

Weekly Copy Ps. 5

Annual Subscription Rs. 2

OPINION

Vol. XX

12th FEBRUARY 1980

No. 41

I SHALL DEFUSE

THE sleeper in the bed moved uneasily, sighed, turned to the other side, murmured incoherently, then suddenly sat up exclaiming, "I shall defuse, yes I shall defuse. Defuse what? Why first the Afghan situation. Then the still remaining opposition to me. The Russians, oh the Russians, why do they do such things? Primarily I suppose their reason is the same as mine, love of power. I want absolute power over this country, they want it over the whole world. It scarcely lies with me to blame them. And what good friends they have been to me! In the strict privacy of this bedroom at this early hour of the morning—4, isn't it—I'll admit I could hardly have been here again without their help in many ways. Ah, yes, they have been very useful. That's why I'm anxious this Afghan business should go in their favour without its costing them too much. So I shall defuse. Of course, they must stay in Afghanistan. They couldn't really withdraw without losing too much face. Only they mustn't get involved in Pakistan. I've heard their high military authorities have programmed five days to a week for the takeover of that country, and the Pakistani high command, while showing a bold face, has very little hope of stopping them. That's why all their hesitation about accepting American aid, the 'peanuts', etc. If you're badly beaten already in your mind, what chance is there of your putting up a good show? So the Russians have to be stopped before they begin Operation Pakistan. And who'll stop them? There isn't the military strength available in the area, nor can there be sufficient reinforcement in time, even if the ponderous American machine got to work, having arranged terms with its European and other allies. No, there's only myself. I know Brezhnev, I know Kosygin, I know Gromyko and a score of lesser lights in and around the Polit Bureau. They know me. They know their real interests and mine mesh together very finely, so I think they'll listen to me. Perhaps, now that Parliament is over, I might fly over quietly for a couple of days and talk it over with them in Moscow. Anyhow Gromyko will be here on the twelfth, and we'll see.

"Let me go into this a little deeper. Why don't I want the Russians in Pakistan? It might seem an ideal solution from one point of view. Friends on the West, instead of constantly pin-pricking, having to be watched, unpredictable people, with plenty of imaginary grievances. Ah, but to have the Bear lumbering along just outside your compound wall! No, no, you could never be sure when he would step over and once he did, on what his mind would be set. Better by far a couple of

countries, or at least one, between him and us. And what will be my argument with the Russians ? Look, I'll say, you've gone far enough, acquired far too much odium. It's time to let the opinion antagonistic to you cool down. You don't want to rouse it to fever-pitch. So keep off Pak now. It oughtn't to be necessary to remind you that history thinks in long terms. A few years' later you may be able to pick up Pakistan with far less fuss. Why hurry and spoil it all now ? You don't want to drive the Americans too hard, too. They are, unlike you solid-headed Northerners, much more volatile, and driven to despair or overcome by unbearable depression, might fall back on the final weapon, which you of all people, with the bright and beautifully gay centuries of the future opening out before you, must dread most of all. For this once, then, be content with Afghanistan, no mean prize in any case when you consider its strategic, political and historical implications. We shall keep on saying you will leave when the Afghan Government wants you to go. The Afghan Government, your own creature, will keep on saying you must stay in view of the grave danger from bandits armed by foreign powers, in fact dissident Afghans, who revolted because of the harsh rule of the Communist Government you set up, and many of whom have now taken refuge in Pakistan. Most of them will repair happily to their homes once they know the rigour of the Afghan (your) government has softened. So in a couple of years you will have an obedient, fairly quiet satellite there, and then, if you find it necessary for your global purposes, you may consider Pakistan for action. There is of course, the argument that meanwhile the Americans and Chinese may so build up Pakistan as to make it truly formidable. The answer to that is simple. Just look at the Pakistan people. Can any amount of building-up make them formidable, especially to you with your organisation and discipline. And as time passes, the Americans will get lethargical and the Chinese turn to newer projects, and so Pakistan will remain very much what it is. Yes, thus I shall defuse."

Rising from the bed, the speaker went into the other room and returning a few minutes later refreshed, put on a winter house-coat and ensconced herself in a low padded chair by the side of an electric heater. "Yes," she said, "I'll make that my motto for the next few months, a year or so perhaps, 'I shall defuse'. Defuse what ? First the opposition to me still remaining within the country. At the Centre and in the States. I don't think that will be specially difficult. Our politicians make great play with principles and declarations, but they almost invariably have a price and generally after a little face-saving hesitation and some bargaining sometimes, fall for it. Why, some of the people who denounced me most roundly in the elections, were making overtures the day after the results, and quite a number elected on other tickets, just walked over, once they saw I was in power. No, flexibility is a strong Indian virtue, and who can appreciate it more than I, so often a beneficiary of its exercise ? The State Governments of parties other than mine will either walk over to me or be dismissed, and in the new elections that will follow, will my arts of persuasion, in more forms than one, be found wanting ?

No, very soon we shall have governments of my liking in almost all the states, except in Communist-governed Bengal, Tripura and Kerala, and there too with my special approach to the Kremlin, I shall have my way. (Must consider the question of these states another time. Dangerous to have them subject to outside authority. Possibility of toppling ? Entirely in the public interest, of course.)

Somewhere, I read the other day about the Courts being not unaffected by the great tides that sweep through public opinion outside their walls. I hope our Courts, including the Supreme Court, will consider the result of the General Election such a great tide. That would solve many matters, including those affecting dear Sanjay. Which reminds me, do I need to defuse him ? Is he a great nuisance now ? On the way to becoming one ? H'm, let me think. No, for the present he may be allowed to run on ; he's young of course and on top of the world, so some ebullience is natural. He'll bear careful watching though ; has a thoroughly nasty crowd round him. I suppose they say that of me too, and I suppose with some justification. People don't understand the kind of things one has to do and get done to get to and stay on top, that's where the misunderstanding comes in. From the first time on which I had to tell my innermost circle who complained bitterly about some men being very, very inconvenient 'Well, see to them, see to them,' making at the same time sweeping movements with my hands, I knew I had passed beyond the pale. The codes that governed the rest of mankind did not any more apply to me. Sanjay moreover has still to make his way in the world, and that must excuse a great deal, as Melbourne told Queen Victoria, talking about Disraeli. I love him too much for his own good, perhaps, but then as I am, so I am, and would I deprive myself of one of the few joys of my staid and dreary life ? No, emphatically not. So Sanjay must go on as he is doing, and I must try and keep more of an unobtrusive eye on him, and if sometimes I can't and he does something outrageous, well c'est la vie.

My time-table ? The first year, to December 31, 1980, I devote to getting everything in marching order, the whole machine organised for the great purpose of making my authority absolute and maintaining it unimpeded. In ten months then, the media must be pliant instruments, the trade unions transmission-belts, the legislatures and courts recorders of my will, state governments my organs. The state, it is I, will be my aim, and I know it can be achieved. Last time, I very nearly got it right, and I've learnt from experience now. I won't go off half-cocked nor let fools get me into untenable positions. No, deep study, close calculation, prompt action, all in my own interest, this shall be my guide. The good of the people, etc., etc. Of course, of course, aren't they all included in my own good ? This is not a public meeting, and it's hardly necessary to itemise them here. The one abiding rule is 'What is good for me is bound to be good for the people ; what is bad for me, is bound to be bad for the people.' Ah, well, must try and sleep a little now. Have a heavy day in front of me." The lady lay down on the bed and drawing the rezai over herself, was soon asleep.

OPINION, February 12, 1980

INTERFERENCE IN ADMINISTRATION

(1-4-1955)

When the Congress took office in 1946, and the tendency became apparent for the Minister and the Party leader, both at headquarters and in the districts, to interfere and give a twist to administrative matters so as to prevent decisions purely on merits, the sympathetic observer was inclined to put it down largely to inexperience. "They are feeling their way," he thought, "after all, they are decent people and will soon realise that just Government cannot be achieved if they interfere in matters within the competence of others in order to influence decisions, or if they themselves allow any considerations except those of merit to affect their conclusions, when it is for them to decide."

Eight years later, the observer, still sympathetic, can only conclude that by and large he erred in his earlier view and was over-optimistic. Many of those who, in public meetings, declaim eloquently about the complete freedom of volition they leave to the administrators in matters which are primarily their concern, seem, in private, to have little compunction not only about influencing by indirect suggestion but even about ordering directly in person or through agents. In the result, from almost every part of the country come reports that ordinary administration has deteriorated greatly....

The effect of interference generally, and interference on personal grounds in particular, on the official, is even more damaging. It deprives him of that certainty in behaviour which is one of the principal needs of the good civil servant. It causes him to be always looking over his shoulder instead of going straight ahead with his job. He has to ask in connection with every matter not what he ought to do on merits but what it will pay him to do in the light of the views of his political master. Briefly, it tends to obliterate the dividing line between the civil servant and the politician, a course never intended in any reasonable country, for one of the principal grounds for having the civil servant at all, especially the high-ranking civil servant, is the need for a permanent instrument, different from the politician and in many matters with judgment independent of the politician, who can be relied upon to keep the administration going honestly and straightforwardly, whatever the movements and vicissitudes of politics.

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Posted at Central Packet Sorting Office, Bombay on 12-2-1980

Regd. No. BYW 69

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Edited and published by A. D. Gorwala at 40C Ridge Road, Bombay 400 006 and
printed by him at the Mouj Printing Bureau, Khatau Wadi, Bombay 400 004.
Proprietor : A. D. Gorwala.