

Capital View

New Confidence?

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IT is at last possible to talk of something other than Abdullah, although he has promised to visit Pakistan 'to build his base there' and to hold further talks with Prime Minister Nehru and his colleagues; and let us hope that his pontification about India's hostile attitudes to Pakistan, alleged to be inspired by V K Krishna Menon, are motivated by the need to create the proper atmosphere for his reception in Rawalpindi.

Delhi seems self-satisfied. Even Lal Bahadur has thought it fit publicly to associate himself with the Kashmir confabulations, something which various Congress stalwarts have been reluctant to do for fear that the odium of a failure would descend upon them and ruin their 'political prospects'. But, surprisingly enough, there has been little progress in changing the mind of Abdullah. Our elders seem to be susceptible to surface signs. An unforgivable weakness.

Eye-Opener to the US

However, there is little point in dwelling: on the speculation about success or failure at Teen Murti Marg. We must wait and see. Perhaps, the present vagueness suits the GOT — particularly when there arc signs that US opinion is no longer hostile to India and there is a good chance of getting a large amount of military hardware on generous terms. Defence Minister Chavan, together with a rather elaborate delegation, will soon be in the USA and nothing is to be done to disturb these new trends.

Of course, the more hard-headed claim that the Soviet decision to build the Bokaro steel plant has helped to open the eyes of the US policy-makers on the danger of leaving India 'friendless'. Rumours are strong that the Soviet initiative on Bokaro is a carefully considered first step in a programme of intensive aid in fundamental nation-building projects, particularly steel, heavy engineering and chemicals. It certainly seems logical that Moscow, confronted by an adventurist communist group in Peking, should make special efforts to safe-

guard her friendship with India. It seems logical, too, that the USA should revise her notions about developments in the sub-continent. Maybe events are conspiring in our favour.

Hope and Fear

Our newspaper correspondents in Washington certainly seem to think so as they begin the preparatory coverage of Chavan's mission to get military assistance. True, gullible as ever, they continue to publicise the canards that our Army staff is incapable of working out our defence needs, that the LSA is genuinely convinced that our five-year defence plan is too big and too ambitious, that we do not possess the managerial and technical personnel to man the new ordnance factories, and that we should not be demoralised by the small financial amounts offered as assistance because prices of military equipment will be pegged at low levels. But through the easy patter, very much alike in every newspaper, comes the impression that the desire to meet India's needs is visible at long last.

In Defence Ministry circles, they prefer to keep their fingers crossed. Too many times in the past have hopes been raised only to be disappointed. Even now, every statement, official or unofficial, is dressed up in a number of qualifying phrases. Indeed, it is pointed out that if Chavan's mission fails, an Indo-Soviet move to re-equip the Indian armed forces will become inevitable. Already there have been discussions on the possibility of the Soviet Union supplying ground-to-air missiles for the defence of strategic centres and air-to-air missiles to combat intruding planes. The MIG factories are also under way on much easier terms. All this points to a feeling of confidence.

Something of this new confidence is captured in a rather 'massive paper' prepared by the Perspective Planning Division of the Planning Commission. During the past fortnight, this document has been under discussion — and now, with the Prime Minister presiding, its targets have been accepted. A 7-7.5 per cent annual growth rate has been endorsed.

This will involve a programme of investment of some Rs 22,000 crores during the Fourth Plan period (1966-71) and of Rs 44,000 crores during the Fifth. At the end of the Fifth Plan, that is in 1975, a minimum per capita consumption level of Rs 20 per month will be ensured for a population which will by then probably stand at 625 millions.

Going through the pages of this perspective plan paper — which, incidentally, is to replace all other projections forthwith — one cannot but be impressed by the thorough job done. But, in the background, is the fear that organisationally, whether in the field of politics or technology, we are lagging behind. And it is no idle fear.

Organisational Failure

Our performance during these last few years represents a failure of organisation, of the capacity to implement the plans we sketch. We can no longer afford to ignore this aspect. It leads to production bottlenecks, bureaucratic hamstringing, unbalanced development, incredible wastages, unfulfilled aspirations, widespread demoralisation, and brings planning itself into disrepute. In other words, we must devise a rigorous implementation programme.

Speaking to those who know about these things is a revealing experience. The argumentation runs at several levels. The unanimous acceptance of planned targets is meaningless when a large number of those in support are cynical and command the levers with which to obstruct implementation. Asoka Mehta is firmly convinced that the impressive perspectives sketched are the absolute minimum we must achieve to sustain economic stability, but will he be able to cut a path through the jungle of checks and counter-checks created by an egocentric Finance Ministry and committees comprised of senior bureaucrats which refuse to speed decisions.

Then again the easy surrender of Cabinet Ministers to INTUC and Congress Party blackmail at State level reduces the efficiency of public sector projects. New, dynamic, ma-

nagerial cadre, with experience of industry, does not under the circumstances come forward and there is a disastrous resort to unsuited retired personnel who happen to possess the right connections.

What Do the Targets Mean?

At another level, there is a reluctance to accept the fact that the setting of targets is only part of the battle for development. These targets have to be broken down into specific tasks. Resources have to be found and moved within strict time schedules. A hold-up at one point, derails development at a hundred different places. In the same context, managers tend to build only their own specific project, refusing to aid others with equipment that is not in use, with the result that hundreds of crores of rupees worth of machinery of every description lies around unutilised in the country even as efforts are made to import more of it for new projects. Anyone in the public sector can confirm that this statement is no exaggeration.

Translated into practical terms what does all this mean?

If we are to produce some 18-19 million tons of steel by the end of the Fourth Plan there must be a parallel development at the heavy engineering end to make effective use of this steel. If fertiliser production is to see a sharp rise, we must realise that for every rupee invested in this sector another at least will have to be expended to reach the fertiliser to the farmer and to help him make full use of it. If reliance on foreign assistance is to end in the Fifth Plan, meticulous detailed planning of the projected 18 per cent growth rate in the indigenous capital goods and intermediate industries will have to be begun forthwith, as also the business of building exports. If investment in the public sector { a dominant sector by 1975 is to yield a ten per cent return — and it must, considering the rather restricted taxation base in the country — we will have to carry through a major revolution in managerial methods and practices.

In fact, it is possible in this fashion to go on listing what has to be done and what has not been done. Some of the remedies are simple. Others, more complicated. But the time has come to jettison the dead practices of the past.

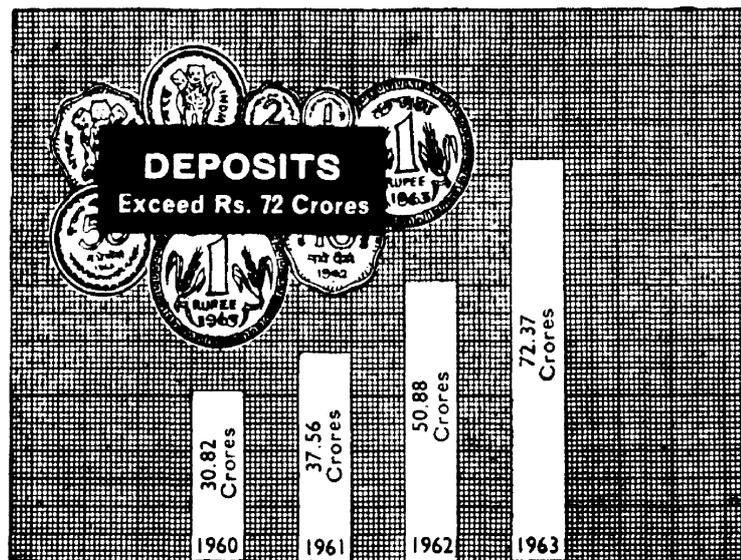
An Assignment for Asoka Mehta
The Targets set by the Planning Commission might well act as a catalyst, but only if Asoka Mehta, as Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, is given the powers to review the workings of each ministry and to place the findings of the Commission before Parliament. Only a cold, ruthless reviewing, which does not spare the reputations of the highest in the land, can bring us face to face with the reality.

Nothing less will satisfy a sorely disappointed people who see incompetence, lethargy, waste and apathy increasing in every department of the Government and administration. We cannot afford these 'luxuries' when prices of essentials are rocketing, when corruption is on the increase. when laws are more honoured in their

breach than in their observance. A tolerant people cannot remain tolerant for ever.

Will the Prime Minister, who has the vision to place challenging tasks before the nation, also realise that implementation has to be pursued with a vigour which we have as yet not shown? There is some kind of vague recognition of this problem, but the ruling party still imagines that the answer will fall from the heavens. It is here that some solid thinking has to be done. Then, and only then, will the new confidence be well-founded.

Tailpiece: Many residential and commercial sectors of the Capital have been short of water, short of electricity — and now the city as a Whole is short of milk and short of sugar!



WHO SAID "Figures don't Speak"?

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