

6026

21st June, 1972

My dear J.P.,

Since you have disappeared from the newspaper headlines and I do not quite know where to write to you, I am assuming you are having your South Indian rest at Yercaud and am therefore addressing this letter to you there. By way of caution I am posting a copy to your Patna address.

I spent a weekend a few days back at the Asia Plateau constructed by the M.R.A. at Panchgani. It is really a dream place and perhaps it would provide a holiday retreat for you when you feel like it next.

As it happens, when I went there, it was full of mostly young people from various parts of the world including India and I had to go through a couple of intense question-and-answer sessions which, according to Rajmohan Gandhi and Rusi Lal, Editor of Himmat, were a great success. In a way, the weekend was rewarding as two bright ideas emerged as a result of our discussions provoked by my picture of the state of the country today with which you are not altogether out of tune. A bright, young lady, Neerja Choudhury, who writes for Himmat, came up with the suggestion that, in the absence of Opposition Parties and a fearless press, what the country probably needs is some kind of a panel of eminent and independent people who could act as the conscience of the country - a role that you have been performing with some success for the past couple of decades. Her idea was that we should have a panel of ten or twelve people - she mentioned your name and mine among them - who could comment on developments of the day which might be of a significant nature and particularly sound a note of warning about some things that might be considered to be 'off-side'. Such a panel could also perhaps examine legislation which raise fundamental issues which Parliament today, composed as it is, is incapable and unwilling to do.

I told the lady that this was a very constructive thought which I would pass on to you and thought you indeed would be a very good rallying point for such a group. In so far as my membership is concerned, my observation was that, if someone who had been politically identified like myself, even though at present hibernating, were to be on the panel, perhaps my presence should be balanced by someone like E.M.S.Namboodiripad on it.

Since then, Rajmohan and I have talked over this idea and I thought I should put this to you as you might be able to include it in the thinking you are doing on what the country needs. Among other possible members of such a panel can be one of the former Chief Justices like Subba Rao, Shah or Hidayatullah, B.K.Mehru (once he retires), Shri Moolgokar (who shortly be back in charge of the Indian Express) and N.A.Palkhivala. If B.Shiva Rao was not so old, I would have suggested his name also. Undoubtedly, we could think of other names. Do please give this matter

some thought so that we may discuss it further either by correspondence or when we meet next.

The other thought that was thrown up, in response to my suggestion that friendship between India and Pakistan was one of our crying needs, was from a headmaster from Jamshedpur who said that his guidance after listening to me that morning was that the M.R.A. should try to organise an informal discussion of the problems involved either abroad between a few Indians and Pakistanis or between Indians in India. Rajachan and I feel that, while the confrontation abroad between a few men of goodwill on both sides would take some time and organising, the domestic discussion should not be delayed and we have worked out a plan for a discussion at Panchgani from September 30 to October 2 (Gandhiji's birthday this year) on "Towards Better Indo-Pak Relations" to be jointly organised by the Lealie Sawhney Programme of Training for Democracy and the M.R.A. Our thinking is that we would each invite ten persons and that this group of twenty should then be free to discuss various aspects of this problem.

I feel sure you will like this idea and would very much appreciate your cooperation in making it a success. The most effective way you can do this of course is to be present. Rajachan and I are very keen that Prabhavati and you should come up and spend a weekend in Panchgani. I can assure you that it is a delightful place which combination of /is a a first class European hotel on a hill-side with the spirit of an Ashram but, thank goodness, without its austerity! It is also a very lovely place and you can stay on longer either by coming up in advance or staying on a few days after the discussion. Do please give this invitation your serious thought and try and accept it. You will agree that the notice is adequate.

The other way in which you can help is in suggesting names for our ten L.S.P. invitees. The names that occur to me are : Sugata Dasgupta, George Verghese, J.J. Singh, Kuldeep Nayar, Shamim Shamim, Khushwant Singh and A.C. Moorani besides you and myself. Since one should also have some hawks along with these cooing doves, I would very much like to have Balraj Madhok and General Harbaksh Singh. Your comments on these names and suggestions about the matter would be much appreciated. I shall issue the invitations till I hear from you. So please drop me a line on the subject.

I shall be in Madras for some Swatantra Party meetings and Rajaji during the weekend of 24th & 25th June but, alas, Yercaud is not within motoring distance or I would have

How is progress with your health and strength?

Awaiting a line from you soon,

Yc

Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan,
YERCAUD. (Near Salem)

(M. R. M.)