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EDITORIALS

The First President	25
Conference in Colombo	26
The Turn of the Screw	28

WEEKLY NOTES

FROM THE WASHINGTON END

Fair Deal	33
-----------	----

OFF THE RECORD

A Naive Assumption	35
--------------------	----

OUR DELHI LETTER

Retrenchment & Efficiency	32
---------------------------	----

SPECIAL ARTICLE

Mixed Economy—Whose Prescription? —Ashim Bose	36
Cotton Budget—A Statistical Note	43

FROM SOUTH INDIA

The Agricultural Situation	38
----------------------------	----

MONEY MARKET

Bullion up again	44
------------------	----

STOCK EXCHANGE

Upward Trend Continues	45
------------------------	----

COTTON MARKET

Grow More Cotton	40
------------------	----

CURRENT STATISTICS

47

THE FIRST PRESIDENT

THERE SEEMS TO BE room for doubt among constitutional experts about the exact character of the new constitution. No doubt it abounds in contradictions. India is to be formally declared a Republic on the 26th and yet it will remain within the British Commonwealth and accept the Crown as a symbol. The form of the constitution, moreover, is parliamentary and yet, at least according to some, the President of the Republic has been endowed with powers which rarely fall to the titular head in a parliamentary form of Government. The Ministers of the Central Government will rest upon the confidence of the Parliament. But the President can make a similar, even a wider claim, for his position rests upon a more general consent, as he is elected by the Parliament and the elected members of the legislatures of the States assembled together,

Though the first President of the Republic of India will be elected in a more informal manner—we take it that he will be the unanimous choice of the members of the present Constituent Assembly—and experts may still wrangle whether he would be merely a titular head of the State or whether he will wield real authority, there is no doubt that he is going to be a very, very important person. For good or ill, the first President of the Indian Republic will stand out in history. It may fall to his lot to pilot the country through impending storms to a haven of peace and prosperity. It may equally fall to his lot to stand erect and hold fast to his responsibility and trust, while the new-born State is buffeted about in tempestuous weather of which we have so far only received faint danger signals. That his election has not aroused wider popular controversy is because in the present political set-up, even matters of such great moment are decided behind closed doors in a party meeting of the Congress members of the Constituent Assembly to which outsiders have no admission.

There have been indications of late in plenty that this party machine has not been running smoothly. The creaks and jolts in the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly could not fail to attract widespread attention, awakening expectations or apprehensions. For a time it looked that the sugar muddle and the failing grip of the administration on the major economic problems had caused more than a casual flutter in the dove-cotes of the Congress party. For the time being, the ruffled party members have been smoothed down. But only for the time being. There is an under-current of restlessness as the rumble of approaching events grows louder. The promised interim election in West Bengal has been officially called off. With it the curtain is drawn on the expectations raised by Pandit Nehru's memorable visit to Calcutta. A new turn of events is now on the cards, Patel, it is announced, will visit the problem province, investigate at first-hand the administration

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of law and order, and presumably inaugurate a new policy or rather breathe new life into old ones which have failed so signally to work.

A minor stir in Congress circles has also been hinted at over the issue of the selection of the future President, on which, it appears, the Congress Party itself, not to speak of all the members of the Constituent Assembly, have not been of one mind. The two names that emerged were those of the present Governor-General and the President of the Constituent Assembly,—leaving aside for the moment Dr. Ambedkar, whose name was also canvassed in certain quarters for this high office, partly in recognition of his work in framing the new constitution and partly as a Gandhian gesture for healing and putting a seal on the fissure in the ranks of our society of which we, and the Congress, have been duly, and understandably, both apologetic and ashamed. Of the two contestants to whom the field has been left, the points both for and against are strikingly in apposition. Rajaji possesses *in excelsis* all the qualities that would be needed for such an office of State. His urbanity, grace of manners, high intelligence, tact and diplomatic skill are indeed unrivalled. In addition, he is equally-qualified to hold his own against other heads of State in any country in the world. This is a matter of no mean consideration when we are not airaing at a policy of isolation for the future of this country. Against Rajaji's elasticity, Babu Rajendra Prasad presents the solidity of the old guard. He has never swerved or slackened, tripped or fallen. He is the idol of his home province, which Rajaji is not. Perhaps this alone brings out the contrast between the two contestants in the sharpest perspective; for one who will have to cement the unity of India, it is not enough to be an idol of any one province. Perhaps if Dr. Rajendra Prasad were not such a pillar of strength for Bihar, he would be more warmly accepted by other provinces. If he is chosen for it, his new office will bring him to resolve disputes in which his home province may be involv-

ed with others. That Rajaji does not command that solid following in Madras gives him a unique position in all-India affairs,

But there is one point which, unfortunately, weigh against Rajaji and which may finally decide the issue in favour of the trusted old guard of the Congress to which Rajen Babu can certainly claim to belong. There are sections in the Congress, by no means small or without influence, who have not yet forgotten that Rajaji once left the Congress to plough a lonely furrow nor have they forgiven him for it. That eventually the Congress followed Rajaji's lead and virtually accepted the position that he had taken up earlier in the war, does not seem to weigh yet with this section of the Congress. True, logic is not on their side, but then logic does not always rule human affairs.

It would be with a sad heart that the country will bid farewell to Rajaji when he invites the President of the New Republic to take over charge after the inauguration of the Republic. Per-

haps there is yet time to 'rectify what will indeed be a minor tragedy—that so competent a person and one so admirably suited to fill this high office is to depart at a time when he could have shed lustre on the office that he must yield to another.

There are occasions when party loyalties must be tempered with reason. Is it not true that in departing from the Congress, when reason suggested to him the Tightness of his decision, Rajaji showed no less intellectual courage than any of his colleagues? Perhaps the courage of conviction that he showed to such high degree on that occasion entitle him to greater respect than the country will be showing him by declining to make him the first President of the Indian Republic To confer this honour on Rajendra Prasad will certainly be a gesture to the orthodox Congress, but it will be an empty gesture and mock heroics, since the Government which run in the name of the Congress owe little allegiance to this loyalty and the Party conclaves do little about it.

Conference In Colombo

OVER Colombo hang two dark clouds: Red China and the forthcoming general election in Britain. Red China is creating a problem not only in Colombo but also in Washington and at Lake Success. Faced with recognition of Red China by Burma, India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Britain, President Truman has turned a somersault. He has backed out of his reported decision to adopt a "positive"—and military—policy towards Formosa; the Truman Doctrine will not be applied to Formosa. Though shipments of war materials to the remnants of the Kuomintang Government will continue under EC A arrangements, President Truman will not help Chiang with military and civil advisers.

This decision of President Truman under the pressure of world developments is a major defeat to his Secretary for War, his joint chiefs of staff and to those Republican politicians who share Gene-

Lai MacArthur's view that Formosa is essential to the defence of the United States. Time alone will reveal whether President Truman's final decision not to back up discredited Chiang in Formosa will mark the beginning of the end of bi-partisan foreign policy in the United States. Meanwhile, the possibility of a comic situation arising out of non-recognition of Red China by some Commonwealth members and Foreign Powers cannot be ruled out altogether.

Though the matter is highly technical and relates to procedure, the Nationalist China representative can, by the use of the *veto*, retain China's seat in the Security Council as long as Nationalist China is recognised by some members of the United Nations. Alternatively, there is the possibility that the United States representative who does not recognise Red China, may be sitting in the Security Council