Bombay's Future

The decision of the Congress Working Committee on the future of Bombay City, though inevitable in the circumstances, has, far from giving any special cause for satisfaction in any quarter, had a somewhat chilling effect on all the parties concerned. Though for the cosmopolitan-minded people of the City such, there can be some immediate negative solace in the fact that the metropolis, the scene of their endeavours and a perennial source of inspiration and pride, does not go to any particular unilingual territory for the time being, the possibility of the present decision being reversed five years hence, is a disturbing factor. That can only mean that the battle for Bombay, as it has come to be picturesquely described in certain quarters, will continue during the five-year period, possibly with increasing intensity and bitterness, imparting a sense of uncertainty and unreality to all the doings of the City. And that is not to speak of the very real danger of the coming elections in the City being fought on the question of Bombay's future and a bloc being formed in the would-be legislature of Bombay City to carry on the campaign in the legislative arena through every means known 10 parliamentary obstruction. In fact, the crucial battle for Bombay will be fought, not five years hence, but in the very next elections, and the pattern of political alignment that emerges then will show whether the experiment of a separate City State can work or not.

The policy of leaving an issue open has little to commend it—except perhaps political expediency. The Working Committee has been wise in deciding to do away with the five-year period of uncertainty visualised by the States Reorganisation Commission for Telengana. That it has not been able to apply the same consideration to Bombay is a matter for regret. With no possibility of the differences among the various claimants to Bombay City being reconciled, the Working Committee was fully justified in recommending that the City be formed into a separate State. Having been forced to that conclusion, the Committee could well have made its decision final—in the sense of its not being open to reconsideration at all. If a showdown was unavoidable, the present was the best time to face it along with the innumerable other minor crises brewing in other parts of the country over the linguistic question. The bad precedent set in the case of Bombay is only too likely to encourage hopes of reconsideration and revision in other quarters too. That way, the problem of linguistic reorganisation will never come to be settled. And as long as it continues to be a live issue, the nation's attention and energy will be diverted from more important national tasks and frittered away on futile rivalries and bickerings.

Only Solution

SHRI S K PATIL, who, more than others, has tried to emphasise the special status of Bombay in the country and secure recognition for it too, is himself not very happy about the decision of the Working Committee. But he has sought to hug the hope that an earnest effort would be made to give the Working Committee's solution a fair trial and that meanwhile all controversy and agitation over the future of the City would be set aside. At least, that is the essence of his appeal to the people of Bombay; and though there are large sections who are one with Shri Patil in seeking enthusiastic response to his appeal and fulfilment for his hope, the fact cannot be overlooked that in such matters a determined, fanatically-inclined group, though not numerically overwhelming, could nevertheless cause considerable embarrassment and even hindrance to the smooth working of the administration. Indeed, in retrospect, it seems as though the proposal made by the States Reorganisation Commission for a bilingual State with Bombay as the capital was not only fair and practicable, but also highly conducive to the progress and prosperity of this part of the country. It is doubtful, at this stage, whether there can be any return to that proposal except on a basis which cannot be fair to all the parties concerned. And so the only way out is the Wonting Committee's recommendation to make Bombay City a separate State which, if accepted in grace and good faith and technicians by Czechoslovakia to Egypt has created the foreign disturbance between Israel and Egypt. This is not to deny that the race for armaments in West Asia is a deplorable development.

Both the British Prime Minister and the President of the United States have stressed the sinister implications of an "arms race" in West Asia. Even if Sir Anthony Eden's proposal, Britain is prepared to act as mediator to settle the dispute between Israel and Arab States under certain conditions, Colonel Nasser, Egypt's Prime Minister, is no less adamant in his threat that Syria and Egypt, "now united, would drive out and free the Islamic world of Zionism".

The border tension mounts, both Israel and Egypt seem determined to have a showdown. Israel has been too hasty in rejecting Sir Anthony Eden's proposal. Britain is prepared to act as mediator to settle the dispute between Israel and Arab States under certain conditions. Colonel Nasser, Egypt's Prime Minister, is no less adamant in his threat that Syria and Egypt, "now united, would drive out and free the Islamic world of Zionism".