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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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than suspected. They were met with an iron hand. But what of the trailing consequences? Where is there an end to it? President Ayub Khan has rejected the suggestion from the Indian President of issuing a joint appeal for communal peace. The joint tour of the affected areas by the representatives of India and Pakistan provided for in the Liaquat Ali Pact could never be even mooted. Or the contrary, to keep the Kashmir issue alive, Pakistan has moved the Security Council.

There are still more than 9 million non-Muslims in East Pakistan, according to Pakistani Census of 1961. The number of Muslims in India is nearly 50 million. From whichever end dislodgment starts, the consequences would be the same and these are too horrible to contemplate. It has been a fortnight of the deepest gloom relieved only by the accounts coming from

both sides of the border of the assertion, even at the risk of life, by individuals and groups of human dignity, decency and good neighbourliness. In the Calcutta Letter appearing in this issue would be seen the stirrings of it in the midst of much else which is deeply disturbing. East Pakistan press and opposition political groups have probably been even more astir. The Karachi correspondent of the *Times of India* News Service reports that the Bengali Muslims are wanting to break with communalism which permeates politics in West Pakistan and has hailed it as "probably a new trend in East Pakistan". The tragedy of inaction on the part of the Government, however, is the inevitability of wrong action on the part of the wrong people. And action cannot be limited to that of suppressing and putting down communal outbreaks within the country's own borders.

one of the generating forces for what America claims to dread : the Fidel Castros of Venezuela, Brazil and elsewhere.

The current troubles in Panama are merely the periodic manifestation of a long and deep-seated hostility towards the United States, a situation inevitable given the economic and military relationship. Theodore Roosevelt, refused rights over the Canal by Colombia, fostered secession by the minute unit of Panama, and immediately forced on the new nation a treaty guaranteeing in perpetuity the United States right to administer directly some 650 square miles of territory (a strip on both sides of the Canal, on average 10 miles wide and forty miles long). In return, Washington offered 10 million dollars down-payment and a quarter of a million dollars annual rent. Actual administration led to extreme segregation between the American 'Zonians' and the Panamanians. The second Roosevelt ended the formal protectorate status of Panama, and Eisenhower agreed to increase the rent to 1.9 million dollars and made some attempt to acknowledge titular Panama sovereignty by ordering both American and Panama flags to be flown simultaneously in the Zone. In addition, various other *ad hoc* forms of aid have been offered—in 1962, for example, Panama received some 13.2 million dollars aid, and currently the Panama Minister of Industry is in Washington to ask for a three million dollar loan.

All this helps to tot up the bribe for silence fairly high, but simultaneously exacerbates nationalist feelings—particularly when the *country* has in the past been governed by corrupt oligarchies only too easier to find a foreign scapegoat for domestic failings. With a *per capita* income of roughly 390 dollars, virtually a one crop economy (some 50 per cent of foreign exchange earnings are derived from the sale of bananas), and sharp class differentiation, the contrast between the Zone and Panama could hardly be more extreme. Add to it the foolish *colon* chauvinism of some Zonians and the wonder is that there has not been more consistent trouble along the Zone borders. The overwhelming disproportion in relative forces has kept the scene quiet, if sullen.

Despite the fact then that there

Alliance for Progress?

THE shadow of Fidel Castro looms particularly large over the current crisis in Panama, not because Castroites or even ordinary Communists played an important role in the riots (despite Dean Rusk's attempts to revive this faded explanation of all America's troubles), but because American policy towards Panama is primarily geared to the war on Communism. The present American position in Panama allows it to keep a large body of troops there, permanently available for use throughout Latin America to repress movements Washington considers to be inimical to its interests. In fact, the Canal is *now* of declining strategic importance—the larger ships of the American Navy cannot use it, and the United States consequently has to maintain two fleets both on the East and West coasts; in addition, the American economy does not depend on imports in the way, say, that Britain does, and in any case can receive her imports without recourse to the Canal if necessary. Financially, there is no reason to suppose that the roughly 85 million dollars revenue from the Canal is returned to the United States (most of it is re-invested in the Canal or serves to maintain the extraordinarily high Standard of living of 15,000 civi-

lians and the 22,000 troops who inhabit the Canal Zone), or that, even if it were, this profit would outweigh the cost of maintaining the military bases ostensibly designed to protect the Canal.

Yet the strategic case is even weaker than this. Even the Suez Canal was shown to be not a crucial factor in the British economy, nor did immediate chaos break out in the Middle East when British troops were withdrawn from Sue2. Last year's air transhipment of American troops to Europe clearly demonstrated the speed with which forces could be mobilised over great distances—it might even be cheaper financially to keep the American army at home. It would certainly be cheaper in political terms since the whole mirage of idealistic friendship between the United States and her southern neighbours suddenly rolls away when faced with events like those that have occurred in Panama. The economic relationship with America has been a factor in the instability of Governments in the southern continent and, as a consequence, in the failure of many of those countries to develop at a speed within their ordinary ability. Necessarily, the long shadow of the United States stimulates virulent nationalisms which in turn provide