

Capital View

Moment of Criticauty

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AS the trains carrying refugees from the East Pakistan border reach their destinations in India, old communal vendettas are once again placed on the agenda of Hindu revivalist groups which thrive on them. In and around Srinagar, the so-called 'sacred relic' agitations have been given a pro-Pakistani colouring by a regiment of mullahs, maulvis and maulanās. The *men* and groups who have always held India's unity and secularity to ransom are once again on the rampage. The situation could not be worse, for single-minded leadership is lacking in the Capital.

The happenings in East Pakistan are strange, to say the least. The minority communities — Hindus and Christians — totalling some 9 to 10 millions, are sought to be driven out of their homes in a manner somewhat reminiscent of West Pakistan in 1947. The logic is difficult to comprehend. East Pakistan which has managed to preserve some semblance of inter-communal peace and order these past sixteen years, now acts against its interests. If some ten million flee the territory, it will lose its 'majority' in Pakistan as a whole and be correspondingly weakened in terms of its struggle with West Pakistan. But the attack continues. Obviously, it is encouraged and intensified by the Punjabi bureaucrats and armymen who actually rule East Pakistan.

Conspiracy of Silence

The dogged refusal of the foreign press, particularly in the United Kingdom and the USA, to condemn Pakistan for this re-kindling of communal passions has contributed in no small measure to the ferocity of the attack on the Hindu and Christian minority. Foreign correspondents in India, too, have failed in their duty. Even the plight of the Christians has been played down or blacked out. There seems to be an evil 'consensus' behind all these gruesome events.

The feeling in Delhi is that an attempt is being made to compel India to surrender the Kashmir Val-

ley by arranging a series of communal disasters. There is little doubt that militant Hindu and Muslim communalists, aided by *agent provocateurs*, are sought to be used to weaken, confuse, paralyse and make impotent the government in Delhi. The heavy reliance now being placed on military interventions in affected areas is also disconcerting, for it points to the easy break-down of normal police administration. If the plan is to extend the operation and to engulf the Kashmir Valley in disorders, the implications are far-reaching.

Opportunity Missed in Kashmir

When Lai Bahadur Shastri took the bold decision to arrange a 'deedar of the sacred relic and to trust the gentlemen of the 'Action Committee' in Srinagar, particularly that old nationalist Maulana Masoodi, he had the support of all those who wanted to end the worst features of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's rule and to establish a plurality in the political life of the State. It was rightly argued that the discontent engendered by the highly personalised and corrupt rule of *both* Abdullah and Bakshi had to be allowed expression, that political health would not return if this discontent was bottled up.

However, perceptive observers also believed that Lai Bahadur Shastri would strengthen the hands of the Sadiq group to purge the discredited National Conference of those elements hindering a clean up, and permit the arrest of 'prominent' men who had misused their positions. An action of this kind would have met the wishes of the people, denied the political adventurers in the Action Committee the chance to exploit the situation, and given the respected Sadiq group an opportunity to build political support.

This, Delhi was reluctant to do. Only minor offenders were listed for charge-sheeting. Nobody was prepared to offend Bakshi and his powerful supporters in the Congress Party. Moreover, the description of

Sadiq and his colleagues as 'crypto-communists' had had an impact on the dull minds which rule in the name of the Prime Minister.

Secessionists Grow Strong

And, now, we have entered a trap of our own making. Bakshi's repeated visits to the State, his effort to prove that Sadiq is *his* man, and tire provocative activities of the gangster elements of the National Conference, within and outside the Action Committee, have had the effect of placing more and more emphasis on the slogan which links the demand for Abdullah's release with the call for a plebescite. Of course the agitation is confined to Srinagar and its environs, but every day's delay in dealing with the secessionists results in more power passing to Masoodi and Karra who now seem determined to win for themselves an independent State, confident that Abdullah's personal ambitions can be drowned in the so-called 'mass upsurge'.

How can Delhi tackle this situation? A corrective to our bungling has to be worked out at various levels. Speedy steps have to be taken to fully integrate the State with the rest of the country and to make the democratic laws of the Indian Union applicable to it. At the same time, the major political parties of the Indian Union have to start functioning in the State and among the people who are sought to be mobilised on a secessionist platform by the leading elements of the omnibus 'Sacred Relic Action Committee'. The Sadiq government provides the basis for these long delayed decisions.

Withdraw Complaint from U N

Internationally, we have to finally decide that if Kashmir is a part of India, and if the United Nations refuses to take proper notice of our charge of aggression against Pakistan, there is no point in continuing the discussions in the United Nations or entertaining formulas to resolve what is sought to be described as a 'dispute'. In other words, we have to withdraw our complaint

from the UN and make clear that we will not tolerate any interference in our internal matters.

Our fair-weather friends are bound to treat this as an affront, but we should remember that in this context we have the sustained support of a sizeable part of the world, headed by the Soviet Union. Our action would be considered most proper by Moscow. Should Pakistan be encouraged to violate a border demarcated unilaterally by us more or less along the cease-fire line, her leaders would, in such a situation, have to be more than ordinarily wary of a collision with India. China's adventurism would also fail to deter the Soviet Union from intervening actively on the side of an India determined to preserve her sovereignty over Kashmir.

Real Cost of Western Aid

We were very near this kind of stand some ten years ago, at the time of the Bandung Conference. Today, the need for a return to such a position is even stronger. We have drifted because of the extraordinary notion that servility to the West is essential for economic and military aid. This is a false estimate of a international balance of power which is rapidly changing and which can benefit us if we realise that our national interest is best preserved in an understanding with the Soviet Union.

The realists in Moscow appreciate the potential power of India and would build it, for it very definitely serves their own fundamental interests. We have failed to grasp this essential truth, and permitted ideological inhibitions to steer us into alliances which make us more and more vulnerable to the pressures of those who would destroy our unity and secularity. Defence Minister Chavan's recent statement in the Lok Sabha, that Western aid amounts to a paltry Rs 30 crores, and is given on the condition that it will be used only against China under the constant check of various 'military attaches' of the aid powers, is a significant pointer. Not a voice is raised to prevent Pakistani military strength from being used against India!

We cannot afford any longer to continue this flirtation with the West. A crisis of immense magni-

tude is developing. While Delhi fiddles, the secularity of the nation is threatened by political incendiaries of various hue and under organisations with various high-sounding labels. Men caught in the act of murder and arson are released with "warnings", but the contagion very often spreads through these same men. Jawaharlal Nehru alone could have stemmed this communalist tide, but his energy is broken. His place has been taken by pigmies who mutter and murmur on the sidelines, who indulge in peripheral action, but who lack the passion to lead a confused people through these new trials.

When reduced to its essence, the conspiracy which attempts to force an Indian surrender on Kashmir is in fact a move to deny India the sky of Kashmir which gives her the 'military highway' to the Soviet Union. Without Kashmir, India loses this strategic and vital contact and is compelled to throw herself at the mercy of conditional and uncertain 'air umbrellas' and 'aircraft-carriers' offered on the basis of cynical calculations by the West. Thinking elements in the Defence Ministry are aware of these implications, but they are fenced in by a flabby leadership which fondly hopes for an economic take-off sponsored by Western aid. When will this mirage lift?

High Falutin Talk

Meanwhile, belated moves are being organised to rally the secular sentiment in the country — the same slow, incoherent actions which have failed in the past. Home Minister Nanda has 'spoken to the nation' in well-meaning platitudes. Committees for communal harmony are springing up, but without any plan of action. Prominent Muslims are encouraged to declare their faith that Kashmir 'belongs' to India. There is high falutin talk of destroying the communal monster.

But—and this is very much to the point—the arrest of Golwalker, the R S S Chief, immediately raises protests in Parliament and the State Government orders his release. Discredited politicians are permitted deliberately to add to the confusion with their stories of Pakistani agents in every nook and corner. A spy trial is sought to be launched in Calcutta on the charge that the G O I was to be overthrown

with smuggled arms, but no one in Delhi knows anything about it. A fire at the heavy engineering project in Ranchi, following trouble over trade union recognition, is given a communal colouring and there is not a voice raised against these calculated anti-secular provocations even in Nehru's government. One could go on and on in this vein, but there is little point. We do not need to be persuaded that we are sick.

High Power Commission Called For

If Home Minister Nanda is serious about breaking the back of communalism in the country, he should utilise the emergency regulations to establish a high-powered control commission to take action against every practice which militates against the principle of secularity. The composition of such a body would have to be most carefully arranged to ensure speedy implementation of secular policies. This control commission should invite petitions from the public and should be answerable only to the President of the Republic.

Perhaps this is like asking for the impossible, what with the UP Legislature ordering the arrest of High Court judges, but some such move to cut through an apathetic bureaucratic and police system has to be attempted if we are to defeat those elements, foreign and indigenous, which seek to destroy the fabric of our secular State. We cannot wait on events. We have to intervene boldly, for, as they would say in atomic energy terminology, this is the moment of criticality.

Of course, looking around the Delhi scene you would not think that we were unduly disturbed. Summer is fast approaching and the members of the Establishment are planning work trips abroad, participation in political conferences and academic seminars, business tours and such things. The less ambitious will be content to gather at the local hill-stations at State expense. The unreality of it all is captured by the Oxford and Cambridge boys, many of whom control the levers of power. They will be gathering over the week-end in college ties and blazers at the UK High Commission to hear the BBC report the Annual 'Varsity boat race'!