

The Indian Image At Home And Abroad

155
"IN this small industrial town in Switzerland, I shall be ashamed to face my friends tomorrow morning!" A young Indian girl, Nandita Kashyap, made this sad confession in a letter back home in the middle of July. The cause of her embarrassment and shame was the news broadcast that evening, that the All-India Congress Committee had unanimously approved of the Indian Government's grossly partisan and unfair stand in regard to the West Asian dispute.

This was only one of many communications that people in India received from their friends abroad, all of which added up to the fact that India's name was mud in the rest of the world.

An eminent Indian woman, widely esteemed and respected for her artistic attainments and social work, told a friend that she had to leave the Visitors' Gallery at the U.N. in shame, half way through a speech by the Indian representative in the Security Council, during a discussion on West Asia.

Michael Brecher, Nehru's well known biographer, who describes himself as "a sympathetic student of India and her leaders for twenty years", writes to say that the Indian Government's "words and deeds" during the last few weeks "have saddened friends of India everywhere. How far has India fallen from the values and standards of the past!" he exclaims. "Does India now believe in the murder of small states? Does India no longer believe in the equality of nations, in the principles of non-interference, mutual respect, freedom of navigation in international waterways, and in the host of other guides to civilised behaviour handed down by her statesmen in the past? One is reluctantly led to ask whether India ever did believe in these principles." He might well ask.

HOW did we fall so low when, twenty years back, we entered the comity of free nations with universal goodwill and esteem? The basis of that admiration had been India's long history and ancient culture. A book like Will Durant's *Our Oriental Heritage* had won India countless friends abroad. Perhaps nothing had raised India's image as high in the world as Mahatma Gandhi's life and work, and the manner in which India had been led by him to achieve her independence in a peaceful and orderly manner. The horrible killings that accompanied the partition of the country were no doubt a blot on both Pakistan and India. But Gandhiji atoned for them by the final sacrifice when he exposed himself to the assassin's bullet.

I recall being told in Rio de Janeiro, when we opened our first Embassy in Latin America, that simple women, white and coloured, had broken down and sobbed on hearing of Gandhiji's death. They felt they had lost a friend. India's stock was very high in those countries at that time, and one received a great deal of honour as a representative of "the country of Gandhi".

How has all this changed? Why this tragic decline in our prestige abroad? In so far as the plane of international relations is concerned, perhaps the decline in India's prestige may be quite simply attributed to her inability to match her practice with her professions. The world would have understood if India had attended to her own affairs and not involved herself in the problems of the world at large, and attributed it to the humility natural to a new member in the comity of nations. The world would equally have accepted an India which sought to apply actively to the problems of the day, Gandhiji's advocacy of peace and his methods of truth and non-violence. But on one condition—that she practised in her own relationships the precepts she preached to others. The world found, however, that in the case of Tibet and Hungary, our love of freedom and our vaunted anti-imperialist pretensions were quickly forgotten by us. In the case of Kashmir and Goa, they found that we claimed to be judges in our own cause. It is against this background that the West Asian debacle in our foreign policy seems to have struck our prestige a mortal blow.

Rightly or wrongly, the world believes that the right to criticise and condemn other members of the world community should be accompanied by a capacity to do business with them on equal and self-respecting terms. Unfortunately, thanks to the

by

M. R. MASANI

improvident policies of our Government, this country has, for years now, had to depend on others for the gift of food to keep its people alive. This combination of self-righteous posturing with economic mendicancy has been too much for the world to take.

A press correspondent reporting from London says that the facts about Bihar "have etched in millions of British homes the picture of India as the abode of unredeemed misery and human degradation" and have strengthened the feeling that "the country is being grossly misgoverned".

At a time when other countries are asked to rush to the rescue of our starving people in Bihar, an American weekly of high standing recently enlightened its readers about how each Indian State is a separate food zone and how some of these States were holding up supplies to Bihar.

"The tragedy of India's food crisis is that some States have more food than they can use. But these areas are carefully hoarding their surpluses. Each Indian State is now a separate 'food zone'. Food cannot be 'imported' or 'exported' without local government permission. After a bumper wheat harvest in the Punjab in recent months the price dropped by fifty per cent. But the Punjab Government refuses to let the food-distributing organisation of the Federal Government buy

grains there for use in deficit areas such as Bihar."

What kind of image can such a state of affairs be expected to project?

One of India's leading industrialists Mr S. L. Kiroloskar, on his return to India early in July, expressed his apprehensions that foreign loans would not be forthcoming in the amounts expected by the authorities of the Fourth Plan. He said that people abroad were greatly worried at India's deteriorating economic condition and about law and order situation. "Knowledgeable people abroad," said Mr Kiroloskar, "thought that India's situation was going from bad to worse because of the dogmatic approach of the Government, which resulted in too much controls and restrictions; and that centralised planning would fail to revive the economy. A foreign investor expected less support in the money market and this was lacking in India."

THE recent General Election appears, however, to have done our country's image abroad a great deal of good. According to Mr W. N. Morris-Jones, Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, who writes in the July issue of the *Round Table*: "The elections have achieved a breakthrough to normality... Charisma, ready-made India leadership and plebiscitary democracy have gone, and competitive pressures, pragmatic realism and the containment, one through bargaining and compromise of social and cultural variety, will be the features of the future. In a word, the day of quasi-federalism gave way to an era of blooded federal politics in a thoroughly federal society... By dispelling a sense of claustrophobia in the political arena, the 1967 elections may have set the system fresh, strong roots." It is hoped that later developments do not dispel the appreciation that the behaviour of the Indian electorate in the 1967 Parliamentary elections evoked.

There may be people who would draw the world view of India as erroneous in any event, one we need not bother about. This point of view would be easily accepted if it could be demonstrated that India thinks very highly of itself.

The other day, Mr M. C. Chagla, our External Affairs Minister, raised a veritable hornet's nest—and the buzzing continued in the Lok Sabha for no less than half an hour—by accusing an Opposition member of having indulged in "character assassination of the nation". In the end, an unfortunate Minister had to express regret for his words and to plead he had meant no harm. He then went on to explain that he had meant was that we in this country are hyper-critical about ourselves and others do not see us in quite such an unfavourable light. While the facts do bear out Mr Chagla's feeling that we are a monopoly in regard to criticism of ourselves, it is quite true that India's image

[Please Turn Over]

The Indian Image [CONTINUED]

the eyes of its people at home is in no better shape than it is abroad.

Whether in the course of conversation in the correspondence columns of our newspapers, it is quite clear that people in India, by and large, take a dim view of the state of the nation. While a great deal of complaint and grumbling are directed at the Government—and God knows they deserve—it is unfortunately too often accompanied by the assumption that the grumbler and his ilk deserve to be excluded from the general condemnation.

This mood of widespread disillusionment, cynicism and disbelief in the good motives of others is so widespread as to be alarming. Some fifteen years back, a foreign visitor, who happens to be a good friend of this country, drew attention to the nihilistic attitude of the editor of a certain "Leftist" journal, and certainly papers of that kind have contributed considerably to this corrosive cynicism.

The state of our country certainly does not warrant complacency. There is ample reason and room for discontent. But discontent needs to be harnessed to a drive to constructive endeavour, and should not be allowed to dissipate itself in a helpless and disgusted shrug of the shoulders, as it so often does today.

It would be a mistake to blame our poor image on bad public relations. No amount of propaganda or public relations, whether at home or abroad, can change the picture we present. Public relations can only be effective when it has a basically good story

to tell. Have we such a story to supply?

India's image, whether at home or abroad, is not likely to improve unless enough of her sons and daughters make up their minds to sacrifice a little of their comfort, some part of their leisure, and a great deal of their peace of mind to working hard at putting things right. It is time we stopped looking to "them" in New Delhi to stop misbehaving and solving our problems. "They" are not likely to justify any such hope and this goes for many in the Opposition as well as for those in the Government. What India needs is a great deal of what is known in America as "grass roots" democracy—cleaning up the municipal mess, beautifying the neighbourhood, creating organisations and institutions to deal with specific ills, stopping tyranny and oppression wherever they raise their heads, and banding together to stop peace-loving citizens from being intimidated by the organisers of bandhs and gheraos.

Phosfomin® increases your stimulates builds up amina strengthens body's assistance



ke's health in Phosfomin
the family

The Green Fruit-flavoured Tonic with
Vitamins and Multiple Glycerophosphates

TTT® represents the Registered Trademark of
E.R. Squibb & Sons, Inc., of which KPPL are the Licensed Users.

AI CHEMICALS

ships sc. 49/67



A SENSATION IN THE FIELD OF COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHY ENLARGER LENS JANPOL - COLOUR



UNIQUE LENS WITH
BUILT-IN COLOUR FILTERS
TRANSFERRING EACH BLACK & WHITE
ENLARGER FOR COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHY



EXPORTED BY
VARIMEX WARSAWA - POLAND
ON RUPEE PAYMENT

Sole Agents:

CHOKSI BROTHERS PRIVATE LIMITED

Western India House, 88, Ganesh Ch. Avenue, 5/17, Mount Road
P.M. Road, Fort, Bombay-1 • Calcutta-13. Madras-2