

Capital view

The War Crisis

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A WORLD war could begin any moment. And even if it does not, President Kennedy's illegal naval blockade of Cuba, and his extraordinarily aggressive double-talk to justify it, has precipitated a crisis which will have far-flung repercussions. The most immediate result is that the conflict between India and China will be treated throughout the world as a minor skirmish. We must consider the implications, and then see how these affect the position on our northern frontier.

Emboldened By Our Failures

Against the background of developments over Cuba, there is little point in detailing the causes of the many failures of our China policy, failures which have so emboldened our adversary that a fullscale operation has been launched against our defence system along the northern frontier. True, in the Capital, there is much criticism of the incapacity of the GOI to understand that the Chinese were capable of ordering a simultaneous offensive along the entire front. Others point to this woody-headedness to explain why the armed forces are so ill-equipped at this critical juncture. Yet, the job now is to clear the cobwebs and face a complicated military-political-economic situation which is likely to remain with us for many years.

Students of the border question, who have refused to be carried away by the political and military colouring given to the conflict and have confined themselves to a study of the opposing claims and differing border alignments, are convinced that Peking has ordered its army to occupy and consolidate fully the territories claimed by it in Ladakh. These claims have been stressed with a monotonous repetition. In NEFA, the situation is not so clear. Peking appeared earlier to accept the McMahon Line. The pattern of the offensive in NEFA indicates that here, too, full claims are sought to be established.

The ferocity of the offensive, the elaborate preparation for it,

the total disregard for casualties, emphasise that the enemy is determined to complete the operation within the shortest possible time; winter is already crossing in and then campaigning will be difficult. It is expected in official circles that when the territory claimed is occupied and consolidated, China will then assume peaceful postures and call for "negotiations", this role they have already started to rehearse with the first offer of a 'cease-fire'. They have taken a calculated risk, hoping that the censure of the communist world will be negated when India is compelled to rely heavily on the supply of US military equipment. Obviously, Peking firmly believes that the Soviet Union can now no longer provide military aid to India, that once this becomes clear the 'myth of Nehru's neutrality' will be shattered. The Chinese stand is, indeed, an extraordinary mixture of cynicism, opportunism and adventurism. It is highlighted by the fantastic charge that India launched the attack at dawn on Saturday, October 20.

Thinking aloud, the Prime Minister on several occasions during the past week has implied that we have been manoeuvred into a most unenviable position. In the past, repeatedly, we have urged many nations to settle their problems peacefully, by negotiation. Now, if the Chinese are able to occupy all the territory that they have claimed, grave political repercussions would follow any attempt to open talks with the aggressor. Only two possible alternatives remain. Both have to be pursued. First, immediate measures have to be taken to secure vitally-needed equipment for the armed forces from whatever source is available to us. Second, even as we confront the aggressor, we must continue to seek out every avenue of international mediation. To pursue the one and not the other is to block the chances of a peaceful settlement and to get dragged into a prolonged, exhausting war of attrition,

Russia and Sino-Indian Crisis

Take the question of equipment. There are only three sources of supply — the USSR, the USA and the leading members of the NATO alliance in Europe — and all are now threatened by the Cuban situation. In the past, we were able to draw on all three sources and so insulate our non-aligned status against the kind of pressures that usually follow agreements for the supply of military equipment. In the warlike situation which has been deliberately thrust upon us by the Chinese, it is going to become increasingly difficult for the USSR to come to our aid — unless, of course, Khrushchev decides boldly that Peking has gone too far in its adventurism and that there is every justification for the USSR to aid a leading non-aligned nation even at the cost of further damaging relations between the two main pillars of the communist world. True, the crisis over Yugoslavia and Albania has been a pointer to Khrushchev's capacity to hit out against those who would reduce communist thinking to dead dogma, but to expect similar developments on the Sino-Indian border question is premature, to say the least, and particularly so when peace throughout the world is threatened by Kennedyism in the Caribbean. It is with grave misgivings that the GOI is beginning to open negotiations for military aid from the West, but the Cuba tension will make it impossible for these powers to aid us substantially,

As for international mediation, the present climate appears thoroughly unfavourable. President Nasser's initial move to offer his services did not receive the response it should have because our political leadership could not grasp the role that mediation efforts could play in isolating the Chinese, exposing their false propaganda and building the basis for pressures which have to be mounted to compel Peking to abandon its aggressive tactics. We have nothing to lose through just and impartial mediation. India has not been

the provocateur. We still see the necessity for a peaceful solution. But there is fear that acceptance of mediation at this stage will be interpreted as a sign of surrender, of defeat.

No Bold Lead

The mood which prevails in the Capital today has to be understood in terms of the impact that the present war crisis is likely to have on economic development, particularly the industrial sector which has been much neglected. In other words, the Third Five Year plan, despite the vague talk of the Prime Minister about preserving it, will have to be expanded and strengthened very considerably if it is to serve the needs of the new situation. But where are the funds to come from? In addition, there is danger that prices will get out of hand and spark strikes. This will, in turn, lead to a further and more dangerous polarisation in our political life.

Many of those who listened to the Prime Minister's broadcast to the nation marvelled at his incapacity to *move* beyond a summary of the tragic events. There was no sign of taking the people into confidence, explaining the unscrupulous purpose of the Chinese offensive, accepting responsibility for some of the grave errors made in dealing with the situation or of calling for a dynamic reorganisation of government at central and state level to cope with the new challenges. It was left to a younger man to make the only new, but controversial, contribution to the debate now joined. Chief Minister Patnaik of Orissa called for national front governments which would consolidate the unity of the nation, lessen political and economic tensions and give us the muscle to salvage our plans, rearm our forces and lay the foundations for the isolation and defeat of the aggressors.

Reorganise Government

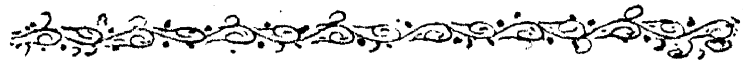
If the Congress Party is unprepared, during the present emergency, to share power with other political parties which subscribe to its programme, then quite clearly it must move with speed to put its own house in order. The demand is rising that members of the party take courage in both hands and insist on an immediate reorganisation of the Union Government,

Attention is being focussed on a few crucial issues. Army ordnance factories must be placed under the control of the Ministry of Industries which will be able to better co-ordinate their functioning and to remove the bottlenecks holding up production even if it involves mobilising the potential of the private sector, until now boycotted by the Defence Ministry. A Ministry of Planning, headed by a younger, decisive leader must be constituted with overriding powers to organise India's industrial break-through. The Foreign Ministry can no longer remain an adjunct of the office of the Prime Minister, for in the coming months, its work is bound to increase many times. Transport and Communications must also be given a radical overhaul. And a Deputy Prime Minister has to be found without delay.

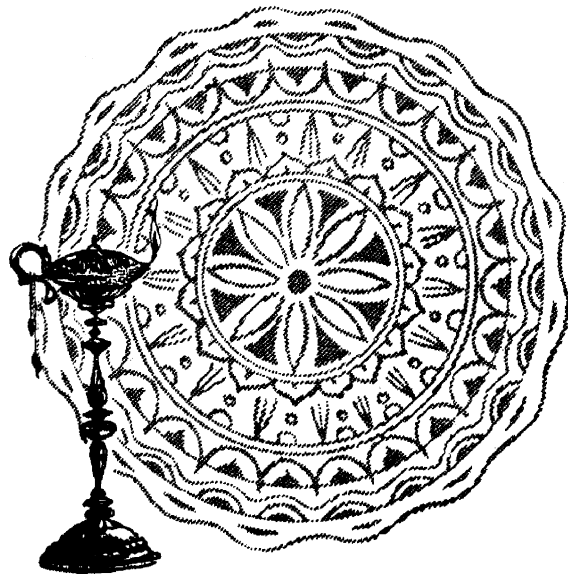
It is urged that, in the absence of a national front government, a

permanent advisory council comprising representatives of the leading political parties be constituted. This will assist in keeping the people informed of the realities of the crisis, cut out loose talk by opportunist-politicians which seeks to place the responsibility for our failures on the leadership of the armed forces, offer the possibility of a more rapid mobilisation of men and resources and discipline those individuals in government and in the services who have allowed their personal prejudices and vendettas to blunt our efforts to prepare for precisely the kind of crisis which now engulfs us,

To stir the powers that be is not easy. Even Parliament has not been called. It will take all the effort of energetic leaders to break the apathy which prevails at almost every level — apathy which can increase tensions, and invite greater disasters.



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