

# **Time for Re-Thinking**

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A NUMBER of policy makers in the Capital are wondering what persuaded the Prime Minister to launch his massive assault on ECM during the Commonwealth Conference in London. It had been generally assumed that India would adopt a 'soft' approach because of her somewhat ramified aid agreements with the leading members of ECM. The Prime Minister has not only attacked ECM as an extension of NATO cold-warring, but has also described its economic perspectives as neo-colonialist. His reasoning is remarkably similar to the theses prepared on the Common Market by the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and released on the eve of the London Conference.

Several observers maintain that our future negotiations with the 'Aid India Club' have been put into jeopardy, and that no amount of explaining to General de Gaulle and Chancellor Adenauer will wash away the impression created that we are going to mobilise opinion in Asia and Africa against ECM. First reports suggest that Paris and Bonn are somewhat puzzled by the vehemence of the criticism, although few share General de Gaulle's hopes that it will have the effect of tilting the balance against Britain's entry into ECM.

The full impact of this orientation in Indian political and economic relations with the West will be ascertained early next year when the 'Aid India Club' is due to meet. Finance Minister Morarji Desai in Washington tried to clear the misunderstandings which have already arisen and which are likely to arise on the question of this aid. Washington, apparently, is of the opinion that not only should the quantum of aid be matched but also the terms under which it is offered. Leading members of the 'Aid India Club' do not agree, and their opposition is likely to increase as the ECM controversy develops sharp political facets. Crucial issues like rates of interest to be charged, the period of the aid, utilisation and

repayment are being revived — and not a few believe that the objective is to 'discipline' India, to remind her gently who is master.

## **Chinese Infiltrate into NEFA**

Nearer home, the Chinese have been likewise busy. Their infiltration into the NEFA area, south of the MacMahon Line, is designed in fact to give notice that the entire Himalayan border is negotiable. Until now, we believed that China had more or less accepted the validity of our frontier in the north-east. The earlier Chinese withdrawal from Longju confirmed this. Now, by a single move, this belief has been dissolved — although several experts consider that the tactic is adopted to strengthen Peking's bargaining position should discussions be restarted.

Militarily, the position in NEFA is almost as difficult as in Ladakh. The terrain is different, but the problem of supplying advanced positions remains. By the looks of it, the Chinese are fully informed about our movements. Special correspondents in the Capital continue to 'leak' information. Where they get it from is anybody's guess, but the Defence Ministry remains supremely indifferent to this grave matter. Quite clearly the 'leaks' are taking place at the highest levels.

There is little doubt among knowledgeable people that no effort will be spared to throw the Chinese out of this area. The Prime Minister cannot permit a Ladakh-like infiltration into the NEFA area. And his increasing confidence in the capacity of the armed forces effectively to deal with this new provocation can be seen from the fact that even during absence he permitted the Defence Minister to leave the country to attend the UN General Assembly. Lal Bahadur Shastri, too, has gone on tour.

The despair generally expressed about Chinese strength on the border is the result of a failure to recognise that with every year that passes India's position to supply

and maintain her forward posts improves. Within a couple of years we will have a communication system somewhat comparable to the one which the Chinese have got. Then, it will not be possible to infiltrate any more. True, the Chinese have a vast numerical superiority, but numbers only become important if there is a sustained war on the border. This seems most unlikely — and even pugnacious Peking will be nervous of getting committed in this fashion. For this reason, many a student of Chinese affairs is hopeful that as the months pass, Peking will see reason and agree to a negotiated settlement. But the time has certainly come to cry 'halt' to infiltration,

## **P M Will Face New Crises**

The Prime Minister, on his return from Europe and Africa, will have to face several new crises. The battle over steel retention price continues. The stock-markets seem to have gone on a US-style strike, and there has been an extraordinary slump in share values. Industries Minister Subramaniam is determined to surmount the pressures. Even the argument that the Tariff Commission has been 'tarnished' has little impact on official circles. In fact, a new committee of economists headed by Professor K N Raj and constituted to investigate the marketing of steel, may well produce some startling revelations about prevalent shortages, trading practices and wastage. The concept of the State taking over the marketing of steel is now firmly on the agenda. Increasingly, pressure groups in the Capital are beginning to realise that the best way to get round the publicity loving, pugnacious Subramaniam is to give him a long rope. However, a frontal attack would be unwise so long as he enjoys the full support of the Prime Minister.

T T Krishnamachari's public lecture on the subject of food prices and controls, and S K Patil's ericism of such 'demoralising' talk, have started fresh speculation

about the role of the Economic Coordinator. First, K D Malaviya dashed with T T K, refused to be daunted and is preparing to launch his coal barges down the Ganga. Then V K Krishna Menon fell out with the man whom he had brought into the Cabinet. After jousting with the leftists'. T T K is moving against the "rightists". By the looks of it, he wants to build a public image for himself of a genuine, rational independent devoted to the Prime Minister. But within the Government of India, he is becoming less and less effective. To the extent that he fails to persuade and yet persists, he runs the risk of being dubbed as an irresponsible meddler in other people's affairs.

What the Prime Minister will have to say about these goings-on no one knows for certain. The four-man committee appointed to suggest a possible reorganisation of the Cabinet and the Government has not been meeting. Many crucial policy matters relating to our foreign exchange troubles are pending as senior bureaucrats are reluctant to take decisions which may be negated by a political re-shuffle at the top. This near paralysis of the administration demands urgent treatment. Even the cautious and conservative are talking of the need for a 'shake-up'.

Perhaps some small shake-up has already started in the External Affairs Ministry headed by the Prime Minister. True, at the moment only the external publicity establishment is under close scrutiny, but the recent happenings in Indonesia and the further deterioration in our relations with Nepal compel a wider and more thoroughgoing review of personnel and policy. Although, as a leading power in Asia we have to prepare ourselves to put up with broken embassy windows, we must also develop independent political and economic attitudes in a world which is undergoing rapid and extraordinary transformation. This is not as easy as it sounds, for the opinion-forming sections of our elite have too long been the intellectual children of Moscow, Washington or London. To tackle personnel or policy singly will yield no tangible result. Both need overhauling because one influences the other.

But does the Prime Minister have the energy now to dislodge the strongly-entrenched elements in and reshape the bureaucracy which has never taken the trouble to understand the implications of his political and economic ideas? Are there men within the senior cadre who could be used to push out those who are not abreast of our changing times? Is it possible to speed the promotion of younger and more able cadres without creating disruption

within the administrative ranks? Should specialised sections be developed to promote the ever expanding activity of Government and can these in part comprise temporary recruits whose experience makes them ideal for short-term and specific assignments at home or abroad? These are only some of the obvious questions which recur when the slate of our administration is discussed. And nobody really has an answer.