

# frontier

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## THE JUDGMENT

WITH the promulgation of the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Ordinance, 1970, the fourteen nationalised banks revert to the status as obtaining between July 19 of last year and the tenth day of this month. The majority of the Supreme Court had provided the Prime Minister with an opportunity to acquire for the nation the rest of the banking undertakings in the country, including the foreign ones. The opportunity was carefully not grabbed. Radicalism is a function of the external situation. There is a season for grabbing, but perhaps Mrs Gandhi takes her Thomas Hardy seriously, there is also a season for staying away. In terms of political arithmetic, the Prime Minister obviously has discovered no net advantage in succumbing to the clamour from the "Left". By doing only the minimum repair essential for re-floating the act of nationalisation, she can now even lay a claim to be what in American jargon will pass as a strict 'constructionist'. Once more, she has kept her options open.

Parliament, when it re-assembles this week-end, will naturally have its hands full: before it goes on to savour the Budget, Ordinance No. 3 of 1970 has to be converted into an Act. Barring the predictable caveats raised by the Swatantra-Jana Sangh axis, there will of course be little resistance to this piece of legislation; the accompanying oratory will certainly be replete with the usual clichés about unswerving loyalty to the cause of the common man.

But the legal uncertainties will remain. For the judgment delivered by the majority of the Supreme Court is a most curious document. The learned judges have chosen not to express themselves on all the issues that were raised before them in connection with the taking over of the fourteen banks in mid-summer last year. For example, they have not given any judgment on the validity of the retrospective operation of an act. What is even more serious, they have discussed, but have not offered any views, whether the condition relating to the "satisfaction" of the President before he decides to issue on Ordinance has been fulfilled in a particular situation is itself justiciable. This could be an ominous thin end of the wedge, and if the judiciary of the country would ever want to demarcate for itself a supra-role vis-a-vis the legislature, a fresh petition before the Supreme Court could well start the process. No doubt, circa

1947 the fuddy-duddys of the Congress were taken for a ride by the so-called legal pundits who drafted this clumsy constitution of the Republic of India. But partly the subsequent developments will always depend on the social attitude and mental make-up of the individuals who constitute the Supreme Court. If these gentlemen decide to set themselves up as arbiters of 'satisfaction', they would merely hasten the process of a political explosion, which could be both properly bloody and properly anti-liberal, depending upon whose satisfaction in the over-all is at issue. That might not be an unwelcome consequence either.

Meanwhile, thanks to the Supreme Court, some private sharks will be richer—and immediately so—by at least an extra Rs 25 crores, for which provision will have to be made in next week's Budget. What is worse, the compensation for bank nationalisation will now flow not to the individual shareholders, but to the companies, that is to say, to the directors of the erstwhile undertakings, who will have the prerogative to deal with the bonanza of these Supreme Court-given liquid funds. By the behest of the Court, therefore, a blow has been struck in favour of the built-in inequality in the asset structure of Indian society.

The majority of the Court have gone to good lengths to prove that the compensation proffered to the banks was illusory, since no separate accounting was done for goodwill. It may be futile to argue with the learned judges, but, even within the constraints of the existing constitutional framework, the business of banking is not just like any other business. To carry on any other economic activity, one is merely in need of the protective veil of the State so that law and order are maintained. For banking, it is not enough to have law and order; one needs the special dispensation of the State, in the form of a particular apparatus for credit creation and credit expansion, before any Tom, Dick or Harry could pretend an accretion of goodwill through making a success of

the business of borrowing and lending of other people's funds. The goodwill of the banks is thus essentially a reflected goodwill, and it will remain so irrespective of what a majority of the Supreme Court may decide or determine.

Still more curious is the Court's observations on the mode of valuation of the buildings owned by the banks. "Capitalization of annual rental which is generally based on controlled rent under some State Acts at rates pegged down to the rates prevailing in 1940 and on the footing that investment in buildings yields  $8\frac{1}{3}\%$  return furnishes a wholly misleading result which cannot be called compensation. Value of immovable property has spiralled during the last few years and the ren-

tal which is mostly controlled does not bear any reasonable relation to the economic return from property". So say the learned judges of the Supreme Court. And one could infer from this truly historical declaration that, according to these eminences, the various Acts passed by the State legislatures regulating property rentals are unreasonable and the black market rentals are the fairest of all, so that "fair recompense" to the banks would be payment in terms of the latter. We are not sure whether the honourable judges realise the implication of their pronouncement. Sooner or later, their attention may have to be drawn to something else, namely, that there could be such a concept as hostile discrimination against the people.

## The Comatose Front

It is a bitter irony that the people who were jubilating wildly this time last year over the impressive UF victory in the mid-term poll should now be speculating over the future of the Ministry of their choice. They seem to have developed almost an academic detachment in the mean time and are in no way involved; they are neither disappointed nor angered by the possibility of disintegration of the Front. The embattled constituents are trying hard to foist the blame for the UF's present coma on one another, but the impact of this propaganda war on the people is yet to be felt. The meetings and processions organised by different parties are no indication, for the participants are mostly committed men whose behaviour cannot reflect the popular attitude. The hypocrisy of mourning in public the Front's predicament and conspiring in private to wreck it is now blatant. All parties are swearing by the people; yet each one of them is acting contrary to what they call the expressed will of the people. Left to themselves, the UF constituents would have continued to quarrel and maintain the Congress in power. They say that it is the will

of the people which brought them together, but have the left parties not violated this will? Disintegration of the Front will be only a formalisation of this breach of mandate.

The apathy of non-party people over the fate of the UF is a censure on the Government. The first few months of the present regime were not entirely without achievements, though how far they were able to take the toiling masses forward may be open to question; the gains of labour and the peasantry have been vitiated by deadly clashes between groups, to unite whom should have been the business of the UF. No party can claim innocence of this perfidy, though opinions may differ on the extent of blame attaching to the various constituents. The last six months deny even this limited consolation. Engrossed in their internal quarrels, the UF parties have proved themselves miserably inadequate for the task of controlling the forces of lawlessness and anarchy that every change of order unleashes. Instead of trying to contain these forces, the UF parties have encouraged them by giving their misdeeds political and, at times, even ideolo-

gical labels; they are utilising these dark forces to win their private battles; the United Front has become a handy pretext for inaction and non-interference so that the parties may fight out the issues on the streets. The victims are mainly the common people, who are often caught unawares between cross-fires. Nobody had expected the UF Government to bring about radical changes and resolve the basic problems of the people. But it could, if it had tried, give the State a less corrupt and more efficient administration than during the Congress regime. Even in this minimal task the UF has failed.

The UF committee is meeting on February 23 to make a "final" effort to resolve the inner-Front differences. Each party has a prescription of its own for the malady, and all of them are likely to be discussed at the meeting. It is doubtful if the parties are as keen on a settlement as they are in suggesting remedies. Mr Ajoy Mukherjee will go to the meeting with the resignation of his three party colleagues in the Cabinet in his pocket. The associates of the Bangla Congress, like the CPI and the Forward Bloc, are reported to have frowned on this unilateral action, but they are not known to have done anything to persuade the Bangla Congress to retrace its step. The disapproval may well be a public posture. The CPM is crying itself hoarse that it wants the UF to last; yet there is no sign that it is trying to remove the causes of friction as far as it can; maybe the writ of the party leaders does not run on the supporters and sympathisers who have flocked to the party after its assumption of office. Even if the UF committee is able to solve all outstanding issues and devise institutional safeguards to ensure implementation of its decisions, the situation may not improve. In the midst of all the turmoil the UF Cabinet is still functioning smoothly and the Ministers are taking unanimous decisions while nibbling delicacies. Even Mr Ajoy Mukherjee, who delights in running down his own Government, has admitted this. An agreement at the top may convert the UF

committee into another such monstrosity, a stinking testimony to the greed for power of the constituents; it will solve no problem, bring no

peace. The UF will justify its continuance if it can set about its minimum task; otherwise it will merely prolong a hoax.

## A Game Of Chess

*A correspondent writes:*

Let no one pretend that the developments in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have anything to do with progress. But one must still marvel at the opportunistic skill with which Mrs Gandhi has again outmanoeuvred her opponents, and we must admit that the spectacle of the Swatantra-Jana Sangh-Congress (O) men fuming and fretting in impotent rage does not make us exactly inconsolable. The combination has by no means been routed; it retains its potential for mischief. But let that not stop one from enjoying its present misery. For what has happened is, above all, richly comic. Remember the glee with which the C. B. Gupta-Charan Singh deal was hailed in certain quarters? In the Swatantra-Jana Sangh-Congress (O) circles the two men became the Heroes of Our Time. Yet the very people who were prepared to see nearly unlimited virtue in Charan Singh's double-crossing of the Congress (R) are now seething with sanctimonious indignation at his repeat performance with the Congress (O) and its allies. Mr Charan Singh's political record is far too notorious to make sense of any discussion about his reliability. Mrs Gandhi, too, surely knows this, but she has gained her immediate objective by making more effective use of his lack of any political loyalty.

Mr Charan Singh, of course, says that he had made no final commitment to the Congress (O)-Jana Sangh-SSP alliance. The public may not be greatly interested in questions about his veracity, but his statement that the Congress (O) wanted to "trade the office of Chief Minister they could not hold" must be the unkindest cut of all to Mr C. B. Gupta and his cohorts. It is

curious that so shrewd a man like Mr Gupta should have underestimated Mr Charan Singh's capacity to betray or Mrs Gandhi's capacity to manipulate. The latter's performance in Bihar has been no less impressive, although she has been ably assisted by her various emissaries and, some allege, the State Governors concerned. That Mr Charan Singh was not asked to form a Government immediately after his deal with Mr Gupta or that Mr Daroga Rai's claim to majority support made the Governor of Bihar almost immediately change his mind about the prospects of a stable Government in the State have certainly helped the Congress (R). But so what? Neither Mrs Gandhi's supporters nor her opponents care for fair-play. Both sides are engaged in an unabashed fight for power; the means chosen have long ceased to matter.

Why then any gratification at all at Mrs Gandhi's successes? It is like applauding Britain in a soccer test with South Africa. Mrs Gandhi's methods may be questionable, her socialism may be fake, she may do no more, or no less, than a Congress (O)-Swatantra-Jana Sangh alliance would have done; yet she and her group at least care to pretend that they are not reactionaries. This makes them less rabid in following a reactionary line. It may be a petty-bourgeois weakness to prefer this pretension to the naked reality of the proclaimed right; perhaps the illusions can only delay the real struggle. We do not know. In any case, those who are getting impatient may not have to wait long. Mrs Gandhi has won more battles than anybody expected, but her survival is still in doubt. When the crunch comes, the revolutionaries will have ample scope for showing their mettle.

## Nasser's Choice

Mrs Golda Meir, the Israeli Premier, must have thoroughly enjoyed the joke from Washington that Israel should not repeat the 'mistake' of bombing Egyptian factories like the one at Abu Zaabal. Since it is the American largess in the form of economic and military aid that keeps Israel going, Washington must be conceded the right to scold Tel Aviv on an occasion or two. And since the Americans have armed the Israelis to the teeth, the latter feel obliged to follow the American strategy in using these weapons. The best tribute that Israel could pay to the Pentagon was to send U.S. made Phantoms to destroy a metal plant in Egypt in the tradition of the U.S. Air Force Phantoms bombing the Thai Ngyuen steel plant in North Vietnam. And this certainly is not going to be the last of the American examples emulated by Israel.

On the eve of the Rabat summit of Arab leaders, hardly two months back, reports about growing U.S. warmth toward the Arab States were streaming in. There was even talk of a 'crisis' in American-Israeli relations, as a result of the U.S. decision to follow an "even handed policy" in the Middle East. Most of the assembled Kings and Presidents at Rabat were so touched by American goodwill that they just went home without even caring to issue a joint communiqué, not to speak of taking a decision on collective action against the Zionists. Five of the Arab leaders did meet again at Cairo early this month for devising a common strategy, but the meeting came only after a month-long Israeli air offensive against Egypt and after Mr Nixon had left no one in doubt that he would continue to support Israel to the hilt. The Arab leaders ended their summit at Cairo with an attack on the U.S. for this support and with an indirect threat to end American "exploitation" of Middle East oil resources, which were being "converted into assistance and weapons for Israel". The Israeli-American re-

ply to this 'threat' has been intensification of the bombing.

What are President Nasser and his brothers going to do about it? With a growing number of civilian casualties in terror bombings there may well develop popular pressure for retaliatory bombing against non-military targets in Israel. But ever since the Israeli blitzkrieg in June 1967 Egypt's air defence system has been perfunctory. Without an adequate radar network Egypt is as defenceless against Israeli bombers as it is powerless in operating its own air force. As a result Israeli aircraft have been bombing deep inside Egypt and overflying Cairo with impunity while Egyptian MIGs are kept away in safe bunkers. Even if the Russians undertake to rebuild the radar network (very unlikely after the recent Israeli success in stealing a complete radar unit from an Egyptian island) it may again be knocked out. And President Nasser himself has admitted that despite round-the-clock training of pilots their number falls far short of requirements. Conventional warfare against Israel, the popular cry for revenge notwithstanding, could be suicidal.

These considerations as well as Moscow's counsel against any war that might lead to a U.S.-Soviet confrontation probably have led President Nasser to climb down. On February 11, two days after the issue of the Cairo communiqué, the UAR Ambassador at the UN announced acceptance of the U.S. plan for the Middle

East as a basis for solution—the very plan which was rejected outright in December last. The announcement has led to some confusion. Final acceptance of a plan which wants to perpetuate the Zionist State would surely be regarded as gross betrayal by the fighters of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. President Nasser will also have to answer why, despite the brave talk of denying Arab oil to the U.S., Egypt gave a fresh concession to an American oil company for prospecting, or for that matter why Egypt's commercial links with U.S. business are steadily improving. Is it an exercise in buying peace from Washington?

There still is an alternative to suicide or capitulation—the way shown by Vietnam. The implacably aggressive nature of imperialism as well as the cost of conventional warfare should by now have convinced the Arab people of the correctness of the strategy chosen by Al Fatah who have scornfully rejected the "political solutions" peddled by Moscow and Washington and persisted in a protracted guerilla war against a technologically superior enemy. In the ultimate analysis man, not weapons, decides the war and if the masses are politicised, ruthless bombing, as shown by the Vietnamese, can only steel the determination to win. It is not known what the Kremlin will tell Arafat, the guerilla leader, but the implications of the recent Chinese message are clear.

## Export Quality Know-How

Sanction has been granted to the Birlas by the Kenyan Government to construct the Pan-African Paper Mills in West Kenya. This must be great news to the liberal democrats of our country because the Birlas won the battle in Kenya outmanoeuvring several leading industrialists of the world. This paper and pulp project, which will entail a cost of £13 million, will be the largest single project by private enterprise in the whole of Kenya. Its size and complexity make

it all the more enviable and it is heartening for the liberals that one of our own business houses has made the world grade.

As a matter of fact, the paper mills project in Kenya has, till date, climaxed a long process of Indian investment abroad. In Africa, particularly in the eastern region, the paper mills were preceded by sugar mills in Uganda, textile mills in Zambia and woollen mills in Kenya. Indian Railway wagons have been supplied to

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the East African Railways; electrical equipment to Tanzania. As far back as 1951, Indian investment abroad was reported to have hovered around Rs 100 crores. Today it must have reached several hundred.

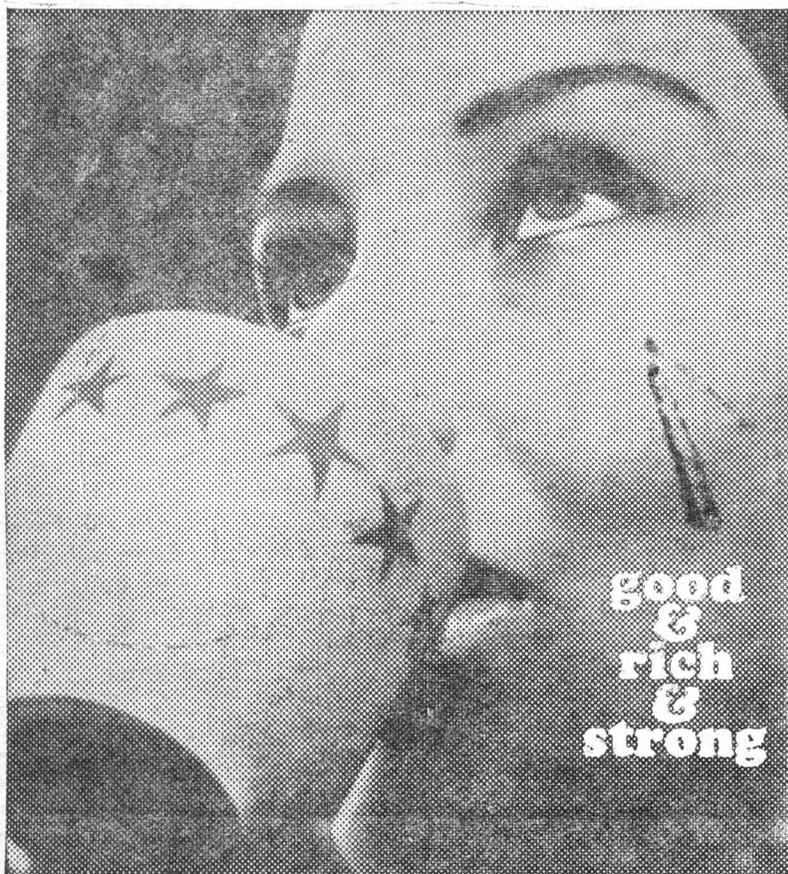
The news from Kenya will be no doubt pigeonholed by the leftists of the country according to their respective theses. The revolutionary and ultra socialists will be all the more entrenched in their view that the big bourgeoisie of our country have already assumed the role of mini-imperialists; no matter whether the proportion of the investment abroad to the total Indian finance capital is significant or not. The leading communists will probably have no reason to re-evaluate their thesis that the Indian big bourgeoisie continues to be the industrial bourgeoisie. The fact that Indian capital is collaborating with imperialist capital in investments abroad does not in their view make the Indian big bourgeois compradors; for, according to them, the big bourgeois can never com-

pletely sell itself out. The industrial magnates of our country, we will be told, may continue to be collaborationists and prone to compromise now and then, but never as servants.

It will be, in this context, interesting to know the terms under which the Birlas secured the sanction to construct the paper mills in Kenya. The International Finance Corporation based in Washington is one of the major investors in the project. It is also known that the Birlas have opened an office and appointed an Indian in New York to conduct liaison between the Kenyan Government and American investors. It seems rather unlikely that the Birlas, under the circumstances, have been able to retain their control on the project and have not become the agents of American finance.

Whatever that may be, the liberals here will rejoice at the fact that the Indian technical know-how has attained export quality. India has

started to contribute to capital formation in African countries, provide employment to the poor blacks, fortify African governments with taxes and revenues, develop African raw material, personnel and enterprises. Whether the same investment within our own country would have brought about the same results is a matter over which they should not like to be bothered. Neither should they be asked if the rapid growth of Indian investment abroad shows that capital in the country has not been properly or fully utilised. After two droughts and Plan holidays India is evidently not as good a pasture as the African countries or countries in the Far East are. Let the Indian Government collect taxes from people here and build up a rural infrastructure in the country (the urban infrastructure, by now, is quite satisfactory for the big industrialists); the tycoons will then employ their full potential to develop India. Till then, let them continue to be the good Samaritans to those who are willing to have them!



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## Polls Apart

FROM A POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

IT was a toppling of sorts in Uttar Pradesh and merits inclusion in the long list of topplings Mrs Indira Gandhi seems to remember with nostalgia, beginning with Kerala, 1959. But neither the ordinance to validate the dud Bank Nationalisation Act nor the installation of a benami ministry in Lucknow restores her the lost majority in the Lok Sabha. It is a closed cycle now, with nothing to support her logic except her own past decisions. The cult of minority governments fashioned jointly by Mrs Gandhi and the CPI could prove her undoing in the long run. Survival on short-term strategy means opportunism and ad hocery. But soon the point is reached when no manoeuvrability is left.

The Uttar Pradesh developments point to the inevitability of mid-term elections to the Lok Sabha. Mrs Gandhi is known to have been telling her lieutenants that she cannot risk it until after she had toppled Mr C. B. Gupta. Mr Charan Singh who manoeuvred himself to a vantage position between the two Congress parties has gambled away his option and Mrs Gandhi has gambled away hers. The motivation behind what looks like, at the time of writing, the belated surrender of her party to Mr Charan Singh is all too obvious. The moment Mrs Gandhi is ready for a mid-term poll, her party will withdraw support to Mr Charan Singh and the Uttar Pradesh Assembly will be dissolved and a mid-term election to the Assembly will synchronise with country-wide Lok Sabha elections. This would hold good even if the Charan Singh Ministry does not get off the ground or collapses in a few weeks. The Assembly could be suspended to begin with and dissolved when Mrs Gandhi is ready to seek dissolution of the Lok Sabha.

But there are major imponderables

in the situation. Can her party regain the ground it has lost to the Syndicate in Uttar Pradesh? The Congress (O)-Jana Sangh-SSP-Swatantra Party constellation in the State might still prove a stronger force than the BKD-Congress (R) alliance. On the whole it will be a desperate gamble if she risks a mid-term election and the Congress (R) might find itself weaker than what it is now, at the end of a poll. Minority ministries have inevitably led to mid-term elections and no strategy can escape this logic. For Mrs Gandhi, the alternative to a fresh Lok Sabha election is defeat in Parliament. It is now a race between the developments and Mrs Gandhi's own preparation for an election. The outcome in the petition challenging Mr V. V. Giri's election is another factor to be reckoned with in this situation.

If a mid-term election to the Lok Sabha becomes inevitable, as it should before 1970 is out, it should be in Mrs Gandhi's interest to force mid-term elections in as many States as possible though the outcome in none of them is preordained. At the end of it all, the Congress (R) might find itself a diminished quantity at the Centre and its dependence on the CPI, Akalis and the DMK might be more total than now.

The initial set-back in Uttar Pradesh and the crisis building up in Andhra Pradesh and Assam have been keeping West Bengal out of the Prime Minister's thoughts during the week. Though Mr Jyoti Basu might have wrested from her an assurance that the Marxists would not be eased out of the West Bengal Government, she is not bound to honour any commitment. She would have to countenance a mini-front ministry as the price of support from the Bangla Congress and the CPI at different levels. The Marxists will soon realise remorse-

fully that the exit of the Gupta Ministry in Uttar Pradesh may hasten the toppling process in West Bengal. If everything goes according to Mrs Gandhi's plan, there would be a mini-front ministry in West Bengal within six weeks. The CPI (M)'s Central Committee has decided to support Mrs Gandhi in Parliament whatever the public pronouncements of its leaders. The party is against minority governments everywhere but not in New Delhi. In contrast the CPI is for minority governments everywhere, including New Delhi and this philosophy has its origin in the mini-front technique crudely devised in Kerala and now being streamlined for West Bengal: holding action in the co-ordination committee, then in the Cabinet and finally a showdown in the Legislature. The CPI (M) has to thank its own opportunism for the impasse. The party is yet to make up its mind whether it believes in United Fronts or not and to what purpose. It is frustrated at its failure to vote the Achutha Menon Ministry out in Kerala and to launch any movement of consequence against the Government. Party functioning has reduced itself to protesting against the presence of the Central Reserve Police in the State and demanding a mid-term poll. Before long the CPI (M) may find itself reduced to functioning at the same level in West Bengal. If its demand for a mid-term poll is logical in Kerala and some day, in West Bengal, the demand should be extended to cover Parliament.

It is no secret that the party has willingly allowed itself to be held on a short leash by the Congress (R). According to lobby reports, the CPI (M) has decided to abstain from voting if the Congress (O) forces a division on the defence allocations. This would amount to unilateral support to the Government at the Centre, irrespective of the fate of the West Bengal United Front.

February 15, 1970

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FEBRUARY 21, 1970

## After Chaliha Who ?

ARUN KUMAR CHAKMA

WITH Mr B. P. Chaliha's decision to resign the curtain rises on Act I of the Assam Congress drama in a new series. His physical departure from the scene will bring nearer the formal split in the Assam Congress over the choice of his successor and also pave the way to a clear-cut cleavage between the pro-Indira and the pro-Syndicate factions.

Since the leadership issue came to the fore, Mr Chaliha has been carefully avoiding having to speak his mind. While one side is apparently perturbed at his latest posture, which is often characterised as inimical, the other is feigning disappointment at his 'neutrality'. These days he allows audience to a very select few. Among them Mr Mahendra Mohan Chaudhury is the most envious figure. Mr Chaliha is also understood to have on one occasion expressed his desire to have him installed in his place. Of course, the reason is not far to seek.

At the time the formal split in the Congress at the Centre seemed almost a certainty, Mr Chaliha appeared in the role of a mediator. That was just a gesture to hide his allegiance to the Syndicate. When the Congress fell apart formally over the election of the country's President, he was very much 'shocked' at the 'collapse' of the Indian National Congress of which he has been all his life an unflinching servant. He did hardly leave any scope till then for anyone to guess on whose side he was, although Mr A. C. Bhagawati, the APCC chief, came out openly in support of Mrs Gandhi. After the Presidential poll results were out, it was revealed that the majority vote of the Assam Congressmen had been cast in favour of Mr Sanjiva Reddy, the Syndicate nominee. Mr Chaliha had backed the wrong horse. However, there was still no immediate reason for direct confrontation between the ruling Assam Congress and the Indira

Gandhi group at the Centre. On the contrary, finding the situation somewhat ticklish, Mr Chaliha went on giving all possible indications indirectly that he was for Mrs Gandhi, much to the Syndicate's exasperation. But that was hardly adequate to inspire Mrs Gandhi's confidence in his bona fides. She kept him out of the Congress Working Committee. The Syndicate wallas have been playing up the wound he had sustained.

In this background, Mr Chaliha's resolve to resign and his anxiety to have Mr M. M. Chaudhury installed in his place are quite understandable. In the situation which has changed over the last few months of endemic disunity among Assam Congressmen, even a strong man like Mr Chaliha cannot perhaps feel safe. It may also appear too defeatist of him to have decided to retire from the scene without declaring a stiff fight against Mr A. C. Bhagawati, who happens to be the choice of the Indira group. No doubt Mrs Gandhi's faith in Mr Chaliha has eroded and he can hardly restore it. The other day he confided to his most trusted friend, Mr Chaudhury, that he should, in the interest of Assam, shoulder the burden. But, in point of fact, it would be rather foolish to think that he is retiring finally, however he may try to leave such an impression, without preparing the ground for reprisal against those who are trying to cloud his future. The main idea behind his move is that if he succeeds in getting Mr Chaudhury, whose pro-Syndicate stance is well known, installed in his place, he can carry on the cold war from behind the scene without having to bear the brunt of it.

Whether Mr Chaudhury will find the sailing smooth is doubtful. His relations with Mr Bhagawati, the most formidable aspirant for the CLP leadership, are bad. This apart, Mr Chaudhury is not also in a position

to evolve a straightforward strategy until he has assessed his strength, which today is a more difficult task than ever before. The ruling Congress High Command has made no secret of its support for Mr Bhagawati in the impending fight for the ACLP leadership, whereas Mr Chaliha's support for Mr Chaudhury is being read by the Centre, for obvious reasons, as a gang-up against the Congress (R). Mr Chaudhury has also been thrown into an embarrassing position because of the way Mr S. N. Misra of the Syndicate is claiming him to be on their side. Curiously enough, Mr Chaudhury has now declared, though belatedly, his allegiance to the ruling Congress and disowned the Syndicate. Nevertheless, it is absurd to think that the ruling Congress at the Centre would be in a mood to take him at his words, especially when Mr Bhagawati is bent on fighting out the Syndicate elements from the Assam Congress.

Compared to Mr Chaudhury's, Mr Bhagawati's position appears secure in that he has been from the very beginning maintaining a pro-Indira stance, causing much provocation to his adversaries. The Syndicate ultimately expelled him from the Congress (O). But the trouble is that even after this action Mr Chaliha cannot oust him from the PCC Presidency since, under the force of circumstances, he has given Mrs Gandhi to understand that his group is also on her side. Naturally, Mr Bhagawati has the advantage of utilising the power of the caucus to push him forward to his coveted goal. What also places him advantageously is that Mr Chaliha's disgruntled adversaries in the party will in all probability rally behind Mr Bhagawati in yet another bid to wipe out the last vestige of the Chaliha regime. And the support he will get from the leftist parties will also be a big factor in this game. The leftist parties have already demonstrated their goodwill for Mr Bhagawati by leaving the prestige Tezpur seat to him. It was from this constituency that the late Bishnu Rabha was returned in the last general elections. Mr Bhagawati is now preparing to contest the by-

election as a Congress (R) sponsored candidate.

## Bihar

Who will ultimately win the battle for Assam CLP leadership depends on who wins this by-election. The Syndicate has sponsored its own candidate, obviously with an eye on Mr M. M. Chaudhury. No doubt this candidate has also the blessings of Mr Chaliha, although he cannot openly support him. If he wins, it will go in Mr Chaudhury's favour because in that case the possibility of a straight fight for the leadership can be ruled out. If Mr Bhagawati wins, which is a probability, then Mr Chaudhury's future will be uncertain. In other words, the selection of Mr Chaliha's successor will in no case be unanimous.

Some quarters, having failed to persuade Mr Chaliha not to resign, have raised the slogan of unity in the Assam Congress. Others are trying to make out a strong case in favour of Mr M. M. Chaudhury on the plea that at least a man of Mr Chaliha's choice should come forward to take the leadership. The rationale behind the arguments put forward by both the parties is that today Assam needs a strong man to save the State from the 'evil designs of the Sino-Pakistani entente'. But such cryptopatriotic slogans rather alienate the people instead of inspiring their confidence. They are tired of hearing these vulgar clichés. The moot point now is how far Mr Chaliha will be capable of manoeuvring the present state of uncertainty in his favour.

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## Caste And Class

N. K. SINGH

Scene: A third class carriage of any passenger train in Bihar, preferably in North Bihar.

"Where are you going?"

"To..."

"Is it your home town?"

"No, I am going for business. I live at..."

"I see."

After a little pause—

"What *varna* (caste) do you belong to?"

**B**IHAR is a province where politics is said to be guided by casteism. It forms the basis of organisation of the various political parties and groups, of distribution of favours, of building support for oneself, of sharing the political spoils and power. Whether it is the distribution of election tickets in the Congress or of favour in the universities or elsewhere, caste is the dominant criterion.

Weak industrialization, absence of powerful mass movements and the failure of land reform measures—all these emphasise the importance of caste. The role of caste-sabhas in securing educational facilities and jobs, fulfilling some economic demands and redressing grievances in the past seems to have strengthened one's attachment to one's caste. In the absence of class-consciousness, many people believe that it is only through caste that they can capture power and become dominant, socially, politically and economically.

The Bihari Hindus can be divided into three broad sections on the basis of caste: upper, backward and scheduled. Among the upper there are four main castes—the Brahmin, the Bhumihar, the Rajput and the Kayasth. The Bhumihars and Rajputs are closely associated with the

feudalistic structure of society. Most of the big landlords and rich farmers belong to these two castes. Thus, being economically dominant, the Rajputs and Bhumihars have captured political power too. But they have been sworn enemies of each other due to the hard competition in the social, political and economic fields. The Kayasths are one of the most educated castes in Bihar. From a long time they have been in the clerical occupation, i.e., they are 'babus'. Among the backward castes a large number consists of either craftsmen or men pursuing certain types of professions. The scheduled castes consist of the so-called 'untouchables', mostly agricultural labourers or landless peasants.

Being the largest political group, the Congress party is the hotbed of political casteism. Or it will be better to say that it has no "ism" except 'casteism'. For a very long time—since the days of the late Dr S. K. Sinha and Mr A. N. Singh there have been different caste groups in the Bihar Congress. Almost all the top leaders were connected with their respective "caste sabhas" in a big way. Dr Rajendra Prasad was for three decades connected with the All India Kayasth Conference. He presided over the Jaunpur session of the Conference in 1925. His weakness for men of his own caste and his distribution of favours to them are well known. Dr A. N. Singh, another prominent leader, was connected with the All India Kshatriya Mahasabha. It was not a mere coincidence that in a civil case between the Dumraon Raj and its Diwan the Rajput zamindar engaged Dr Singh, and the Kayasth Diwan Dr Prasad, as their lawyers.

To be clear, there were four fac-

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tions—the Bhumihar, the Rajput, the Brahmin and the Backward—in the BPC. The leader of the Bhumihar camp was Dr S. K. Sinha. Mr Mahesh Pd Sinha is the successor-leader of this group and its Delhi representative is Tarakeshwari Sinha, famous as Taraji. At present this group is supporting the Syndicate Congress, because 'Morarji Bhai is Bhumihar'. (No one can tell, wherefrom they have got this caste line-up!) The Rajput camp, once led by Dr A. N. Singh, is now being led by his son, Mr S. N. Singh. Its Delhi correspondent is Mr Ram Subhag Singh. But in the fight between the Indicate and the Syndicate, the Rajput camp has been split and a section of North Bihar Rajputs, under the leadership of the Central Minister, Mr Satya Narayan Sinha, has fallen for Mrs Gandhi's progressive ideas. Some say that Mr Y. B. Chavan and Mr Dinesh Singh are themselves far more attractive than the progressive ideas. (Both are Rajputs). The Kayasth is a minority community in Bihar and hence its leaders kept themselves in an alliance with the Rajput camp in the inner power struggle of the party. It is said that Mr J. P. Narayan and Dr Rajendra Prasad supported the Rajput camp during the famous power struggle between the late Dr A. N. Singh and S. K. Sinha. At present Mr K. B. Sahay claims to be the leader of the Kayasths. The backward castes have also their representatives in the Congress party—in Bihar, Mr R. L. S. Yadav, who is a pillar of his 'caste sabha', and in Delhi Mr B. R. Bhagat. Till recently, the Brahmins had no strong group and like other caste factions, they were veering round either the Bhumihar or the Rajput camp. For a short while Pandit B. N. Jha emerged as a Brahmin leader, but he is no more in the Congress. When the first symptom of the Indira-Morarji controversy appeared, the Brahmin leader of the Bihar Congress formed a strong caste-alliance under the leadership of the Indicate Congress President, Mr A. P. Sharma (its Delhi representative is Mr L. N. Mishra) to support Mrs Gandhi.

More or less this is the set-up of both the Congress (O) and the Congress (R) in the State: so many power-lusty caste-wings fighting one another and between themselves, for the leadership of their respective groups, with one common trait—all the factions are feudal. Their roots lie deep in the feudal exploitation of the rural masses. They have massive support from zamindars and kulaks.

#### Non-Congress Parties

The non-Congress parties are not different in this game of dirty, caste-dominated politics. Their attitude depends on who are in the leadership. For instance, when Dr S. K. Sinha was Chief Minister, the then leader of the PSP legislators, Mr Ramanand Tiwary was more critical but when Pandit B. N. Jha came to power, Mr Tiwary's attitude became soft and Mr Baswan Singh, another leader of the PSP, became more critical. It should be noted that Mr Tiwary is a Brahmin while Mr Singh is a Bhumihar. Similarly, if Kayasth K. B. Sahay (Congress) is in power, Kayasth Thakur Prasad, the chief of the State Jana Sangh, will support the former. At present there is a fight inside almost every political party on the question of supporting one or the other faction of the Congress. This inner-party struggle is also being fought on a caste basis. The Brahmins, the backwards and a section of Rajputs are for Indira while the Bhumihars, the Kayasths and a section of Rajputs are for the Syndicate. This is the position of almost every political party. The CPI, the party of silent revolutionaries, has not kept itself aloof from this opportunistic politics. As it is dominated by the upper castes, it entered into an alliance with the Raja of Ramgarh and Co. in 1967.

Among the non-Congress parties, the SSP is most influenced by casteism as its very roots lie there. Since its very foundation there has been going on a struggle between the backward and the upper caste leaders of the SSP. The rich peasants and a section of the emerging industrial

bourgeoisie belong to the backward castes. They dominate the SSP politics and draw support from their caste-men on the basis of two slogans—sixty per cent of the seats in the legislature and in the services, and 'Banish English', because it has been the language of the upper caste. They are against the upper caste leaders of the SSP who, according to them, are utilising the party to capture or share power among themselves. Actually the SSP does not realize that casteism is maintained by certain socio-economic forces which should be fought. It does not want class struggle but rather caste struggle.

Even such 'individual' politicians like J. P. Narayan are not neutral but rather involved in caste politics. J. P.'s sympathetic attitude towards Mr K. B. Sahay and later on towards Mr Mahamaya Pd Sinha is notwithstanding. He was vocal when the police firing took place in 1955 at Patna but was comparatively silent during 1965-67 when Mr Sahay took repressive measures against the people and police firing took place throughout the State.

#### Impact of Elections

Parliamentary politics has strengthened the practice of casteism. The role played by caste is evident at every step: in party groupings, in nomination of candidates by parties, in election campaigns and ultimately in voting. Messrs C. Jha and N. Jha summed it up in the following manner: "In the process of nomination of candidates for election within the party, caste consideration came at two stages. The different group leaders within the party wanted the maximum number of party tickets to go to the supporters of their groups, so that their position in future bouts for party leadership would be strengthened. Then, the parties also kept in view the caste-composition of the constituencies and the caste of the candidates while deciding about the candidature... All the parties in the field recognised the force of caste and set up as far as possible candidates from that point of view... The

net result is that there is a larger number of aggressive casteists in the Bihar legislature today than in 1946" (written in 1964).

But are there no class interests in elections? In the 1968 mid-term elections an interesting fact came to light. The areas where the remnants of feudalism were still strong and a fight was going on between the peasantry and the landlord, the latter, whether belonging to the backward or the upper castes, voted either for the Congress or the Jana Sangh. It is a fact that in a locality which is dominated by a particular caste, all political parties set up candidates belonging to that caste in order to win the election, but the winner is quite often the one who is the most powerful by virtue of wealth or political influence or caste allegiance or all three together. Further, if the candidate belongs to left parties, his caste-people would rather vote for a different candidate representing the class-interests of their respective caste. To cut a long story short, when the question of class-interest arises, caste differences are forgotten.

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# The Tragedy Of Biafra—I

PRIMI LA LEWIS

**T**HE Biafran war is over. The Nigerians have triumphed after 30 months. General Ojukwu fled 'in a white Mercedes' with his wife and children and 'a large retinue', but he has pledged to return to Biafra as soon as he can. But who cares?

Once again the people of Africa have been misled by their self-appointed leaders. This war, sometimes made out to be a war of national self-determination—especially after reports of China's support to Biafra—has been nothing more than a bid for personal power on the part of Ojukwu, built on a water-tight tribal base; and a money-making machine for the assortment of external Powers whose avid involvement in the conflict was motivated by no humanitarian interest whatsoever.

In view of the absence of first-hand knowledge about this situation a background note may be useful here. The fact is that Nigeria's political history from the inception of independence in 1960 right up to the present day (except for one brief moment in time) has been a solidly tribal one. At no point in Nigeria's history as a federal State has there been a genuine, nationally based party. Independence was seized in 1960 without a single party being able to win an overall majority in Parliament. Hasty compromises were reached between regionally entrenched parties with widely differing programmes and platforms, and vital problems were left unresolved. A system of uneasy coalitions was continued right up to the 1965 elections which were won by the northern National People's Congress (NPC) in alliance with a breakaway group from the Western Action Group. Opposing this was an alliance between the Eastern (Ibo) party and the remaining (Yoruba) Action Group. All along, Nigerian politics had been marked by an absence of any national policy or ideology other than that of

personal and tribal ambition. Corruption had reached such a scale as to have become symbolic of every aspect of Nigerian life. Chinua Achebe (the well-known Nigerian-now-Biafran-now novelist) shows the pervasiveness of this corruption in *A Man of the People*. We in India know the corrosive effects of corruption only too well, but in Nigeria it had penetrated to the lowest level of social dealing. You had to be a confidence man in order to survive.

It may be asked here that if the federal set-up was so rotten what was the point in preserving it. This of course brings up all kinds of issues—external as well as internal—which will be dealt with later. But at the time and even now, it is generally recognised that with Africa's by and large primitive economy and scattered population it would be unviable to split it up even further, as concentration of population and capital are interlinked, and an industrial infrastructure can hardly be built without either. Moreover, although many thoughtful Africans see no reason why seven million people in Sweden should constitute a nation while seven million Ibos should merely make for a *tribe* with all its denigrating connotations, the fact remains that economically, production relations in Africa are, in the mass, still pre-feudal, with industry still in its infancy, and almost entirely in the control of foreign interests anyway. Again every previously colonised African country has its trade tied up to the mother country which buys its raw materials and sells back manufactured goods at the now proverbial rate of profit. Thus it is at least economically important for African nations to come together and form regional units rather than to split up into ever smaller fractions which imperialist interests find ever easier to horn in on and control completely. This is a complex dilemma indeed in

the light of Africa's original carve-up into nation States by the various colonial powers on a totally arbitrary basis, coupled with the continuing situation wherein it is rare indeed for a leader (Nyerere of Tanzania is one such) to cut across tribal lines for a secure power base.

### The Break-up

But to return to the background: It was the rotten state of Nigeria which led to the first army coup in January 1966, right in the middle of the fatuous Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in Lagos—or perhaps it was just after. The coup was engineered by a group of junior officers, four of whom were Ibos and one a Yoruba. Their plan was to pick off all the political and military leaders in the country and to establish a socialist junta. The leader of the group was a remarkable and dedicated young Ibo called Chukwuma Nzeogwu. This coup was hailed with great joy throughout Nigeria, and the people thought that at last they would get a clean government and administration. But then it became known that although all the top leaders from the north and the west had been killed according to plan, the Ibo leadership had somehow escaped. Nzeogwu had been betrayed. Some say that Ojukwu, a wealthy, powerful and extremely ambitious Ibo, had a hand in this betrayal. He wanted no socialist coup. Meanwhile, reactionaries in the North and West created confusion by inciting the Hausa and Yoruba people against the Ibos who had deprived them of their leaders, and then General Ironsi—an Ibo—declared martial law, arrested the rebel officers, and, as all the other top officers had been killed off, proceeded to consolidate his position on a purely tribal basis, installing Ibos in positions of control everywhere. This of course was adding insult to injury, and the Northerners were incited to communal rioting and mass killing of the Ibo settlers in their territory. In fact, so enraged was the North by what had passed, that Ironsi himself was assassinated, and, ironically, the North was on the verge of seceding,

when a last-ditch effort was made to save the union by installing Gowon, a Christian, from a minority tribe in the North as President, and then going on to seek a solution on confederal lines at Aburi. This attempt failed too, and Ojukwu who had now come up as the Ibo representative, declared secession. The rest is history.

The fact that the Biafrans put up a magnificent defence against the far superior machinery of the federal forces is an indication of what this war could have been if Ojukwu's intentions had been more progressive—not only for the Ibos but for the whole of Nigeria. Then it truly could have become a war of national liberation. But Ojukwu is little better than a Tshombe. He is a millionaire who has lived fat off the land, he has a brilliant mind, but it has become warped with ambition. His money bought a Swiss-based public relations firm, Martpress, which most successfully sold his story of genocide to an indignant and naive—if not fascistic—Western world, only too ready to believe in the barbaric intentions of feudal Islam against those dear little Ibo Christians. What the propaganda machine never said was that there are over 250 tribes in Nigeria, and it is difficult to imagine them uniting for the sole purpose of eliminating the Ibos. But the Islamic 'threat' has far greater ramifications. It poses a potentially unified Arab-African front to Western (Christian) interests. Moreover, besides Israel's part in all this, there is also the fear that as with rapidly expanding anti-imperialist movements in the Arab countries, the communists will be the first to benefit from such a power bloc. And above all, as Soviet Russia exposes its own brand of imperialism more and more clearly, the situation is fraught with genuinely revolutionary possibilities. Thus wherever Christians—preferably Catholics, as in Biafra and the Southern Sudan—can be seen to be defending civilized values against the sword of Islam, there everyone from the Pope down will rush in to render succour. And to cry GENOCIDE!

Oh yes, Biafra has raised a hornet's nest of issues alright. Both international and African. The only ones who were well and truly fooled were the wretched Ibo people who were made to believe through incessant propaganda that if they did not fight on they would be massacred by the Northern hordes, and also that they must starve rather than touch federal supplies as these would be poisoned. And now? Ojukwu has fled, leaving them to the tender mercies of the ghouls from the North. And the end of this Peoples War of liberation, this fight to the finish for 'survival' itself? (For Ojukwu used to insist that this was *not* his war: that Biafrans would fight on whether he lived or died or was captured) . . . the end of this has been "unconditional surrender". A touching embrace between Gowon and the "new" Biafran leader, Maj. Gen. Philip Effiong. And a last call of Ojukwu from his hideout: "If I live, Biafra lives" . . . The irony is complete.

And so is the tragedy. For in all likelihood nothing will change. There will be a long period of military rule either under the honest but not too intelligent Gowon or someone stronger and more ruthless than he, followed by a charade of civilian 'elections' as in Ghana recently, and a reversion to the old status quo. Nothing will change. For the people are too tribally entrenched and backward, their leaders too corrupt and irresponsible, and the intelligentsia afraid to lose its privileges by sticking its neck out anywhere but in another country.

This is the truth about Nigeria, and indeed, about most of Africa. It breeds a profound cynicism in the most intelligent of its people. Either it must wait for the right historical phase in production relations to mature, or it must put its fate in the hands of individuals—lonely men like Nyerere, who are trying to win a race against time in establishing a socialist infrastructure on a mass base. Such a man is nowhere to be seen on the Nigerian scene. And the situation is so terribly delicate and complex now,

that in all probability it will be handed over to the ubiquitous British advisers (Malcolm Macdonald in person, probably) to sort out. In their own best interests, of course.

That is the price you have to pay for always wanting others to do your dirty work for you, as Fannon so brilliantly points out in his *The Wretched of the Earth*.

were not allowed to move freely. The concept of one Nigeria became a farce and the prospect for an integrated society was buried for all time.

## The Tragedy Of Biafra—II

K. SANTAM

WHEN was Nigeria united country? From the days of the European freebooters through the consolidation of British dominance to the eventful 1966 when two military coups tore into shreds of what was left of Whitehall-modelled democracy, Nigerian unity was at best contrived to protect the interests of the U.K. The country which is an amalgam of peoples of many ethno-cultural groups, big and small, had no name until the wife of Sir Frederick Lugard gave it one following the settlement of the Niger crisis in 1898. It has to be remembered that Lugard "forms the bridge between the haphazard trail-breaking of the merchants and missionaries and bona fide imperialism."<sup>1</sup>

Nigeria has two distinct halves, north and south—and the latter is made up of two regions, west and east. The north belongs to the Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani, the west is the land of the Yoruba, and the Ibo is the majority people of the east. To be precise, the region above the Kabba line comprising three-fifths of the land and over half of the Nigerian population belongs to the north. The enormous preponderance of the north became one of the factors that later threatened the viability of a truly balanced federation. After Lugard had defeated the Emirs of the north, he preferred to maintain a remote overlordship through indirect rule. This gave a new lease to the exploitation and repression of the people through the regionwide administrative, judicial and fiscal structure of the Emirs.

But it also prolonged the inability of the north to graduate into the modern world, and stultified future efforts to introduce parliamentary democracy.

Aware of the fact that mass education and mass enlightenment would one day pose a serious threat to their privileged position, the Emirs condemned the people to illiteracy. The east, however, presents an altogether different picture. Encouraged by the success of the rule of warrant chiefs in the north, Lugard thought of achieving the same results by the application of indirect rule in the east. It boomeranged since the easterners by tradition and mental make-up would insist on being consulted in everything that concerns them. They are an assertive, self-confident and questioning type, which cannot but incur the displeasure of the foreigners. Once the missionaries introduced education on a large scale, the Ibo moved quite rapidly to acquire knowledge in different branches of science and the humanities. They became self-reliant and began to manage their own affairs. By contrast, the northerners being unable to run the offices and factories were content to import numerous British officials and technicians—one of the reasons why today there is a vigorous and vociferous pro-Nigeria lobby of ex-colonial civil servants, soldiers and administrators in London for whom Nigeria is their beloved Northern Region. For the numerous smaller positions requiring some degree of skill, the north had to invite, though reluctantly, the southerners. For them Sabon Garis (strangers' quarters) were created beyond which they

In 1944-45 the Governor, Sir Arthur Richards, undertook an opinion survey on constitutional reforms. Although the north left no doubt about its unwillingness to merge with the south, it agreed to go along only on the basis that (1) the principle of separate regional development should be enshrined in the new Constitution, and that (2) the north should have nearly fifty per cent of the seats in the legislature. During the year of inauguration of the Richards Constitution Tafawa Balewa made a startling declaration: "I should like to make this clear to you that if the British quit Nigeria now at this stage the northern people would continue their interrupted conquest to the sea." The three-region federal State encouraged regionalism and confirmed the northerners' belief that by playing the threat of separation they could exact any concession from the colonial rulers. The Macpherson Constitution, the various regional conferences and the General Conference at Ibadan in January 1950 showed the unerring determination of the northern leaders to make their domination in the federal structure an in-built feature of Nigerian politics.

In such a situation, the success of the political parties was conditioned by regional appeal. Even the National Council of Nigerian Citizens Party which was striving to spread its wings all over the country had to abandon its ambition under pressure from regional parties like the Northern People's Congress and the Action Group Party of the west. The form of parliamentary democracy prescribed for Nigeria proved unsuitable to the existing ethnic group structure, incomprehensible to its local practitioners, inapposite to African civilisation and impracticable in an artificially created nation. Mr Walter Schwarz has made a succinct observation of the product which emerged from a decade of negotia-

<sup>1</sup> The Biafra Story by Frederick Forsyth.

tions between the government and the governed: "Nigeria became independent with a federal structure which, within two years, was shaken by an emergency and, within five, had broken down in disorder, to be finally overthrown by two military coups and a civil war... There is still a widespread feeling among southern Nigerians that the British deliberately left the north in a dominating position because they found its conservatism both congenial and useful."<sup>2</sup> The paltering nature of negotiations confirmed the colonial Government's interest in subjugating the dynamic east to the more backward Hausa and Fulani.

#### January Coup

The situation in January 1966 could only lead to a coup. But it was more likely to be engineered by the authorities to entrench themselves more effectively in power than by some Ibo army officers. According to the northern version, the January coup was a politically inspired attempt by the Ibo to reverse the power structure. Others see it—perhaps more accurately—as a sincere attempt at a national and radical revolution, planned without thoughts of tribal advantage, but which later came to be contaminated and perverted by tribalistic considerations. The coup, which did not go according to the plan in some regions, put General Ironsi, an Ibo, in power. Although the new regime had an impressive beginning, with the General showing no favouritism to the easterners in the matter of appointments, his maladroit handling of some sensitive regional issues soon landed him in a crisis. In his first few statements, he promised that a return to civilian rule would be preceded by the appointment of study groups on different outstanding problems, the establishment of a constituent assembly and a referendum on a new constitution. Ironsi's appointment of Francis Nwodeki, an Ibo, as the commissioner to inquire into the unification of the regional public services incurred the wrath of the northerners who

found in the regional administration a suitable means to keep the easterners in effective check. The main plank of the Ironsi regime was to effect a break with the deficiencies of the "federal system." He wanted to unify the country. However welcome the idea might be to the east, the northerners who had seen in regionalism under the Richards Constitution an undying protection of their own society, with all its lethargy and inertia could have only distaste for it. Faced with the delicate task of balancing the irrepressible east and the conservative north General Ironsi announced a new Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree under which the former regions were abolished, and Nigeria grouped into a number of territorial areas called provinces. Nigeria ceased to be what was described as a federation and became the Republic of Nigeria. In fact, there were no changes of boundaries, only the structure of government was formalised.

The Decree, however, provided the pretext to start a pogrom of the Ibo throughout the north. It was both organised and spontaneous. It was stage-managed by disgruntled civil servants, ex-politicians, local government officials and businessmen whom the change of regime had deprived of lucrative contracts. The northern Emirs left Ironsi in no doubt that in case the unification Decree was not abrogated the north would attempt a secession. Tension continued to mount. Ironsi had no solution for it.

The second coup of July 1966 which was the handiwork of northern army officers was wholly regional, introverted, revanchist and separatist in origin and unnecessarily bloody in execution. The ultimate aim of the coup was secession for the north. But the northern leaders had second thoughts once they were made to realise that secession would deprive the region of any access to the sea and benefits of oil resources in the east. At the Ad Hoc Constitutional Review Conference, General Gowon submitted four alternative arrangements for Nigeria: a federal system with a strong central government; a federal

system with a weak central government; a confederation; or an entirely new arrangement.<sup>3</sup> The north quite expectedly pressed for a loose association amounting, in effect, to a confederation. Its memorandum said that in the proposed union of autonomous States a member State would have the constitutional right to secede unilaterally. Moreover, each State should have its own police and army. But soon there was a turn-about in the north's position following a division in the delegation. The emphasis was now on an effective central government, immediate agreement in principle on the creation of more States and abandonment of the idea that the right of secession should be enshrined in the constitution.

#### 30,000 Killed

The Conference had to be abandoned following the September-October pogrom of genocidal proportions. It was a traumatic experience for the Easterners—the Ibo, Efik, Ibibio, Ogoja and Ijaw. No less than 30,000 were killed in which the army and police cooperated with the civilians. The survivors returned to the east penniless. Also there were refugees from the west, the mid-west and Lagos. The influx of about one million people into the east, already the most densely populated region in Africa, aggravated the problem of local administration. From the beginning of 1967, the east was thrown into an isolation which was both physical and psychological. But Ojukwu still hoped that an agreement would be possible. The conference at Aburi provided the last chance. There was a substantial measure of agreement. But Gowon was reminded by his masters in Lagos that he had gone too far to meet the eastern demand. Gowon went back on the agreement and Ojukwu had no alternative but to proclaim that the territory and region known as eastern Nigeria, together with her continental shelves and territorial waters, would henceforth be an "independent sovereign State of the name and title the Republic of Biafra."

<sup>2</sup> Nigeria by Walter Schwarz.

<sup>3</sup> Nigerian Crisis, Vol. IV.

# Calcutta Diary

GYAN KAPUR

DEATH and broken limbs are now quite common among the various supporters of the United Front. Verval mud-slinging is no less, high up in the hierarchy. But lovers of the United Front need not despair. Whatever the Sen Commission might have said about cricket tickets, Ministers and legislators of the Front are agreed that for their hard work for the people, though they may take lower salaries, they are entitled to some fringe benefits.

The indefatigable Mr Jatin Chakravarty, who is going about like any good executive collecting certificates, has got another feather in his cap. He has succeeded in getting a Railway Booking Office opened inside the Assembly Chamber, on the lines of one in Parliament House. Such booking offices of course have their uses, even though legislators nowadays prefer to go by air wherever such services are available. The friends and well-wishers of the legislators can free themselves from the strain of getting accommodation on trains. I should be the last person to grudge this privilege to the legislators. On a visit to New Delhi some years back all efforts to procure a reservation for a particular day proved useless. Ultimately, the near impossible was made possible by utilising the services of the Parliament Booking Office through an MP.

Another thing on which the Cabinet found it possible to agree is to make available the services of a ward boy or ayah at government expense to Ministers when they are in hospital. There is no reason why this benefit should not be extended to other legislators also and no doubt it will be, in due course of time. Conditions in hospitals being what they are, this is necessary to make the stay in hospital barely tolerable in certain illnesses where the patient cannot move about freely himself.

But it would have been more decent, if these 'men of the people' had also considered the fate of the common people under such circumstances and taken some other steps to ameliorate the intolerable conditions.

Hospitals in India unfortunately work on a sort of pseudo-military discipline which ignores the fact that the patient has a mind of his own and that the needs of patients vary. Also ignored is the question of the patients' ability to pay. There are many patients who require the services of an attendant but are unable to pay for it. According to the rules, however, such attendance cannot be provided by any friend or relative as they are not allowed inside the wards beyond visiting hours. The hardship to children and certain classes of patients such as eye operation cases can well be imagined. Already in some other countries, the USA for example, changes are being made in these rules. Mothers of chronically ill children are allowed to remain near their children under certain well-regulated conditions. As yet in our country, however, all that one is allowed is to loiter somewhere in the corridors while one's near and dear one is being operated upon.

All this reminds me of a story which a doctor friend assured me was true. It is about a refugee couple from East Bengal. The husband was struck down by an incurable disease and after going from door to door of one influential person after another, the wife succeeded in getting him admitted into a hospital. To be near him and attend to his needs, for which she could not hire an attendant, she tried to get a job in the hospital. Ultimately, she found the vacancy of a sweeper woman and gladly took it to be of use to her husband. The man died. Now there was no need for her to

remain in the hospital, cleaning out bedpans. But there was nowhere she could go, nothing she could do for a living. So, she was left stuck there.

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Habits die hard. There seems to be a sort of fixation in the minds of some Central Ministers that anything happening anywhere in the country is their affair, directly or indirectly. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the reported concern expressed by the Union Government over the unfortunate death of the wife of the French Consul as a result of a fatal assault by burglars. The incident, of course, is regrettable. That it involved an official representative of a friendly country makes it sadder still. But Governments are expected to go by cold reason and not emotion alone. There is precious little that any Government anywhere can do to prevent such happenings. All that can be done is to make determined efforts to bring the culprits to book. Murders and kidnappings are not unknown in Delhi, from where the concern has been expressed. But perhaps it was just an attempt, feeble though, to drive home the point that law and order are breaking down over here.

\* \*

Politics at the Centre being what they are, it is not necessary to have much imagination to understand that the Central purse strings are loosened only for certain considerations. If Mr Ajoy Mukherjee and Mr Somnath Lahiri have come away disappointed at their failure to bring back the desired funds for Calcutta, they need not feel disheartened. When the time is ripe, the Central bounty may still fall on Calcutta.

That is all part of the political game which all parties are quite happy to play. But it is not neces-

sary to fear the Centre's hand in any and everything concerning this State and the city of Calcutta. It is amusing to read that the Central Government is hatching a conspiracy against the Calcutta Airport at Dum Dum to reduce its importance as an international airport. This betokens a mind suffering from persecution mania. The Calcutta Airport happens to be the first one in India selected by the Tourism Minister, Dr Karan Singh, for installation of equipment to handle the much-vaunted Jumbo jets expected to land on India next year. However, the first landing will be not at Calcutta but at Santa Cruz which is going to

have the necessary equipment after Calcutta. This is what has led a correspondent in a Calcutta daily to suspect dark designs on the part of the Centre, forgetting that if the Union Government felt that way they could easily have saved Rs 2 crores or so by giving Calcutta the go by in the matter of the equipment.

It is time well-wishers of Calcutta made up their minds on certain points. Either it is a city that is different, with a soul of its own, or it is not. It is no use pretending that Calcutta can compete with Bombay, for example, on its own terms in the matter of, say, night

life. Any time Bombay is going to win hands down.

So, if our boys are keen to go over to the United States to imbibe the virtues of American culture and international airlines do not stop over at Calcutta, we must reconcile ourselves to saying our farewells at the old-fashioned Howrah Station. Or may be accompany them up to New Delhi. And if it is the tourists we are after, we must welcome a different set altogether who may come by tramp steamer. For the plain fact is that Calcutta is not popular with the Jumbo jet set. It is not meant to be either. For that we need not shed any tears.

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# New York Revisited

DEBORAH CHATTAWAY

**W**INGING in from the Atlantic along the old Viking route of inlets and snow and fog one feels, always, like a discoverer. I was a discoverer coming home. Will it have changed...

In those days the war was just over, America a New Found Land flowing with butter, oranges, nylons. This time the whole world was waiting in front of its television, while three Americans stepped humbly back to earth from the other side of the moon. There was Senator McCarthy then, and his un-American activities. Now—Wallace, McCarthy—in twenty years even names change places. In Europe we say since the war. Americans ask immediately, Which One: Europe, Korea, Vietnam? You see black and yellow stickers everywhere nowadays indicating the nearest Fall-Out Shelter, and in December there was a wreath on every door. It means Merry Christmas there, but it seemed more like a funeral to us. Like doomed trees in a forest. And if those towers should come toppling down....

It does feel as if they might. Those giant new building blocks, all in glass, as if forever being put up and taken down by some monster child create a feeling of impermanence. Beauty they have, but it is ephemeral—reflection on counter-reflecton. Put out your hand, and it may not be there. Be careful, or your nose may shatter against the glass. Sad little bits of cellotape warn you here and there, but the illusion persists. The reflections ricochet up to the sky, sending the cars weaving above your head, the clouds to sail at your feet. Crisscross and pass. Only the Iroquois, it is said, can stand building at such heights. Looking up gives vertigo. You have to look down again, or feel it crash about your ears. This was not so before.

They have taken away the El, and even the Empire State has grown

squat. The old buildings look so old-fashioned now, but you cannot mistake them for another. Each time they tugged at memory's heart-strings. Chrysler points its spire, and General Electric wears a crown, and Rockefeller still moans as the wind rocks its lullaby on Broadway—old Indian trail zigzagging from stem to stern of Manhattan.

Did I really work up there in my crow's nest on the 44th floor, for three whole years? Seeing far out to to the glistening Atlantic, the Queens steaming slowly in. Light in perpetual motion, changing to swirling mist, setting that skyline ablaze or rendering it transparent, shifting, slanting down between the canyons. A block dislodges itself, regroupes. This is better than an aeroplane, freer, more like a gull poised aloft. At nightfall, the city itself becomes the firmament, and one feels higher than the stars. New York, built on rock, forever in transit. Moored to the mainland by her bridges. Only the hairsbreadth of the Verrazano to keep the ocean at bay. What if she should suddenly break adrift, with all her passengers each in their overcrowded hold—China Town, Little Italy, Harlem, the Bronx—emigrants who never reached the promised land. In the museums there is booty in plenty. The crew is already in bellbottoms, rolling along the deck in the wind from the sea....

But let us come down to earth a bit. Or don't let's. It is dull on the ground and dirty, and very slow. Has all the money gone up above, that the pavements are cracked, the roads full of potholes? Street signs traffic lights jumble together in confusion, not showing the way to go. Down further, the Subway. Even worse. Underworld where the cops patrol, tunnelling beneath the city. Ambulances, police, fire engines are out all the time. The crowds plod along. I remember it glamorous and on the ball. Now it seems provincial.

Sometimes rude, immensely kindly. "Where're you from?" people stop to ask, show interest when you tell them. The motorists never mow you down. In this city where everyone is a foreigner, I feel at home, though it is nothing like as polyglot as London is these days—fewer nutty costumes. The pace is easy-going, open, but I do not remember seeing anyone kissing. There was beauty sometimes—in a tall girl against a tall skyscraper in the snow, her great-coat reaching right down to the ground, her hair falling like Godiva's—strange modern highwayman with stiltwalker's gait. Always, in that bright shining air.

There was a vendor who sold us hotdogs from his little barrow. In the shadow of Wall Street, in sight of the Statue of Liberty. I do not know what country he came from. He will never speak in any but his native tongue, and will certainly never be president. That is New York. So is the new Ford Foundation, with its interior of Babylonian splendour housed in a framework of "Controlled Rust", and its magnolias that bear no blooms because "the trees haven't got adjusted yet". They have a window-washing problem, too, but their cellotape is golden. Poignant city which reached for the moon. Like the whole American dream perhaps.

## "So What?"

Vietnam, the Assassinations, Black Power, Chicago—Americans have lost their assurance. They are touchingly surprised by appreciation, but no longer expect it. In the home of advertising, you see few advertisements, no hoardings, no headlines. Of course it all goes on from the hearthrug these days, but no one is selling you Manhattan is the Mostest. Not any more. Even a postcard of the city seemed hard to find. In other countries we are still seizing on the conveniences of modern living. Americans have already reached saturation point. It was they who got there first. Their mood is now "So What!" This is startling and disarming to an outsider, and makes Euro-

peans seem smug. It is the biggest single change, and strikes all the time. They even seem uncertain about their food. In the land of plenty, that wonderful milk is divested of its cream and fat, bread of its calories. In a best hotel the sugar lumps wrapped in pink were saccharine—if one preferred!

New York the violent, shamelessly erected to Mammon, its church spires looking insignificant down below. Take it or leave it. Beautiful in spite of itself, for nothing there is out to please. You cannot even walk all round a show-building, the ground-space is too expensive, the next one going up flush. A pity. A tree, a flower, a bench to sit down on... But no, it is all up, down, and straight across. A curve becomes beautiful just because it is a curve, and the skaters going round and around on outdoor rinks bring colour and movement and life. The sense of that vast continent beyond is exhilarating, heady. You can go inside the beautiful Seagram's Building if you want to, and look at the world through whisky-coloured glass. Or take a drive through Central Park and cross over George Washington Bridge, where the natural rock rises vertical as the city. No wonder they built it that way. Drive further. On the wide Hudson the ice is breaking as it comes down from the north. In spite of factory chimneys, mammoth highways, it could still be virgin territory. The forest stretches towards New England. There might still be an Indian among the trees, watching our arrival from some other planet. There are glimpses of water, swamp grass waving. Manhattan dwindles, grows taller, reappears—spindly totem poles reaching higher, higher. Right round the island and back, suddenly, into their colossal shadow.

Steam swirls up from the road vents, manmade mist, vertical too, through which people move as shadows. I do not want to leave. Cars honk, a boat answers from the river. A whole newspaper is blown towards you in the night five, ten, fifty storeys high.... Fruit juice with everything....

I have been given a prodigal's welcome, and now we are flying away. No, this time it is not an elevator taking us upward. Lighting-up time is making it all beautiful. Is it inhabited? Or are the heavens full of empty offices, all with their lights burning bright. If only that big dark building would move, I said, so that I can see the one beside it. And that big dark one turned out to be the star-spangled sky. The illuminated clouds below us could be moon-scape, our huge wing cutting the sky an exhibit in the Whitney Museum. What time is it? Which year? We had no supper, so breakfast is now being served because it is lunchtime. A red ball pulls itself up over the rim of the horizon and floods us with daylight. That is the earth below.

What to make of it all. It has been too quick. I only know it is very grey coming down....

## Open Air Art

BY AN ART CRITIC

DO you want to buy a painting or a sculpture? What variety impresses you most? Surrealistic? Expressionistic? Representational? You will find everything at the Calcutta Art Fair 1970, now going on at the Market Square near the Calcutta Corporation buildings. Over 80 per cent of the prominent artists of West Bengal have assembled there their merchandise. Graphics which sell for Rs. 100 a piece at galleries and conventional exhibitions are being sold for only Rs. 15. If you wish you can get your portrait done in black and white on the spot for Rs. 5 only. Collages are being sold for Rs. 15. Drawings by such significant painters as Prakash Karmakar, Sunil Das, Rabin Mandal and many more are going for Rs. 10 only. You can get a big canvas of oil for Rs. 50 or 100. Exclusive sculptures are also for sale.

Why have the artists flocked in a public park and why are they bent on selling their works for such paltry

amounts? Because, they have realised that their relation with the public is not very close and that this state of affairs would not do. They depend on the whims of a few aristocratic art lovers and a few foreign tourists. But culture, whatsoever it is, evolves on the patronage of the people. In this fair, as expected, visitors are from all walks of life. Here the daily average sale of paintings and sculptures is 50—much more than that at any academy or art gallery. The Corporation of Calcutta should be thanked for allowing the artists to hold such a spectacular fair. A special feature is that a few artists from Maharashtra and Tamilnadu are also exhibiting their art works.

## Letters

### Lobbying On Chandigarh

At last Mrs Indira Gandhi has given her verdict on Chandigarh, though couched in many uncertainties about the problems of Haryana and Punjab. We are happy to note that Punjabi-speaking Chandigarh has been given to Punjab. But in the whole fight for Chandigarh one thing happens to be of much interest to us communists. The way the followers of Dange and Sundarayya took part in the fight is noteworthy. *The Statesman* reports that Harkishen Singh Surjeet, one of the top leaders of CPI (M), made a number of trips to New Delhi and did his utmost to lobby along with the Akali leaders. While the activities of the latter can be justified on the grounds that they acted according to the dictates of their own political philosophy, how will Surjeet justify his all-out involvement in the matter? The linguistic contradiction between the people of Punjab and Haryana was allowed to develop into an antagonistic contradiction by an improper handling of the situation. The revisionists succumbed to regionalism by lobbying with the bourgeois leaders in favour of this or that State. It was the duty of the socialists to expose the misdeeds of the bourgeoisie in foment-

ing regional and to some extent communal feelings of Punjabis and Haryanavis.

Now S. S. Mirajkar has identified himself with the Dangeites. We communists in Delhi have some relevance in the matter. Mirajkar and P. Ramamurti were a party to the decision last year to turn May Day into a Petition Day along with Dange and others, in which even reactionary parties like the Jana Sangh took part. As members of the CPM in Delhi we protested and in spite of directives we went ahead with our plan to hold a May Day rally in Gandhi Ground where we denounced the petition business. Will the Party rank and-file overthrow pseudo-leaders and join hands with the real communist revolutionaries, to avoid betrayal by the revisionists time and again?

SURAJ SINGH  
Delhi

### 'Sanghis In Session'

The President of the Asansol Jana Sangh has criticised (February 7) what he calls my provincialism. I want to make it clear that while writing about Marwaris, I take the business class as a whole.

Mr Mukherjee's argument that the JS is not a Marwari-bania party because "one-fourth of the delegates from West Bengal to the Patna session were not Marwaris" is contradictory because his own statement makes it clear that three-fourths of the delegates were Marwaris. I can dare say that the remaining one-fourth were also Marwaris, i.e. they were businessmen. Such a higher figure (supplied by Mr Mukherjee) only strengthens my report that most of the delegates

from West Bengal were Calcutta Marwaris. The term "most" obviously does not mean all.

Very correctly Mr Mukherjee says 'the majority of W. Bengal Marwaris are not pro-Jana Sangh.' They cannot be. Or how could the Sangh lose its solitary seat also in the mid-term elections and 48 out of 50 candidates had to forfeit their security deposits? Obviously, they are pro-Congress, yet.

Mr Mukherjee has concentrated on the strength of his party in Hindi-speaking India and has boasted that the villagers there do not regard it as a Marwari-bania party. What is the truth? Take Bihar. The Sangh's victories were mainly recorded in the urban and semi-urban areas such as Motihari, Sugauli, Chapra, Bhagalpur, Banka, Kajr, Deoghar and Ranchi where cow-politics could be exploited with the support of the local Marwaris both in men and material. It also captured seats in riot-affected areas like Ranchi. Thus its role in communal riots helped it.

But there is something missing. The Sangh's joining the UF Government and opposing the land reform measures enhanced its prestige among the landlords and rich peasants. The Sangh attracted a significant section from the zamindar and rich peasant families, who saw it as a rising party and the Congress as a sinking boat. So I apologise: the villagers of Bihar and Northern India do not regard the JS as a Marwari-bania party but as a "Marwari-bania-zamindar" party.

N. K. SINGH  
Patna

### Aranyer Dinratri

If a lumpen, a buffoon, a jilted lover and a goody-goody young man stop over a place somewhere near Palamau, occupy a bungalow unauthorisedly by bribing its keeper, meet a luscious widow, her sister-in-law with a kameez and bell-bottom slacks on, and a scantily clad Santhal

girl, their hour-to-hour affairs may well be the subject matter of a trash novelette by Sunil Gangopadhyay. But I could never dream of Satyajit Ray making a film out of it! Well, Ray has done it, and he will perhaps repeat it if Press reports are correct.

I should love to learn from S. T. K. (Letters, February 7) or from anybody else what is the purpose of waking this film. Is it just to have the fun of film-making? Perhaps so, for only Satyajit Ray can afford to dabble in such luxury by virtue of his position. I do not know of any other film-maker who has ever made a film that does not convey anything to its audience. I just fail to understand how S.T.K. finds in this slip-slop an "unaccustomed complexity of either form or characters". Will he please elaborate?

SIDDHARTHA DASGUPTA  
Calcutta

After reading film reviews for about two scores of years, I feel, today, more amused than disgusted by most of them. But what pains is that a sane journal like yours should publish the review of *Aranyer Dinratri* by a film critic (January 24). The review shows personal antagonism against Satyajit Ray. Good English or slick expressions are not the flesh and blood of critical judgement. One must be authentically aware of the creative experiments of an artist, without expecting from him an epic every time or a political manifest. This is, of course, too much to expect from A Film Critic, who prefers to abuse rather than explore and understand the rudiments of 20th century art form.

T. MUKHERJEE  
Calcutta

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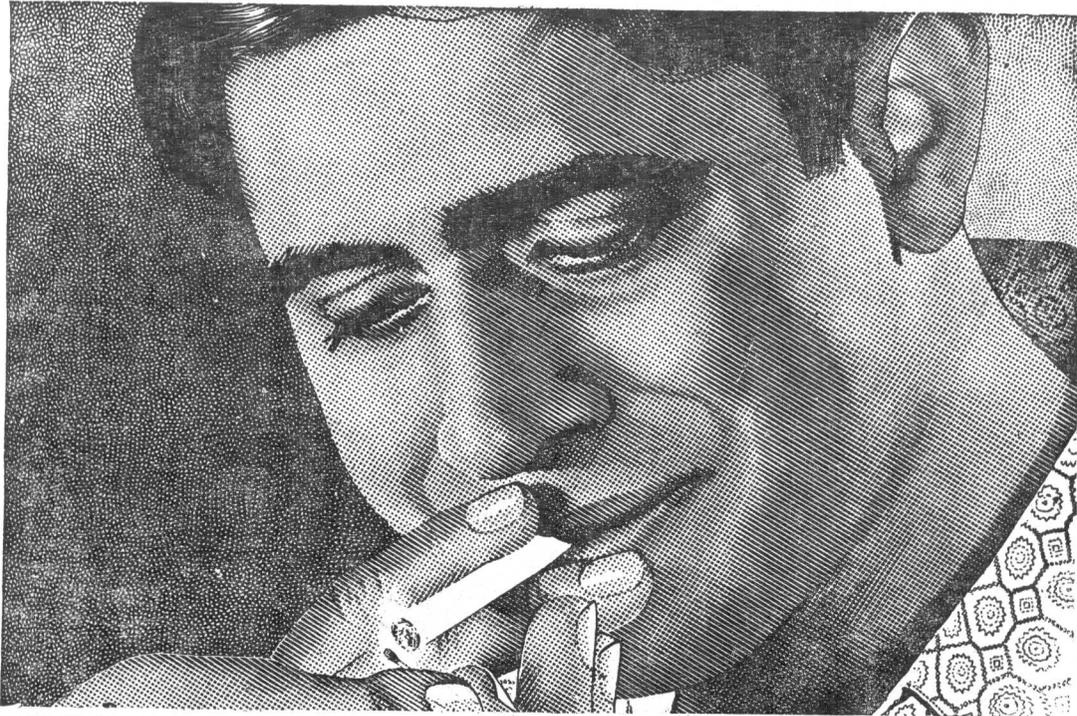
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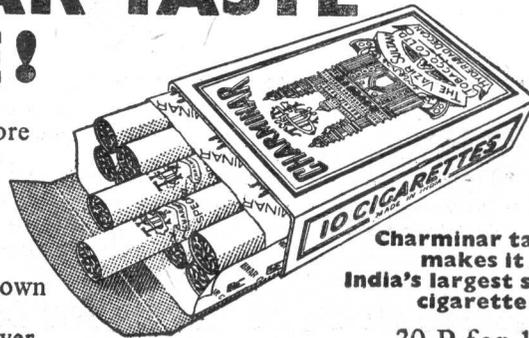
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