

Capital View**'Leaks' and 'Scoops'**

Romesh Thapar

IT has been an angry, gossipy week. Not surprisingly, Krishna Menon sparked it. Upset by the Anglo-US moves to frustrate his projected negotiations for the purchase of Soviet MICs, the Defence Minister took some sharp jabs at the correspondents of the national press who tried to get an authoritative statement on the subject. He more or less dismissed them as a bunch of irresponsible pen-pushers whose activities often threatened national security through 'leaks' and 'scoops.' Now, the press is indignant. So is the Defence Minister.

If you think this is just another one of those passing dust storms which afflict us these days, then you are going to be sadly mistaken. Krishna Menon reflects the explosive frustration which grips official Delhi these days. The Defence Ministry, determined to get supersonic jet fighters to match the planes that Pakistan has received from the USA and believing that the West would not oblige, decided to put out feelers to Moscow. The response was immediate.

Then somebody, somewhere, leaked' the news. The 'leak' happened to coincide with the cut in dollar aid voted in the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. The next step: Krishna Menon's detractors advanced the theory that he had leaked' the story to embarrass President Kennedy who, under the circumstances, will find it difficult to reverse the decision.

Nothing IN Secret

Whenever Delhi is at its agriest, gossip is not far behind. Even as Krishna Menon's detractors went to work, a report gained currency that the Air Chief, unhappy about the plan to purchase Soviet MIGs, had done the 'leaking'. Soon after, it was suggested that perhaps the quiet unobtrusive British had double-crossed the G O I. Certainly, they are fully informed about what goes on and their demarches on the deal are indicative of this. At the moment, the 'leak-locaters' are convincing themselves that probably, and

for good reason, the Russians lifted the veil of secrecy.

The truth of the matter is that nothing is secret in Delhi. Every correspondent has his mentor in the ministerial hierarchy. This is how 'scoops' are engineered! sometimes against colleagues in the Cabinet. The ever-watchful diplomatic establishments do their share of extracting information and 'planting' it in the press at the appropriate moment. In such a climate, it is not surprising that some senior officers of the defence services should also be known to have their contacts with the press.

These are accepted practices in the capital, but officialdom has yet to realise that when so many influential sources of news are being tapped every day it is impossible to locate specific leaks'.

MIG Story

The MIC story, however, has several interesting facets. Apparently, only a handful knew that such negotiations were about to begin. Even senior officials at the External Affairs Ministry, who at first denied the story when approached by the US and British representatives, had to confirm the report later.

Past experience had also supposedly persuaded us that any Indian request for important military equipment would be rejected by the West or would be offered on unfavourable terms — an impression which we are now told is not correct. Moreover, the U S A apparently supplied Pakistan with only 12 supersonic interceptors and does not intend increasing the number now that our production efforts in Bangalore have not yielded the results expected.

And, to top it off, all the fuss is over the purchase of outdated planes which were used in the Korean war in 1950.

Leak or no leak, deal or no deal, the angry controversy has served to highlight one central fact. Non-aligned India, facing a threat from both Pakistan and China, will have to adopt a most flexible policy in

regard to the purchase of military equipment which she is at the moment incapable of producing. A heavy reliance on Soviet supplies will put a dangerous weapon in the hands of the anti-Indian lobby in the U S A. To turn westwards' would upset the USSR and give a fresh handle to Chinese propaganda.

Arms for the Non-Aligned

The Prime Minister, as everyone knows in the capital, has shelved the decision until his return from a holiday in Kashmir. He is likely to urge purchases from both blocs at the most favourable terms. This is not a satisfactory solution, for there is danger that the effectiveness of our armed forces will be blunted by heterogeneous arms purchases from anywhere and everywhere.

Moreover, to the extent that neighbouring Pakistan is linked to US global strategy and bound by so-called defence pacts, Krishna Menon is fully justified in his belief that the U S S R is more likely to meet our needs; Moscow's differences with Peking underline this. Yet he has also to face the uncomfortable truth that India's economic development is dependent on the aid from those who are Pakistan's military allies.

In a devious sort of way, world trends and alignments are forcing us to tackle that most neglected of all issues — whether our armed forces are organised to reflect and sustain our non-alignment.

The starting point of any such reassessment must be a willingness to recognise the fact that any major conflict on our soil, whether precipitated by Pakistan or China, willy-nilly would involve the nations of the world. If this is accepted, then the role of our armed forces is primarily to cushion the initial shock until such time as help arrives. This immediately places a ceiling on our defence needs and disciplines those politicians and soldiers who tend to imagine that we should be strong enough to take on both Pakistan and China and who scoff at the idea of non-alignment.

The Prime Minister has been most consistent in rebutting the demand for an expansion of our armed forces. He sees quite clearly that that process is new-ending, self-developing, and would inevitably divert too large a portion of our limited resources from economic development. But he has as yet to educate his colleagues and followers on these fundamentals.

Parliament Must Assess

A thorough reassessment of the validity in today's conditions of the organisation of our armed forces would help clear the fog which envelops the subject. But who will carry it out? The officer corps cannot be expected to show a ready inclination.

Once again, we revert to the responsibilities of members of Parliament. The Prime Minister is most eloquent on how this country is wedded to non-alignment, but we know that this is one marriage

which could be dissolved by a few well-timed moves. Unless members of Parliament proceed beyond the stage of scoring points against the Defence Minister and unravel the guts of the problems, they will merely assist in the postponement of a decision. And this is the time to do it—or else we will be victimised by those who have plenty of surplus, out-dated military equipment to offer in return for our tacit support to their cold-warring. The Defence Minister himself would do well to take the initiative in persuading a special Parliamentary committee to undertake a reassessment of our actual defence needs.

For some time now, responsible observers in the capital have been taking note of the increasing confusion among MPs, editors, special correspondents and other opinion-makers on matters connected with defence. A special parliamentary committee might take time to pronounce its opinion, but in the meantime a system of confidential brief-

ing must be organised. Fully acquainted with the facts, those who comment will be more accurate and pertinent, and will also be taken more seriously in official quarters. At the moment this business is a hit-and-miss game, exploited by those who have some other motive in mind.

Of course, both the political boss and his trusted bureaucrat are remarkably reluctant to accept this principle of efficient and democratic functioning. The myth is publicised that the confidence imposed will not be respected, that secrets will be out. It is difficult to be patient with such puerile reasoning. If nations like the U S A and U K with many world-wide ramifications, can make confidential briefing an essential part of governmental public relations, then surely the G O I, already surrounded by a host of 'fixers' 'five percenters', 'informers' and 'confidence-men', has little to lose.

Let a beginning be made—even a hesitant beginning.

From the London End

Economists' Second Look at ECM

THE Common Market, Tories' trump card for the General Election, is turning out to be a Joker. Now that the period of exchange of information is over and the process of hard bargaining has begun the British Government is beginning to realise that the fond hopes it cherished that the 'Six' would agree to a watering down of the basic principles of the Rome Treaty to accommodate Britain are unlikely to be realised. The political implications of the Common Market which are fundamental to the issue, are now beginning to stand out, and the attitude of France, and now of Western Germany, makes the situation really difficult. The extent of the rift between Britain and the 'Six' is now beginning to come out in the open. The impression is gaining ground that both De Gaulle and Adenauer now believe that it would be better if Britain did not come into the Common Market after all. The terms they are offering to Britain are, therefore, such that it will be difficult for Britain to accept them if she is to

honour her commitments to the Commonwealth, the EFTA and her own agricultural interests.

On the fundamental problem of Commonwealth preference, the British are unlikely to get more than the very minimum concessions, and in view of the fact that the Americans too have always been opposed to the whole idea of Commonwealth preference, the British can count on little aid from the US.

While the British have always known that General De Gaulle would present one of the most difficult obstacles, the recent Paris-Bonn accord over the terms of British entry has certainly come as an unpleasant surprise. Recently Dr Adenauer told a group of German politicians that he did not want to have Britain in the Common Market as a full member and was prepared to consider Britain only as an associate member. This was later denied, though not by Adenauer himself, but it certainly represents a hardening of the attitude of certain sections in Germany which will make the

British task even more difficult. Dr Adenauer's foreign policy is now tending towards a Franco-German alliance against the Anglo-Saxon influence in Europe. This is reflected in a recent statement: "I stand absolutely by Franco-German understanding. I shall also be talking with De Gaulle about the European Economic Community; up till now we have not done that. Regarding Britain's entry, I think that our standpoints are the same; Britain must sign the Treaty of Rome. In Europe today there are no great powers any more."

French View of Europe

Even more serious perhaps is the attitude of the French. At his Press Conference last week, General De Gaulle made it quite clear that he was against the idea of any supra-national authority in Europe. In his view the individual powers must remain sovereign in Europe. It is ironical that the British idea of political integration in Europe is much nearer to the "L'Europe des Patrick attributed