

National Govt not utopian, say proposers

Ronita Torcato talks to some eminent public men who have proposed the formation of an alternative National Government

IN a letter sent to some newspapers, (see *The Indian Post*, October 28) some eminent public men have demanded the dismissal of the Rajiv Gandhi Government and its replacement by what they call, an interim National Government. The proposal has been received with some scepticism in political circles and with a measure of acceptance outside. The proposal, in summary, envisages the dismissal of the Prime Minister and his Government by Presidential fiat and the formation of an interim National Government to take its place. The national Government is to comprise eminent individuals of proven integrity who will hold power for six months before another Government is elected.

The proposal for the formation of a National Government has been criticised on several grounds. The main points at issue are:

1) Whether there is any realistic char- of the proposal being implemented, in view of the Consti-

tutional ambiguities relating to the dismissal of an elected Government, and one with a substantial majority at that.

2) The mechanics by which the alternative National Government will be formed, which the signatories of the letter did not specify.

3) The validity of the rationale of the whole plan, which envisages merely an interim status for the National Government, to be replaced after six months with another elected Government, which will comprise the same politicians who have brought about the present crisis.

Minoo Masani, eminent legal counsel and former Swatantra Party leader and one of the signatories of the letter, nevertheless, defends the proposal. Says Masani, "Under the British and Indian Constitutions, the Crown and the President are empowered, albeit in exceptional circumstances, to dismiss a Prime Minister who enjoys a Parliamentary majority. If they are convinced the Prime Minister and the Government no



Minoo Masani

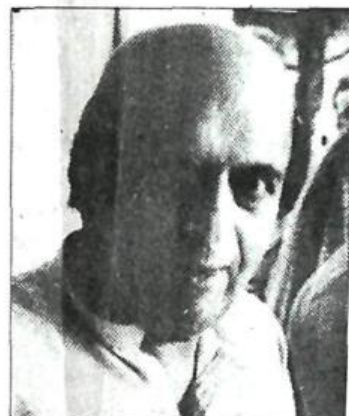
longer reflect the will of the electorate. The Supreme Court of India has held that while the President ought not to dismiss the PM in normal circumstances, he has the power to do so otherwise. So, the prerogative of dismissing the PM is there. Our Constitution says the PM holds office at the pleasure

of the President. People are not aware that they can ask the President to intervene.

Masani also questions the view that the present Government is a majority Government. Says he, "Rajiv never got a majority. For, 49 per cent of those who voted for him comprised only half of the electorate. So, there was no massive mandate."

He points to the fact that the idea of a neutral care-taker Government taking office between two elections is not new. "Rajaji had suggested that before an election there should be an honest care-taker Government for six months, which would be followed by new elections."

"In a crisis like this, the people lose faith in the Government's ability to control the situation," explains **Madhu Mehta**, convenor of the Hindustani Andolan, "We have only floated a proposal on which we would like to mobilise public opinion and generate a public debate. We felt that a National Government is the best so-



Madhu Mehta

lution. Ultimately, action has to be taken by the President, who can use his good offices in persuading the PM to take note of the chaotic conditions in the country and ensure the continuation of democratic rule."

The interregnum of six months, it is hoped, will function as a period

"When a new political alignment takes place... and a national consensus can emerge."

Elaborating, he says "What they (the National Government) will do and how, nobody can say, but it would entail "A coalition ... of men and women, of integrity and the ability and experience to tackle problems, cutting across partisan interests... Let the Congress-I remain and the Opposition parties, too. Then it will be a truly democratic Government."

"We want to preserve democracy and the national Government is one way of doing it" opines **Kekoo Gandhi**, of the Gallery Chemould. Asked to suggest likely nominees for the National Government he says "If you asked me about the contemporary art scene in Bombay I'd be able to speak with some authority. I'm very apolitical, but I would say we need people who do not take positions so readily. Persons who see things more holistically." Such as ? "Mr J.R.D. Tata.

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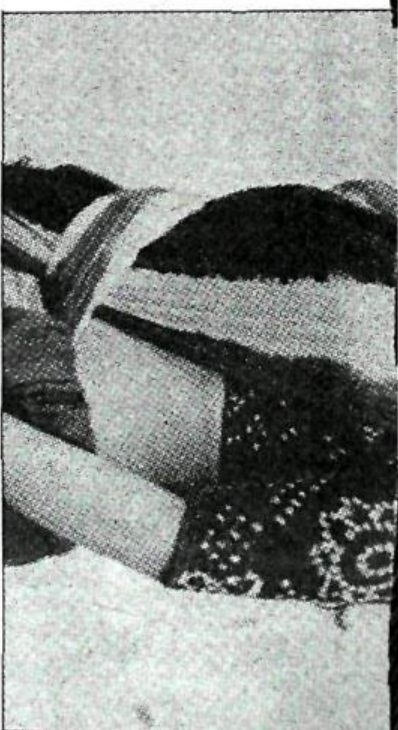
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A scene from *Aliens*.