language and the script, the folklore and the grammar, the music and the poetry, the passions and the ideas. Despite specific cultural lags, the quality of the passion remains the same, here as well as there: it is the passion for social change. And it is from the felt intensity of this passion that there is such fierce springing of courage which Radio Australia was describing last week and the weeks before.

It is this courage which the army is now trying to snuff out. And if East Pakistan goes under, it will be a death of Bengali passion, it will be the liquidation of a part of our very being. History will not forgive us if, while all this was happening, we merely stood on the sidelines and, passivity personified, tuned in to Radio Australia.

* *

No, it is far from my intention to invite the West Bengal masses to

invade the territory of East Pakistan and join up with the peasants and workers there. But certainly there could be a mobilisation of the people to protest against—and thwart—the mischievous doings of New Delhi. There could be a mobilisation to stir the conscience of the two communist parties; Mrs Gandhi could be forced to cancel any arrangements secretly reached with the army clique in Pakistan in regard to the transshipment of troops and *materiel* to East Pakistan; the very question whether the Yahya Khan regime is to be recognised as the legal government of Pakistan could be subjected to a re-examination if an upsurge of emotion could have occurred here.

For any such upsurge, West Bengal will necessarily have to provide the epicentre. What an immense tragedy that, when East Pakistan is aflame with rebellion and great social issues are being thrashed out there across the barricade, the youth of West Bengal are tearing each other apart. This internecine spilling of blood too, I am told, involves an issue of ideology. Maybe it does, maybe the date of election for the University Student's Union is a matter of life and death. And yet, what utter lack of proportion, what truly astounding parochialism! In the coffee house, they talk of the futility of the parliamentary path and the impending peasant insurrection. Two scores of miles away, a magnificent peasant insurrection is in danger of being killed off, and perhaps killed off with the active connivance of our rulers in New Delhi; let it be killed off, our students cannot be bothered—they are much too busy to find out who else apart from the Deputy Chief Minister, among the members of the United Front Cabinet, are agents of the CIA.

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The Small Family Norm And Literacy—II

ASOK MITRA

IN recent years, since 1947, the enormous expansion of transport and communication has certainly assisted in migration and redistribution of population which, in turn, has greatly contributed to the improvement and consolidation of economic regions, particularly in respect of resource-based industries. But other causes also have been at work even more powerfully in economic region formation in India. These have been, apart from the reorganisation of States into linguistic regions, agrarian reform and the establishment of appreciable measures of peasant-proprietorship together with electricity grids and irrigation. Following the 1961 Census, I undertook an exercise to classify the 330 districts of India into four levels of regional development. Several features became quite evident in the process. In those regions which I called the top, IVth and IIIrd levels of development, the upsurge in the agrarian base and near explosion in agricultural production through activation of peasant-proprietorship, have been greatly assisted by irrigation, electricity and communication. This, in turn, has led to the rapid intensification of physio-economic regionalisation to which private entrepreneurial skill in addition to public State investment, has contributed a large measure of special purpose regionalisation. This regionalisation has been accelerated by preference on the part of entrepreneurial activity to gravitate towards low level cost areas, that is, precisely those areas which are freshly coming up in agricultural production and by the tendency on the part of labour to migrate to more and more high wage areas. This twin process has given rise to an interesting feature in recent times, where migration has been selective in its preference more for those areas exhibiting a higher potential or possibility of absorption of

labour than for areas which have already attained a high level of absorption or of wages. The rate of migration to the former is appreciably higher than to the latter.

Away from Hinterland

These high potential areas, as distinguished from currently high level absorption areas, curiously enough, radiate away from the highly developed special purpose regions which have been traditionally the hinterland of the main port cities. The new up-and-coming economic regions, each characterised by refreshing diversity in homogeneity, are precisely those areas away from the hinterland of the primate port cities (Calcutta-Hazaribagh axis in the case of Calcutta, and the Bombay - Poona, Bombay - Ahmedabad, Bombay-Bhusawal axes, in the case of Bombay) which have emerged as being on the top and third grades of development in the map of my levels of development. These are the areas which have experienced appreciable measures of agricultural explosion through the resurgence of peasant-proprietorship and have received substantial benefits of State investment in electrification, irrigation and communication network. These are the areas which practically coincide with the active network of electricity grids for each State; in those major river basins where the electricity network does not embrace the entire basin, economic regionalisation has been most active in those segments that have been covered by electricity grids, the primary factor in such resurgence being the articulation of, in Professor Kolsoskiy's terminology, the power industry, the agricultural industry, and the irrigation agricultural industry cycles. It is these cycles which have injected wholesome heterogeneity into the erstwhile homogeneous physiographical regions and even changed the

zonal character. In 1966, I attempted in my monograph on Internal Migration and Urbanisation in India a delineation of the main trends of rural to rural, urban to urban, rural to urban and urban to rural migrations as well as step migration with the object of bringing out the significant characteristics of the areas of heavy in-migration and out-migration. It appears that the areas of heavy migration conform to those which hold out high potentials of development rather than high levels of actual achievement, and coincide with those which have an optimum combination of rising agricultural production, effective, albeit incomplete agrarian reform and peasant proprietorship, irrigation, electricity and communication network. Curiously enough these do not always coincide with, on the contrary are often distinct from, special purpose regions generated by the location of large-scale heavy industries as for example, Western and North-Western Uttar Pradesh and North-Eastern Rajasthan, Jammu, Punjab, Haryana, Northern and Western Rajasthan, Malwa, Gujarat, the Poona-Sangli-Kolhapur-Sholapur area of Bombay, the whole of Vidarbha, the Marathawada tract, the deltaic and Northern Andhra Pradesh, North-Eastern and Eastern Madras, the Malnad tract of Mysore, and the Malabar-Cochin tract of Kerala, where heavy industry has followed in the wake of rather than preceded, economic regionalisation. Curiously enough, it is in these areas that material and cultural progress of every kind is more evident than in areas of established heavy industry like the Calcutta-Asansol region, the Bihar Coal Field area and the Jamshedpur, Rourkela, Bhilai regions. Curiously enough again, even the process of urbanisation has not contributed in many parts of India to an atmosphere of modernisation through material and cultural progress to the extent that the regions I have just described have attained, where the twin process of urbanisation and heavy industry base is still a thing of the future. It seems quite plain that irrigation, electricity, transport and communication, the widening of the market network, diversification, de-

centralization and intensification of agricultural specialization, all underpinned by rapidly expanding literacy and a significant, though incomplete reform towards peasant proprietorship, aided by a pattern of geographical division of labour peculiarly characteristic of a fundamentally agrarian base have played a more decisive role in the formation of economic regions than urbanisation or heavy industry. The reason is not far to seek.

The major reason why the hinterland of the heavy industrial and urban regions of India have, paradoxically enough, lagged behind in material and cultural progress, is the low level of literacy and agricultural production, and consequently of consumption, compared to the levels of those areas which I have just delineated. For example, Uttar Pradesh with its comparatively high level of urbanisation has a much lower level of literacy and consumption than what even the depressed areas of the up-and-coming regions that I have just enumerated enjoy. This applies equally to the industrial belts of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. As a result, in spite of the theoretically high potential of heavy industry and urbanisation of discharging the role of activisers in economic region formation, it is these regions of consumption and literacy that in reality have gone ahead with greater doses of material and cultural progress. And, presumably, these areas again will go well ahead of many other areas in the country in the matter of taking deliberate and effective steps towards limiting the family.

I feel that one is being rather naive if one puts all his faith in the Green Revolution as the great panacea. The enormous agro-technological revolution which bids fair to overrun the country will have the result of rendering the top of the agrarian pyramid steeper and slimmer than ever before. Even if sufficient quantities of food grains or other crops are produced to the point of becoming surplus and generously exportable, land tenure conditions will still continue to impose severe restrictions on the enlargement of consumption in

rural areas, because too few would be producing too much to be able to sell at expected profits and there would still be too many unable to work for reasonable returns to enable them to produce or buy in sufficient quantities. Unless the fruits of the agri-technological revolution are made equally, or rather preferentially, available to the lower and wider bases in the pyramid, the backwash effect of poor consumption in the wide base will endanger the growing stability of the top. It has to be recognized that unsatisfactory land tenure conditions still play an overwhelming part in the backwardness of our agriculture because they prevent the effective application of proved technological improvements. Vast latifundia contrast with myriads of small holdings and often the evils of both are combined by having latifundia worked by sharecroppers or small tenants on a minifundial operation unit basis. The pattern varies from region to region with varying rates of absorption of rural manpower. But the system itself perpetuates inequalities of income and in fact contributes to the growing gap between the rich latifundia and the poor minifundia, comparable to the widening gap between rich and poor countries. It is true that the profit motive has enthused the latifundia in this area of green revolution but this motive alone is insufficient to sustain and bring about the full development of agriculture. It will be argued that in spite of minifundia spectacular progress has been achieved in agricultural production in all parts of the country. Of this there is incontrovertible evidence and no doubt. But this has been possible in spite of minifundia and not on account of it, and one cannot help wondering how much more would have been possible were minifundia done away with. For, in minifundia the profit motive is blocked in the first place by the physical impossibility of single, small owners carrying out improvements in production techniques. Organisation of improvements becomes difficult, if not impossible, in the absence of overall control, for nobody knows how his work will fit in with that of the others,

who should give land for irrigation canals and where the compensation would come from, or on what basis one is to be remunerated. Even more important and insidious, however, is the blockage due to what Thomas Balogh calls the credit factor. Minifundia are usually subject to crushing amounts of debt and the moneylender is in a position to take the whole surplus of the smallholding. The peasant thus has no interest in getting into debt in order to improve his production methods—and the classical incentive mechanism is again stultified. Nor is the peasant able to tap the capital market on any reasonable terms.

The results manifest themselves in many demographic forms, the most grievous of which is the steady flow of personnel at very young ages of the slightest of education or skill from minifundia areas. The classic regions of such flight may be cited as Eastern Uttar Pradesh, North and Western Bihar and so on. This amounts to punishing the young and preventing them from improving the soil of their birth and leaving it to continuing neglect in the hands of an incompetent and older generation. Nowhere is the younger generation punished more severely than in areas of minifundia. Owing to this phenomenon, the backwash in all other economic activities readily follows together with such demographic phenomena as high fertility and high mortality, lack of transfer from agriculture to industry, lack of cross fertilization between rural and urban areas and lack of diversification of economic skills through lack of consumption and investment. The chiefest to suffer are education and employment of women in independent economic activity for in these areas even teachers are difficult to raise or import, and female labour must be employed to take what should naturally be the younger generation's work at home.

Very few people have the foggiest notion of what it is to be an adult illiterate. Our memory of our illiterate childhood days serves as no help to appreciate the utter disadvantages of remaining an adult illiterate person.

One has to remind oneself of this fact to realise its appalling implications. All our messages on agricultural and industrial production, on family planning and on every other conceivable aspect of development are in terms of literates attempting to communicate to literates. We have not been able to devise a single mass communication medium by which an illiterate person can communicate to another illiterate person with even a fraction of the effectiveness with which an educated person can communicate to another educated person or even a literate person to another literate person. Things are difficult to communicate as between a literate and an illiterate person of the same status in life, say between an educated husband and an illiterate wife. It becomes infinitely more difficult in circumstances of rank inequality of incomes and levels of living.

In India this problem of inequality has become pretty unbearable in the rural areas which are still the major wealth producing sector. It is particularly there that this problem of rural inequality awaits a double attack. In the middle of last year an analysis undertaken in the Department of Community Development in the Ministry of Agriculture estimated that of a projected total outlay of 18,000 crores rupees in the Fourth Plan period as much as 5,000 crore rupees would directly or indirectly be spent on the population engaged in agriculture. An extract from this unpublished analysis will be relevant to our present argument :

Apart from the constraints set by geographical conditions, the present pattern of land holdings adds to the unevenness of impact of the investment on agriculture. About 18% of the rural holdings account for about 68% of the operational area; over 70% of the holdings are below the average size of holdings (2.69 hectares). Even if we ignore for the moment the average proportion of landless agricultural labourers, we are faced with a situation in which a small fraction of the rural community reaps the major share of benefit of the effort

to raise agricultural production. Perhaps, in the context of the compelling need to attain self-sufficiency in food as early as possible, such a situation has to be tolerated in the short run. The fact remains, however, that in the process, the interest of the community as a whole is left on the sidelines.

In brief, the better part of the outlay on agricultural development, which accounts for the lion's share of the Plan resources flowing into the rural areas, will be devoted, by and large, to a third of the country; even within this limited area of coverage, it is the numerically smaller, but economically stronger, landowners who will secure maximum benefit. But then, is the bulk of the country and the country's population to wait indefinitely for their turn to share in the fruits of progress? Can such an unevenly distributed programme lead to full community mobilisation? Is not the relative neglect of large parts of the country likely to have serious social and political consequences? It is, without doubt, a sound strategy to pay special attention, in the short run, to areas with good potential. Equally, it is necessary that a minimum programme is maintained in the rest of the country; for reasons explained earlier, the intimate relationship between the different sectors of rural life demands that this should follow an integrated approach.

On the one hand reform land tenure to enable the rural population to reduce the still yawning gap between latifundia on the one end of the scale and minifundia on the other, and thereby to increase its output, productivity and income, and fortify this attack with a simultaneous reform of education.

One of the ways to bring about rapid change would be the enforcement of an appropriate type of compulsory primary education suited to the agrarian situation intended to put boys and girls to school between the ages of ten and fifteen. This will certainly not be easy for children of peasants and agri-

cultural labourers; even for such an advanced country as France; Raymond Poignant observed that as late as between 1952 and 1964 the trend in the rate of admission to Grade I of secondary schools in France was the lowest for agricultural workers (from 10 it went up to 30 per cent), followed by higher figures in order of increase respectively for farmers, industrial workers, white-collar workers, artisans and shopkeepers, lower management, the highest ratios being shared by children of professional staff, senior management and industrialists. A comparable hierarchy of income and caste has been noticed by Dr P. C. Joshi of the Delhi Institute of Agricultural Research in respect of beneficiaries of primary schools in Uttar Pradesh. Mary Bowman and C. A. Anderson have completed extensive investigations showing how difficult it is to involve the low earning groups in education. But the need of enforcement of primary education has become so urgent that it is extremely doubtful whether any change is possible unless the highest priority is put fairly and squarely upon compulsory primary education to be achieved in a short time bound period.

(To be continued)

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Full Circle In Pakistan

COMMENTATOR

PRESIDENT Ayub Khan has bowed out of the Pakistani scene with a big bang. The news made banners in all national dailies and overshadowed the discomfiture of the Congress Government at the Centre over the failure of the Constitution Amendment Bill to reorganise Assam to secure the requisite majority and the consequences resignation of the Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs. Few papers could come out with editorials simultaneously with the news of the return of military rule to Pakistan, but this was partly compensated by their New Delhi correspondents claiming to project the Government of India's views on the full circle in Pakistan. Some correspondents have attributed a great deal of what appears to be hindsight to New Delhi, for according to them, imposition of martial law has not come as a surprise to the Centre. One of them has cast Mr Ayub Khan exactly in the mould of Mr Iskander Mirza and forecast that President Ayub and his sons would probably try to take advantage of the breathing spell provided by martial law to leave the country and settle abroad before it was too late. All papers are unanimous that there is nothing for India to be happy over the developments in Pakistan as its relations with the neighbouring country may be more difficult than they were during President Ayub's regime.

The Indian Express interprets Mr Ayub Khan's decision to hand over power to the Armed Forces as his "parting kick" to the politicians who after having compelled him to agree to the restoration of parliamentary democracy were demanding his immediate resignation and the formation of a national government. The paper says that the despatch of two shiploads of tanks to East Pakistan some days ago suggests that the decision to impose martial law throughout the

country might have been taken at that time, though the appointment of new Governors in West and East Pakistan within the last few days would give the impression that it is a sudden decision forced by the spreading wave of violence which the civil authorities were not able to control. The formation of an all-party interim government was certainly not easy, but a majority of the Opposition parties were willing to cooperate, and if such a government had been formed it would have had a salutary effect on the situation in the country. However, no effort to form a broad-based government was made. Mr Ayub Khan has bowed out, but he has had his revenge on those who demanded his resignation. What has happened is not a progress towards democracy, but a throw-back to 1958, when the then Government was dismissed and Gen. Ayub Khan assumed power as Martial Law Administrator. The paper wonders if Pakistan can remain united and stable only under a military dictatorship and says that there is no knowing when the people of Pakistan will be given a chance to rule themselves and to decide what is best for them.

The Statesman thinks that Mr Ayub Khan's abdication before the forces of disintegration may only prove that though he had the capacity to ensure order and stability in Pakistan for a decade, the quality of statesmanship, often attributed to him by his admirers, was not part of his make-up. If after ten years of his firm and dictatorial rule, and much good work to promote economic development, he was wholly unable to prevent the disintegrating forces that have now raised their head, it is difficult to see how a return to martial law could achieve anything better than postpone the demand for autonomy to the day when martial law may have to end and some methods of associating the people with the administration and obtaining their consent will have to be found. Martial law, perhaps to be followed again by another spell of dictatorship, may succeed for a time, but neither the geography nor history

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of Pakistan will offer support for the belief that this phase to come will be more successful in welding Pakistan into a united nation than the Field Marshal's regime which, in spite of its many merits, failed to do so. India had many occasions to experience the distressing consequences of the tendency of the Field-Marshal's mind to think only in military terms in war or peace. Such hopes as there were of a gradual change and progress towards a detente must now give way to another spell of watchful anxiety and misgivings for the safety of the frontiers; when military men continue to rule the helpless Pakistanis they may indulge in fresh adventures to divert public attention from domestic discontents.

The Times of India says that when President Ayub Khan took over nearly eleven years ago only the political parties were discredited in the eyes of the people who welcomed the change with a sigh of relief. Now the entire military-bureaucratic complex which had dominated the life of the country stands gravely compromised. The armed forces can perhaps pull the country back from the brink of chaos and anarchy by restoring some semblance of law and order. But they have no answer to the problem which has baffled and in the end overwhelmed President Ayub Khan. What Pakistan needs is not mere law and order but a viable system which can contain the forces of disintegration inherent in the geography of the country without choking its political life. The paper says that the imposition of martial law, which will be largely administered by men belonging to West Pakistan, will not only keep alive but further accentuate the feeling of alienation in East Pakistan. The fissures in the body politic of the country can no longer be wished away. Nor can a strong Centre be built so long as one half of the country is not prepared to concede its rightful due to the other. The most ominous symptom of the malaise that has overtaken Pakistan is not the breakdown of law and order but the unwillingness of any party in West Pakistan, however radical its slogans,

to agree to a full redressal of the wrongs suffered by East Pakistan or to any arrangement which gives its people such say in national affairs as ought to be theirs in a genuine democratic set-up. The imposition of martial law is no cure for the malady afflicting Pakistan; it is an admission that the disease is incurable.

The Hindustan Times cautions General Yahya Khan that he will be gravely mistaken if he calculates on law and order being re-established merely by a show of strength. On the contrary, popular resentment may spill over or be driven underground unless he appears to be working for the restoration of normalcy in order to carry forward the process of constitutional and political reform initiated by Mr Ayub Khan in response to the aspirations of the people. If his is a genuinely stabilising interim regime, the martial law administration could provide a neutral and orderly transition to a new constitutional settlement and national elections. One reason why martial law had to be clamped down may have been the fear that delay would have given East Pakistanis the opportunity to table their own constitutional amendments for wider regional autonomy at the crucial National Assembly session which was due to meet some time in April. With East Pakistan in the grip of lynchings, violence and mass hysteria, not one among the National Assembly members hailing from that province could have been trusted to vote against these amendments. Their votes, together with those of dissident West Pakistani members, would have either carried these radical amendments or created a stalemate in which President Ayub's more moderate proposals may not have survived. Mr Ayub may have feared that the process of constitutional reform set in motion by him might fail to shape events in the manner desired and that the attendant disorders would tear the country apart. Even if elections are held for a new National Assembly, as is the declared objective of General Yahya Khan, peace may not return until East Pakistan's urge for autonomy is satisfied. Martial

law is no answer to Pakistan's problem. There is need for high statesmanship.

Patriot says that President Ayub had every chance to make Pakistan a democratic and peace-loving country whose people, like others in this continent, could have worked hopefully for their economic and cultural advance; but he preferred to choose the path of adventure and opportunism. He emphasised theocratic concepts, encouraged religious communalism, made hatred of India the only valid sentiment for his State and at the same time denied the people all the spiritual and cultural comforts that democracy gives. The demands that were placed before President Ayub just before his fall are proof that none of those who have hitherto pretended to lead the people of Pakistan gave any thought to the most vital national problems. The President who has run away like a coward and the Martial Law Administrator have mentioned in their broadcasts the perilous condition of the nation's economy and the people's democratic longings. Till a year ago these same men and others who worked for them as well as their foreign admirers both in the West and in the East were never tired of talking of the near miracle that had taken place in respect of Pakistan's economic advance and the great political discovery of "basic democracy". In a matter of months the economy, the world is told, has been shattered and "basic democracy" crucified in the persons of President Ayub's unfortunate henchmen who fell into the hands of furious East Pakistani mobs. General Yahya Khan has talked as toughly as President Ayub Khan once used to; but the Pakistani army and air force are not the proper instruments with which the nation's democratic stability can be built. For the time being, they may perhaps be able to terrify the people of Pakistan and drive underground the many claims that have been made for regional identity and economic advance but the final round will still be with the people and they may take dire revenge when they get the chance.

"Headline"

For Squad-31

BY OUR DRAMA CRITIC

THE theatre is a composite art form and is the result of co-operative effort. Like a symphony orchestra everyone participating is expected to produce a harmonious whole and if discords are introduced they must have purpose and not mere effect. *Headline*, presented by Squad-31 at the Minerva Theatre, suffered from one major defect: certain characters were made to act like clowns in a burlesque—not even the serious minded "clowns" of Shavian comedy.

Recently there has been a tendency to overplay the reactionary characters in some productions (remember Taras Shevchenko, *Frontier*, December 21, 1968) through dress or behaviour with the purpose of ridiculing them.

I am tempted to refer to Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, about which Desmond MacCarthy wrote "Signor Pirandello has illustrated what every profound dramatist must feel when he sees his characters on the stage; his sufferings at the inevitable distortions due to the substitution of the personality of the actor for that of his character as he imagined it". How much more excruciating must this suffering be if to the inevitable distortion is added wilful caricature by the producer.

If a play is worth producing and if audiences can be found for seeing it, it must have certain basic artistic qualities. If these qualities are present in small measure then distortions can completely negate its intrinsic merit. If on the other hand the artistic values are high then distortions can only detract from real quality.

Now let us see how this wilful distortion of characters affected the play under review.

The first act introduces the audience to the reporters, editor and owner of a newspaper. Each character is a caricature even to the one who informs the owner that as his paper is

now doing well he expects to receive back some of the borrowed money and with interest. The deference the owner and editor show to this shabbily dressed gentleman strains the credulity of the most gullible. Besides, because most of the characters who appear in this act behave like buffoons, while the dialogue remains serious, one is unable to gauge the form the play is going to take. Furthermore, the supposed author (Satya Bandopadhyay of the play stands near the wings in full view of the audience performing the duties of a chorus. He acts quite seriously and therefore in the first act he is completely out of pattern. When one of the machinemmen appears on the stage and behaves perfectly natural, the spectators are thrown completely into confusion.

In the second act the audience sees the editor and owner still buffooning, the workers still normal and the new element, the police, surprisingly, also normal. And so it continues to the end. If there was any symbolism in this natural behaviour of the police it remained hidden from the audience. In fact, in the last scene when the owner and editor join in the murder of the machine-man who appeared in the first act, it was very difficult to ascribe to the buffoons the role of killers though killers they are in real life. And this is my point. If the reactionaries are to be lampooned then the character given to them must run through consistently to the end so that the audience takes with it the impression which the author seeks to establish. If the author wants certain types to be recognised as murderers then the producer must provide the audience with sufficient indications for them to be convinced that these characters are vicious enough to beat another human being to death. Theatre is make-believe and the duty of the producer is to convince the audience about the author's intentions.

The producer, here however, instead of building up this viciousness, continues to make the actors clown even in the scene where the police are interrogating the worker. The only explanation which comes to mind is the

utter callousness with which the employers treat the harassment of the workers. Then why the seriousness on the part of the police? After all the police are there only to serve the interests of the exploiting classes.

Two well-known plays, *The Russian Question* and *Stop Press*, also about a newspaper, have been translated and performed on the local stage. The former dealt with the honesty and courage of a writer, the second with the method of control used over editorial policy. This one, showing as it did the relationship between the owners, the editors and the policemen vis-a-vis the workers, had the material for first-rate drama: it was sad that the essence was lost for effect.

Yet another point emerges out of this kind of characterisation. If the privileged classes are represented in this wrong manner the people at large are apt to be misled. Unless the notion is outdated, let us "hold a (plain) mirror up to nature" for it is possible that in trying to reap derisive laughter we may be sowing seeds of retribution.

The production went through without a hitch, the acting was competent and the action well maintained. The machineman played by Alok Chatterjee put on a sustained and impressive performance. The plain-clothes interrogator (Shankar Ghatak) was most plausible and his uniformed counterpart (Amiya Biswas) almost life-like.

The editor (Mihir Das Gupta) and owner (Sunil Chatterjee) both performed well within the interpretation they had been instructed to follow.

One failed to understand the reason for a two-tier setting in Act I and the second part of Act II.

The shooting down of peaceful demonstrators was deftly handed, although the "firing squad" would have had more effect if placed back-stage. Sounding from the front, it was becoming identified with the audience.

The rag-picker added a touch of bizarre yet callous unreality to what was the most "realistic" and moving scene of the play.

New Releases

PRABODH KUMAR MAITRA

IT is heartening to find Barin Saha's *Tero Nadir Pare* getting a release chain. The film was made years ago and barring its screening by the Calcutta Film Society when a good number of people had the opportunity to see it, Saha's first film went into unmerited hibernation. The fact is lamentable and a pointer to the ills affecting the industry in West Bengal.

If, of course, the film does not measure up to one's expectations which soared high as the chances of release became slender, it is a different matter. The youthful director lacked neither vigour nor earnestness when he made his debut. The story is woven round the performers of a roving circus party, facets of whose life are the subject of the film. The characters are inextricably bound up with the particular mode of existence that the circus provides for them. The balance of the tight-rope walker gets upset with the arrival of the girl and he finds it impossible to put his life on an even keel. The problem of the performer seems to be shared by the director himself in putting his film on an even balance. Saha apparently is unable to utilise the basic raw material provided by the plot. What one misses is not only lack of finesse in story telling. The script is slovenly and the dialogue poor. The director also finds it hard to get his players to act reasonably well. Saha's handling of the situations hardly brings to life the world he seeks to create. The characters seem to live a world of contrived existence.

But the director is a commendable craftsman of the camera. Despite the overall insipidity a few sequences certainly stand out in their isolated brilliance. One such is when the dancer arrives at the place of performance along the embankment and the back streets of the bazaar, quickening the pulse of the sleepy habitation. A few tricks of the performing act also offer delectable moments. But the pieces

are not integrated into a coherent pattern and the interesting material Saha chooses for his film is largely wasted.

Another new release, *Sesh Theke Suru*, is based on the play which had a fairly successful run. That may partly explain the staginess of the film. The director does not seem to be much bothered about the demands of a different medium. Wherever it may have begun the story in the film is seemingly interminable.

The story concerns a photographer at a burning ghat and his assistant and when the narrative does not relate to either of them, the customers take over with their tales of woe. Each one turns up to get the photographs of dead relatives but does not leave before giving rambling accounts of their bereavement. All the characters jostle to find a place which makes the situation overloaded for the director to cope with. The director is undecided as to whether to treat the material on a comic level or to tear-jerk the audience. Right from the credits the confusion is apparent. What we get is the worst of both. The comic overtones are blended with the pathos inherent in the situation. The result is a queer amalgam of horseplay and sloppy sentiment.

The flow of the narrative is affected every moment by situations treated as so many wordy inanities. The dealing with the dead leads to a predictable obsession to break into pseudo-philosophical jargon over the ephemeral nature of existence. Sometimes the main characters even rationalise their existence by the thought that the dead are less bothersome than the living.

The assistant's other moments are better occupied with the irate neighbour's daughter clad in mini-sari. Even these episodes fail to make the sequences lively. The whole film has a grossness of treatment. One interesting thing is, however, the photograph of Uttam Kumar which adorns the wall in the incongruous presence of photographs of the dead. This is perhaps the high point of realisation

that even stellar personalities are subject to the same laws of decay as ordinary mortals.

Exhibitions

BY AN ART CRITIC

NIRMALA Shah's exhibition at the Birla Academy (March 26 to 31) included batiks, oils and a few pastels. She is uncomplicated in her technique and themes and draws in a representational style that, on occasion, borders on the photographic.

Her thirty exhibits were mostly face and figure studies among which Daisy (pastel), and Combing (batik), showing a dark-haired woman, had strength and charm. Two other appealing paintings were Boats and House tops, a huddle of red roofs and yellow walls up on the mountains. The best thing in the show was a batik painting entitled Wayside, which showed two men and a woman gossiping at a roadside stall in a mountain village. It was a beauty in yellow and black with touches of red.

Simultaneously at the Birla Academy, Sitesh Roy and Dulu Roy held a joint show.

It was Dulu Roy's maiden effort with sixteen sketches. To be quite candid, most of the sketches, done with bold strokes suggestive of shapes in juxtaposition, failed in their purpose. One requires a great deal of subtlety to draw a few wisps of hair or the hem of a skirt, or a rhythmic line in such a manner that the viewer can imagine the figure of a woman. Or like a Chinese ideogram, draw two figures of women to represent gossip. The most that can be said of Dulu Roy is that he has been successfully gimmicky here and there: in depicting a quadruped in rectangles and Adam and Eve on an apple.

Sitesh Roy displayed a dozen paintings in Indian style, eleven of them inspired by Tagore poems. Most of them showed a solitary *nayika*-like figure against decorative trees a la Indian miniatures. Here again is a game which it is not easy to make

APRIL 5, 1969

a success of. It is, therefore, to the credit of Sitesh Roy that in at least two or three of his efforts he achieved a beauty of line and colour that gave them a pleasing quality.

W. R. Kapoor, an eighteen-year-old art student, gave a one-man show of his paintings at the Academy last week.

Kapoor, who was struck by an ailment that kept him bedridden from the age of two and a half to the age of fifteen, took to painting as a means of freedom from physical imprisonment. Be that as it may, the fact that Kapoor has genuine talent was seen from the oils and water colours he exhibited, all done over the last three years or so. Among his oils his still life paintings showed his technical abilities. If in his oils, he seemed somewhat derivative, some of his water colours had freshness and beauty. One, in particular, deserves mention: a picture showing two vaguely suggestive ships against the background of water and sky.

Letters

Hunting with the Hound

It is always painful to cross swords with you but certain remarks of yours cannot pass unnoticed. To hear the word 'vulgar' (Hunting with the Hound, March 22, in which good is mixed up with something harmful) from your mouth relating to a type of protest by working men embittered by centuries of exploitation was very distressing, almost insulting. Let us not mince words either. While Jyoti Basu has hunted physically you have done it spiritually providing, unconsciously though, an alibi for the suppression of working class protests. The whole system of private property, in other words capitalism, is based on decadence and violence, coercion and plunder, often indirect, and the working class is forced to reply to this coercion by coercion. Gherao is purely an indigenous product, born spontaneously. Frustrated by the inefficacy of petitions and resolutions, the masses have chosen the second best, the penultimate weapon before they

reach the point of no-return. And it is not just a sort of loafing about, as you, from the 'impartiality' of your superior standpoint suppose. It is equally nerve-racking and painstaking for a gheraoist. To call it vulgar is to betray the heartlessness of an upper middle class gentleman longing for his own unruffled peace. While I say this I am aware that socialism is not anarchism, that 'I do as I please' attitude which often manifests itself in sheer insubordination. Gherao is not without senseless fuss and savage brutality but as the conditions of life in our society are inhuman, it follows that the working class will, willy nilly, reflect some of these inhuman qualities in their dealings with their opponents. Of course the working class must not remain in a stagle of blind anger and spontaneity but it must raise itself to the realm of knowledge, to a state conscious of its historic task and must learn to distinguish the primary from the secondary, the real from the ephemeral. But condemn gherao as a whole in an off-hand manner is extremely one-sided and therefore immoral.

There are many other things that can be said in this matter; for instance, that between the industrial establishment and modern educational institutions the difference being only external, the basis of economic exploitation, remains common to both, and that to seek to confuse McCarthyism—compelling one to do what he does not believe to be true—with the organised bargaining of a trade union is eclecticism, sophistry of the worst kind. It is nice to read something about the Naxalites which does not consist entirely of denigration.

PROBODH CHANDRA DUTTA
Dankuni

As a regular reader of *Frontier*, I have often wondered what exactly are your own views on the major issues before the country, in particular the left and socialist forces. While you criticise practically every section of the leftists and socialists, you have rarely said what should have been done or what should be done with

regard to a particular situation or problem.

The latest and perhaps the most glaring example is your editorial "Hunting with the Hound" (March 22). You find fault with the Vice-Chancellor for allowing the University Union office-bearers to draw Rs. 6,000 from the union fund. Next, you criticise the Naxalite students for not waiting for the March 14 meeting of representatives of the different student organisation. You further ridicule this section for "getting extremely isolated and damned", by continuing the gherao of the Vice-Chancellor. Then you question their wisdom in getting 'addicted to gheraos'. Finally, you proceed to denounce the CPM for permitting or encouraging its student supporters to organise what you call a witch-hunt against the Naxalites.

Having been convinced by your rather pontifical characterisation of all the participants, as either petty-bourgeois romantics or hypocritical establishment-wallas, one seeks in vain for your own views on the situation under discussion.

This is only an illustration of the rather negative manner of your comments on major and minor issues. One wonders if you could not tell us also as to which side you are on, or what your own suggestions are with regard to problems and issues on which you comment editorially.

S. NAQVI
Calcutta

Apropos your editorial comment, 'Hunting with the Hound', in so far as the UF attitude is concerned nothing unexpected or fortuitous has happened. The Marxist-Leninists of yesterday have become the Millerandists and peaceful transitionists of today, forsaking Revolution as an anathema. On the one hand these legalists are swearing by the sacred

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Constitution and, on the other, they are taking cover under the cry for confrontation with the Centre. But the Centre is not what it had been. Mr Chavan and his bosses know only too well that the UF men are there to serve their cause.

ARUN MISRA
Calcutta

By giving naked support to Naxalites (March 22) you have completely exposed your real face. By doing so you have lined up with the reactionary press which tries hard to discredit the UF Government in the name of supporting it. Not a word of condemnation of the goondas, notorious bad elements, the self-styled student leaders who with the help of Congressites tried to create a situation to force the UF to send in the police. Fortunately (unfortunately for the red rebels) for the ever vigilant democratic movement, students and other youth organisations foiled their attempt at the cost of Krishna Roy's life. The wanton destruction of public property, the reckless vandalism of the Naxalites were not allowed to continue. The democratic movement of West Bengal, carrying forward its healthy traditions, has taught them a lesson. Now they will realise where it hurts. And here you come forward to defend the bomb-throwing, Mao-reading roughs.

Yes there have been some reprisals. But the working class has never been and should never be kindly to its class enemies. That is the historical lesson. West Bengal is deter-

mined to defend the gains, the workers of the people are determined to build up a bigger struggle so that the bourgeois-landlord combine is removed from the Centre in the 1972 elections. Any attempt to cause a deviation from this course, any attempt to vitiate the democratic atmosphere by empty slogan-mongering will not be tolerated by the working class. Your future also depends on your capacity to judge right and wrong, your ability to support united action and your willingness to condemn the Congress-Naxalite entente. Otherwise a time will come, soon, when you will be forced to learn the teachings of history.

A. K. SARKAR
Barasat,
24-Parganas

I should like to let the citizens of Calcutta know how the people of Behala live under the UF regime. Some hooligans there have changed into communists overnight. Some time ago they looted a shop, burnt a house and beat up a man whose only fault was that he is a supporter of the Naxalites. On March 17 they assaulted a girl. When the local people resisted them, they ran away.

On March 18 they came back with the armed police at their heels, raided every house and humiliated those considered progressive. The people resisted again and injured one of them. The hooligans fled. We know they will come back, but we are prepared to face the white terror.

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'Our Commonwealth'

After reading Mr Premendra Nath Addy's letter 'Our Commonwealth' (*Frontier*, February 15) I wrote a letter to the BBC, London, requesting them to confirm the incident (broadcast on the BBC on January 14) mentioned in the letter. I received the reply* enclosed.

SUBRATA MUKHERJEE
New Delhi

*The reply signed by the Programme Editor, Current Affairs (BBC), says in part :

I am bound to say that it comes as a considerable surprise to learn that the Indian press has reported the broadcast in question in a programme called "Listening Post". As you summarise the report, it must have been substantially correct. We do not issue scripts to outside correspondents, but you can take it that "The Frontier" newspaper (sic) was substantially accurate.

Of course the incident was greatly deplored here and was wholly unrepresentative. We thought it right to draw attention to it in effect to emphasize how deplorable it was, and you have to remember that no one would have heard of it but for the English woman who wrote to us and our decision to broadcast it. You may not be familiar with the London Underground system, but, of course the trains stop only for a minute or two at each station, and unfortunately this incident was over and the hooligans in question were on their way again before anything effective could have been done. But for this undoubtedly the station authorities and perhaps the Police would have been called in.

I can understand the distress publication of the incident must have caused to readers of the newspaper concerned, and I hope the details I give you above will reassure you about the motives which led us to broadcast the letter and that the incident itself was wholly unrepresentative.

'Naxalbari Deviations'

Miss Sudipta Mazumdar (March 29) is perfectly justified in making her query. But no value judgment was intended in the Calcutta Diary of March 1, and the expression 'deviation' was used in its original sense : a digression from the official line.

CHARAN GUPTA
Calcutta

APRIL 5, 1969