5564

TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 1968

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Think it over:

The proper function of a government is to make it easy for the people to do good and difficult for them to do evil.
—GLADSTONE

Kutch melodrama

THE Jana Sangh, the Samyukta Socialist Party, the Praja Socialist Party and the Gujarat unit of the Swatantra Party would be well advised to end their satyagraha in Kutch. Their continued defiance of the ban imposed by the Union Government on entry into the Rann will help nobody, and the agitation might even peter out if it is not called off soon. The Government was justified in imposing the ban. In proceeding to implement the Kutch tribunal's award, the Government is honouring an international commitment endorsed by Parliament. Instead of defying the ban, the sponsors of the satyagraha should in fact welcome it because it offers them a way out of a difficult situation.

It was clear for some time before the satyagraha was due to begin that the organisers were having second thoughts on the wisdom of their move. The leaders of the Jana Sangh had called upon the Gujarat Government and the army authorities to provide the volunteers transport, water, and other facilities for their journey through the arid wastes of the Rann. When they decided to launch their movement, it was naturally assumed that they had foreseen the difficulties involved. They should have known that a march on foot through a trackless desert would call for endurance and discipline of a high order. The satyagraha, ostensibly directed against the "surrender" of Indian territory to Pakistan, is in reality a challenge to the Government. The Jana Sangh leaders are not so naive as not to realise that no Government can provide facilities to law-breakers, however valorous or timid. They and their colleagues of the SSP, the PSP and the Swatantra Party naturally could not give up their programme in a hurry without loss of face, but the satyagraha was bound to prove only a symbolic gesture.

A decision that was meant to embarrass the Government has caused more embarrassment to the organisers themselves. If the satyagraha is persisted in, the parties sponsoring it are bound to lose more than they gain. This is true especially of the SSP and the PSP. The Kerala unit of the SSP has broken away from the all-India organisation on the issue of the Kutch satyagraha, and in defiance of the National Executive's directive it has refused to withdraw from the United Front Government. The Bihar unit of the party has preferred caution to theatrical action. It has postponed joining the Government headed by Mr Paswan pending the conclusion of the satyagraha, but it has done so under pressure and evidently against its own better judgment. The spirit of revolt is spreading in the party. Whether Mr Joshi's threats of disciplinary action against erring units can prevent the party's progressive disintegration is anybody's guess. As for the PSP, it is in disarray everywhere.

The Swatantra Party, at the all-India level, is opposed to any agitation against the Kutch award. It is the State unit in Gujarat which urged participation in the satyagraha. As the chief Opposition party in Gujarat, the temptation to complicate matters for the Congress in the State probably proved too strong to resist. Comfortably ensconced in Delhi, the National Executive resolved its dilemma by permitting members of the party in Gujarat to join the satyagraha in their individual capacity. The central leadership of the party will be happy if the satyagraha is called off. In fact, since the parties concerned have already registered their protest by courting arrest, they should think seriously of ending the cheap melodrama as quickly as they can.

gap to end by 1971-72

…self-sufficient in the production of crude too but this may not necessarily turn out to be so, the world reserves being unequally distributed.

The Minister effectively conveyed to the House the drama and the gamble of oil exploration. It may be a bonanza or nothing, he said. In the bargain it was a costly business. To drive home the point, he spoke of Iran. "We have drilled more wells than Iran but we produce only a fraction of its oil supply."

Oil needs

But he agreed that the country should be self-sufficient in refining capacity. It was working towards that goal. The public sector in refining would keep on growing but the private sector's rights will be protected provided it recognises the need to renegotiate the agreements in keeping with the changing times. He rejected the demand for nationalisation of private oil companies. Neither would they be throttled. But they must recognise the need for renegotiating the agreements.

The country's present refining capacity of six to seven million tons would in the next three or four years be raised to nine to ten million tons. A new refinery was proposed to be set up "somewhere in the north-west." He categorically ruled out the possibility of another refinery in Assam. "A refinery is not a toy that it must be set up every day." The products of the existing refinery in Assam did not find a market there.

Mr Mehta said the country cannot become self-sufficient in crude if exploration was confined to land. Exploration had to be taken to off-shore areas. But no one can say in advance what the result would be. The deep sea areas were most profitable. But exploration in such areas was costly as well as technically difficult. A well cost about three million dollars. The Government was considering whether it should enter into negotiations with others or "some other method can be devised."

He also spoke of the investments in Iran. India had drilled three structures. Two more structures had yet to be drilled.

Explaining the Government's fertiliser policy, Mr Mehta said 70 per cent of the fertiliser capacity would be based on Naphtha, the rest would be based on coal or lignite and on liquid ammonia.

Mr Mehta heatedly defended the policy of striking compromises with the private sector. A country as badly in need of foreign exchange as India could not work differently. It has to give some concessions.

In the case of petro-chemicals the progress has been slow but this was again because of resources. "We are now pushing ahead with it." A petrochemical complex would be set up soon. *Investment in this industry would* trigger of development. An investment of Rs 200 crores would increase the national income by Rs 500 crores a year.

The drug industry too was "rapidly developing." The country had reached a stage of production of Rs 180 crores a year. By 1971-72 it would come to Rs 250 crores. About 10 to 12 per cent of production had imported content. Drugs worth Rs 4 crores were also exported every year, Mr Mehta said.

Parvati (11), of Khidki Faras Khana, was allegedly hit by a running train on Sunday near Lahori Gate overbridge. She was found dead on the track.