

Capital View

Behind the Abdullah Headlines

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Wednesday, Morning

Even as I prepare to airmail this piece to Bombay, the telephone rings to give the news that Jawaharlal has had a relapse, that his condition is causing grave anxiety. It is as if India lies stricken.

OBVIOUSLY, we are fast losing " the capacity to judge political events—at least this is the impression created by the awfully amateurish reporting of Abdullah's visit to Pakistan. Our special correspondents, including a sprinkling of editors, are vying with one another to project the idea that the Sheikh is about to resolve Indo-Pakistan differences and to open the door to an era of lasting goodwill and understanding. This is particularly so since the announcement of the Nehru-Ayub meeting sometime in June. Like proverbial village yokels, our reporters seem to have been overwhelmed by the *tamasha* of receptions and meetings, and the string of platitudes popularised officially in Rawalpindi and elsewhere.

Abdullah is no gullible. Nowhere in his speeches is there any evidence that he hopes to obtain speedy or easy results. Indeed, even a superficial study of his political behaviour convinces that he is embarked on a most ramified plan to win an independent State by skilfully exploiting the hates and prejudices, conscious and unconscious, and the power political tangles which provide the background to Indo-Pakistan relations. He has decided to be patient, long-suffering, for he believes firmly that ultimately only Abdullah will count in Kashmir.

Sheikh's Position in the Valley

Despite the daily headlines with which we are sought to be fed, the facts about the Abdullah story are very different. Long years of corrupt government, the reluctance of the Congress Party to intervene in a deteriorating situation, the phoney conspiracy trial organised by men who should themselves have been in jail, and the fusion of political dissatisfaction with religious fervour at the time of the Hazratbal incident, gave the pro-Pakistan elements in the Valley the basis for presenting India as a kind of callous, colonial power holding Kashmir with subsidised rice and such things.

With the release of Abdullah, the situation stabilised somewhat. The Sheikh found himself holding what amounted to a politically centrist position in the Valley. The demand for an autonomous or independent status was natural from a man whose ambitions were unlimited and who realised that there was unlikely to be any secure political future for him in either Pakistan or India. This demand also gave Abdullah the possibility of manoeuvre between Delhi and Rawalpindi, a very important factor considering the hardened and embittered attitudes in both countries.

Both Must Agree

Arriving in Delhi, Abdullah stressed the obvious: that any lasting solution of the Kashmir question must have the agreement of both India and Pakistan. It sounded eminently reasonable. And, what's more, this apparently statesmanlike posture also made it possible for Abdullah to rally a variety of men and women in India who nurse the fond belief that only the Kashmir 'irritant' stands in the way of close Indo-Pak relations, in the way of subcontinental solidarity.

The business of building this 'base', as Abdullah calls it, was not lost sight of during the prolonged talks with Prime Minister Nehru in Delhi. And the same objective was sought to be achieved by the visit to Pakistan and the confabulations with President Ayub. With these two 'bases', Abdullah hopes to lobby for his independent State — the establishment of which, he underlines, must not create a sense of loss in either India or Pakistan.

All this gives the puerile the impression that a new Gandhian is in action to mend our ways, to show us the path to sub-continental fraternity and goodwill. The play-acting is of a high order. Quarters close to the Prime Minister speak of the remarkable change which has occurred in Abdullah's thinking. Sadiq and his colleagues in Kashmir also believe that the Sheikh is being disciplined

by the realities of the situation, and that the return to normality will be speeded when Pakistan bares its teeth.

As I have said before, Abdullah knows exactly what he wants — and he is almost as certain about the tactics necessary for success. For example, he has been more than responsive to Prime Minister Nehru's comments about the dangerous communal repercussions which would result from any type of plebiscite in Kashmir, the impossibility of accepting Pakistani aggression, the implications of the present Rawalpindi-Peking flirtations and the likelihood of persistent big power intrigues in a very dependent 'independent' Kashmir. Carefully, the Sheikh has skirted detailed discussions. His anxiety has been to 'soften up' the two neighbours with whom he has to deal.

India Too Willing

India, as always, is only too willing to soften up. The Prime Minister reflects a deep desire in the country to normalise relations with Pakistan in the interests of our secular growth. Abdullah has naturally seized upon this desire. In the course of his Delhi talks, it is suggested that he came closest to being specific when he offered to persuade Pakistan partially to vacate her aggression in Kashmir on the condition that India would respond by promising to hold some kind of referendum to decide Kashmir's precise status vis-a-vis her 'two neighbours'.

From what one can gather, there has been some considerable talking around this proposition. The UN is not to be involved; indeed, it is suggested that the matter be withdrawn through mutual agreement. To make the proposal palatable to Rawalpindi, the Pakistani withdrawal is not to take place from Poonch which has come to be regarded as essential to Pakistan. Similarly the future of the Gilgit area (after all, it was a separate Agency) and Baltistan is left vague for the time being. The Pakistan withdrawal is to be effected only from the Valley area.

Will President Ayub oblige the Sheikh? He may well do so, that is if only the Valley area is involved. After all, the revanchists in Rawalpindi are convinced that an election campaign master-minded by Abdullah will lead to an 'independent' Kashmir, and that this independence can be subverted later when India will have lost the appetite for another tedious confrontation. Moreover, the most aggressive of the Pakistanis know that 'their men', Khursheed and Abbas, are pathetic figures and unlikely ever to inspire the Kashmiris against a hostile Abdullah. These are shrewd calculations, no doubt, and the military junta knows that it can enforce its decisions.

Withdrawal Without UN

If Abdullah wins this kind of 'base' in Pakistan, then he will be ready to tighten the screws on Delhi, on his old comrade, Jawaharlal Nehru. He will be immeasurably strengthened, for even the pro-Pakistan elements in the Valley will have been deflated by Rawalpindi's acquiescence in Abdullah's plans. An Indian refusal to cooperate at this juncture, the Sheikh feels, can only make him the undisputed leader of the Valley. He, in fact, believes he has nothing to lose.

In other words, a host of considerations now condition thinking on Kashmir and will weigh heavily during the Nehru-Ayub meeting. Theories about condominiums and such arrangements are crude in comparison. Of course, a failure to carry conviction on a non-UN inspired withdrawal and referendum in Kashmir could throw us back to the 'compromises' which have been popularised by the pontificators and conciliators whose only purpose seems to be to turn this sub-continent into an anti-communist bastion. This limited and sorry objective explains the mixed but influential patronage arranged for these compromises which are sought to be foisted upon an ageing Nehru anxious to settle outstanding problems.

Of considerable interest in this connection is the position taken by Sadiq and those who think like him in Kashmir. They refuse to accept the easy conclusions of journalists that Abdullah is able to march the 'utilitarian' or 'pragmatist' Kashmiris whichever way he desires. It is maintained that the response to Abdullah's calls is already on the decline, that: the two million people of the Valley are realising the disastrous implications of the slogans being raised by some of their leaders, slogans which inevitably will divide the

Kashmiris and reduce them to mutual-hostile communal pockets.

Sadiq continues to emphasise the need politically to confront those who would break Kashmir's ties with India. Step by step, the shattered organisation of the National Conference is being rebuilt. This vital work, however, is obstructed and hamstrung by the extraordinary opportunism of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed who seems to wish for chaos merely to survive. And, to think of it, his brother, a partner in this intrigue against Sadiq, has been elected to high position in the organi-

From the London End

Balance of Payments Blues

THE April trade figures have acted as a cold douche to dampen the temporary sunshine in which the Tories were basking as a result of their recent by-election victories. This is the second time this year when the trade figures have given the lie to the rosy picture of Britain's economy painted by the Conservatives. The January trade figures, revealing a gap of £120 million, came almost immediately after Sir Alec Douglas Home had told television viewers that the economy "has seldom been stronger". The April figures, revealing a gap of £107 million, come shortly after Maudling's statement that the economy was reacting favourably to his Budget measures, and seem to bear out the gloomy prognostications made by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research to which reference was made in these columns last week.

While it was easy to dismiss the January figures as a mere statistical freak, it is taxing the bounds of credibility to suggest that the April figures are a similar freak. It is a little difficult to believe that coincidences of this nature can occur within a period of only four months. What appears to be more likely is that the trend of UK exports is less favourable than most official and unofficial commentators have been assuming.

The facts of the situation are as follows. In April, seasonally adjusted imports valued at £457 million showed little change over the previous month, but exports fell by £36 million to £337 million. Taking into account re-exports valued at £13 million, there was a trade gap of £107 million and a

sation of the Congress Party!

This is only a tiny fragment of the story behind the Abdullah headlines. Preparations will soon begin for the Nehru-Ayub meeting, which we hope will range over all the issues involved in Indo-Pak relations, but it is more than clear that until we undertake a series of very much overdue administrative, political and economic initiatives in the Valley we will remain helpless elements in the drama now unfolding. A strange apathy grips us. We seem exhausted. When will we stir? And who will do the stirring?

balance of payments gap of £55 million — treble that registered in March. A gap of this nature, combined with the persistent high level of imports and the disappointing export figures, is certainly no cause for rejoicing.

The general feeling is that imports, which are rising as the inevitable accompaniment of rising production and stock-building, will soon taper off, but exports will certainly have to rise rapidly if Britain is to make up for the worsening in her capital position. It appears that both exports and imports are growing rather more slowly than in the last six months of 1963. Imports for the first four months of 1964 were 13 per cent above the 1963 average, while exports have only grown by 3 per cent.

In an attempt to mitigate the disappointment over the export performance in April, it could be argued that the April figures might have been the result of sharp month-to-month fluctuations in the shipment of large items of capital equipment, notably ships and aircraft. But this could hardly explain a fall as great as £36 million. Taking the figures available for deliveries of ships and planes for 1964, these have averaged about £23 million a quarter; therefore, excluding the export of all such items in April, the difference could not amount to more than £8 million. It must also be noted that exports of motor vehicles and machinery ceased to rise in the first quarter of 1964, and exports of fuel were lower.

Taking a closer look at Britain's export performance it can be seen that some sectors have provided a