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THE PRESIDENT

(Friday Evening)

SINCE Independence Presidents of India have been scholars, gentlemen, gentlemen and scholars, politicians, even clowns arousing the laughter of Indians at least. Now we have a trickster as President. He tricked Morarji by letting him believe he had been given a day more to submit the list of his supporters and then demanding it by a fixed time on the previous day. He tricked Jagjivan Ram and Chandrasekhar by telling them he was in no hurry to decide on the Prime Ministership and they could send in the list of their supporters next day, and then within half-an-hour dissolving the Lok Sabha. He tricked the Indian people by keeping in office as caretaker a government which had never faced the Lok Sabha, and the leader of which resigned rather than seek the confidence of the House. He tricked the Indian people again by accepting the advice of that leader to hold general elections, when there was every probability of a viable and stable government being formed if he had only sent for the Leader of the Opposition, which was the largest party in the House.

Why all this trickery, oh trickster Nilam Sanjiva Reddy ? You, from exalted Rashtrapati Bhavan, are not likely to make a reply, so we must make do with our own humble speculations. Ambassador Mehta of blessed memory used to tell a story of a prominent man who said to another 'why in God's name are you persecuting me ? I have never even done you a good turn.' The sense of obligation is often a strong cause of dislike in human affairs and Morarji, the leader of a party which had obliged Reddy twice, making him first Speaker of the Lok Sabha and then President of India, may well have incurred Reddy's displeasure on that account, compounded no doubt by Morarji's usual brusque disregard of any view except his own and what Reddy must have regarded as the lack of the proper deference due to the President. In Reddy's mind then it may have become settled that if any opportunity came, Morarji should be made to rue it. The occasion arose with Charan Singh and his followers' defection from the Janata Party and how fully Reddy made use of it, first by calling on Charan Singh and Morarji both to show him lists of their supporters, instead of on Morarji, the leader of the still-largest party, first, and secondly by the trick already related. And so Morarji out and Reddi at last satisfied, one would think. But oh, no, against Jagjivan Ram he

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had an old grudge, having been opposed by him some years ago and observing in him too the lack of deference and *pairvi* he felt were his due. And so the keeping him hanging on and the lie told to him, when all along, despite the best advice from constitutional experts, he had already decided that JR would be a dead loss to him and must be ditched.

With Charan Singh, Reddy no doubt feels more easy ; they are both after all 'kisans', not peasants with very small acreages but proper kulaks. They both not unoften think with their blood and regard cunning as the highest wisdom. A further point of unity between them must be their strong, though secret, antagonism to having a Harijan, Jagjivan Ram, as Prime Minister. What, the lowest of the low, in the highest position in the land ! This must not be was probably their innermost reaction, however, loath they are to make it public. Alas, that the President of India does not see how sadly he has missed this excellent opportunity of demonstrating to his fellow-citizens and the world the accord between the theory of the constitution—that there is complete equality of opportunity for all citizens irrespective of caste and creed, and that we discriminate against no one because of his social origins—and our actual practice !

From almost the beginning of his presidency, Reddy has stressed the idea of unity in government. A national government from all the parties would to him be ideal. That this would mean the coming together with Indira of the Emergency does not seem to have discouraged him. He obviously takes the view common in some circles, 'Forgive and forget. All that was more than two years ago. Act, act in the living present, let the dead past bury its dead.' He has thus seemed to have a specially cordial attitude towards Indira. Greatly rejoiced he must have been, when he saw the growing closeness between Indira and Charan Singh, leading to the support of the Congress(I) for the latter. Equally great must have been his dejection when he saw their later falling apart, leading to Charan Singh's resignation. Indira of course wanted much more than Charan Singh could immediately give without making his followers, quite a number of whom were strongly against Indira, revolt. So he had to refuse her pleas in regard to the cases against her, and seems even to have ordered more expeditions disposal of them, probably in order to bring her to heel. (Something good might after all result from the interaction of these two evil forces, if judgments get delivered against Indira in a few cases, thus reducing her capacity for future harm. As has been said, not altogether wrongly, the Lord works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.) Indira now is appealing to the President to replace the Charan Singh ministry by another (under which law ? None) and to suspend the work of the Special Courts until after the elections, to both of which suggestions Reddy will hum and haw for quite a long time, unless he wishes to land himself even deeper in the quagmire than he has done. Charan Singh and Indira are both his dear friends and he wants to keep them that way. So it would not be surprising if he tried to arrange some accommodation between them. Not exactly the President's function, but the times are exceptional, aren't they, and may well call for exceptional initiative and enterprise ? Certainly, revered sir, and are

you not a most exceptional President, will happily chorus his numerous sycophants.

Talk of impeaching the President now, however much he may deserve it, is just moonshine. The only way to make it anything more is to come back after the elections with a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha. The task of the next hundred days then is not sitting in Delhi and passing resolutions, but electioneering in the constituencies and coming back so strong as to make the opposer, be he the President, Charan Singh or Indira beware.

All the above is on the assumption that this whole business is an internal affair, and no strings are being pulled by foreigners. There are of course rumours that the Russians, having destabilised Afghanistan, are now anxious to do a similar service to us. Their agents, said to be in high position and esteem in the present Government and ruling party, are experts in disintegration, as they have already shown themselves to be in the united Janata party. If this is so, a greater responsibility than ever rests upon the President and the caretaker Prime Minister. One can only pray that whatever the degree of their viciousness as politicians, they still remain good Indians, and will not sell, or allow anyone else to sell, this India to anyone. If their natures compel them, let them fight in it politically, play dirty tricks upon their countrymen in and outside politics, bring forth into the open all the viciousness within them, but let them not be traitors nor give traitors any quarter. Thy Mercy be upon this land, Lord, and Thy Grace protect it!

3-MINUTE SPOT

TWO earnest, pleasant and persuasive young men came to me on the morning of the Monday before Independence Day, and by argument and humour made me believe that I would be failing badly in my duty to my fellow-citizens, if I did not do a "three-minute spot" for TV on Achievements and Failures in the thirty-two years of Independence. This is, so far as I can recollect, what I said:

In the years since independence, great have been our achievements. Agricultural production has been more than doubled, industrial production increased several times over. The numbers of our technicians, technologists, scientists, professional men, doctors, lawyers, accountants, managers have risen very considerably. All over the world Indians are known for their ability and capacity to take on any job.

Despite this great material progress, there have been a number of failures. I mention three which seem to me the most important:

1) We have no defence against Communist China's nuclear might, despite the very large sums we have been spending on defence. Communist China could within 45 minutes destroy every city in N. India from Cal-

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cutta to Amritsar and we could do nothing. With the aid of Pak troops, it could then even occupy large parts of the country.

2) We have failed to stabilise our population. Japan did it in ten years purely by democratic methods. We have the knowledge of methods, of means to apply, of incentives and disincentives to offer, but to no avail. Hence elimination of poverty becomes a fantasy, in spite of many good schemes like Employment Guarantee etc. If we had stabilised at the population of 1951, by now we could have been a proper welfare state; if at the population of '61, hardly anyone would have been desperately poor. As it is, you know,

3) Our greatest failure has been in the moral sphere. A great decline in values and in conduct has marked this period. Since most Indians have no standards of their own to live by, but follow the examples of those above them, the responsibility for this falls surely on our elites. In 1947, about 40 per cent of our political elite consisted of men of integrity; to-day the figure would be about 5 per cent. The corresponding figures for the other elites would be:

Administrative	..	90 to 95	20 -
Professional	..	65	30
Business	..	40	5

This decline was due very largely to the conduct of our new political elite. They, including primarily Nehru, lacked the personal integrity of the ruler, without which according to the ancient Hindu tradition, good government was not possible. All the rest followed. If the man at the top is dishonest, a nepotist, a protector of favourites, why not I, several rungs down, became the prevalent thinking.

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