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Darkness at Noon

THIS has been a crowded week. After his illness, Pandit Nehru issued his first public statement which appropriately enough welcomed Premier Khrushchev's appeal for abjuring violence for settling border disputes between States. France has moved farther towards recognising China, paving the way, thereby, to the eventual admission of China into the United Nations. President Sukarno has called off his dispute with Malaysia and with Philippines coming forward, the emergence of Maphilindo, a confederation of the three Malayan States, seems now to be a question of time. The newly independent African States, Tanganyika and Uganda, had their teething troubles with the revolt of army units against their British officers but in both, the situation has been brought under control.

On the domestic front, a long expected development has at last been formally announced. Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri has joined the Cabinet as Minister without Portfolio. Though he has not been given the seniority which entitles him to act as the Deputy Prime Minister, the appointment nevertheless suggests the answer to the two key questions of the day — of the direction of Government policy and the succession to Pandit Nehru. The answer to both may be Shastriji who represents the dead centre and the most likely successor.

Of the humdrum affairs of the day, a feeler has been let out from the Finance Ministry to restrain export incentives for preventing wastage of foreign exchange. If followed up, this would mean curbing the enthusiasm, energy and enterprise of the Minister in charge of export promotion who is surely not incapable of assessing the costs and benefits of the measures that he initiates.

Then there are the usual things — more dithering on steel decontrol, more funds for the top financial corporations, one more study of the overhaul of management of public sector projects, a public statement from the Election Commissioner that ceiling on election expenses serves no purpose, elections in the Nagaland and a gentle, indirect pressure from the American Ambassador — which is all to the good — that India is not doing enough for land reform.

All these, however, shade into insignificance, compared to what has not appeared in the papers, the nightmarish thought that all that Nehru has fought for all his life, communal harmony for which he has laboured, and the secular State that he has sought to build up, may go up in flames even when Nehru is still on the scene. Not that there is any development which conjures up such fears afresh. On the contrary, the manner in which the Government has handled the situation in Calcutta merits the highest praise. The news of Khulna and Jessore reached the Subjects Committee of the Congress when it was deliberating at Bhubaneswar. Morarji expressed the hope that Pakistan would take the necessary steps to curb these incidents lest they should lead to "more serious consequences." and complained that the manner in which some people in Pakistan were trying to exploit the Hazratbal incident in Kashmir created "difficulties" for India. What these difficulties were was unfolded in the next few days. They came sooner

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