

'BRITISH WILL QUIT WHEN TOLD & NOT ASKED'

Viceroy On His Task During Transition Period

From Our Special Representative

NEW DELHI, June 4.

LORD Mountbatten scored another personal triumph today when he met the Indian and foreign correspondents at a press conference in the Constituent Assembly Hall.

The Viceroy delivered an extempore lucid exposition of the British Government's procedure plan and the background leading to its evolution from stage to stage and then literally stood up to a barrage of over a hundred questions from the journalists.

Throughout the proceedings of the conference lasting two hours, Lord Mountbatten kept standing, replying to questions with disarming frankness and tact and genial humour and captured the hearts of over 200 hardboiled cynical newspaper men, who fully associated themselves with the glowing tribute paid to the Viceroy by Sir Ushanath Sen, President of the Indian Press Association, in the course of his vote of thanks at the conclusion of the conference.

Lord Mountbatten underlined the fact that the plan announced overnight was not a surprise to the Indian leaders, but was itself the result of his discussions and consultations with them in the course of the last two months. His own part in the evolution of the plan was to help the Indian leaders to find the largest common measure of agreement between them and to draft the plan. "I was only the mechanic that made the car run but did not occupy the driver's seat" he added.

"TWO THINGS CLEAR"

His Excellency said that soon after he arrived in India over two months ago, two things became clear to him—first, that the Muslim League insisted on the partition of the country and was not willing to enter the existing Constituent Assembly, and the second, that a speedy transfer of power was essential to prevent complete deterioration in the political situation in the country.

Lord Mountbatten reaffirmed his faith in a united India, but realised that "one can take a horse to the river but cannot make it drink". Thus the division plan on the principle of non-coercion of unwilling sections of the people was evolved, with the consent of both the Muslim League and the Congress and Sikhs.

To stem further deterioration in the Indian situation, immediate transfer of power on the basis of Dominion Status had been contemplated. So far as the British Government were concerned, they had their plans ready for a legislative measure to be introduced in Parliament the moment the Indians themselves fixed up the preliminaries. He expected to see the legislation passed in Parliament by August 15 this year.

HIS ROLE

Lord Mountbatten emphasised that Indians themselves should work out the procedure plan by mutual agreement and goodwill and his own role was confined to helping them in that task.

His Excellency declared: "The British will leave whenever they are told—and not asked—to leave. The British will be in India only so long as they are needed here."

The following are the other points from the press conference:

Princes: Indian States will not be offered Dominion Status. Legally, at the withdrawal of British power from India, Paramountcy has to be reverted to the Indian States. There is no intention to encourage Balkanisation of the country.

Sikhs: Lord Mountbatten was surprised that the Sikhs should have asked for a partition of the Punjab as their own community would be split and suffer thereby. Yet it was at the instance of the Sikhs that the Congress had passed the resolution demanding partition of the Punjab.

North-West Frontier: His Excellency would not come in the way of a sovereign Pathanistan if the commands of the Congress and Muslim League jointly asked for it.

The referendum in the North-West Province and in the Sylhet District of Assam will be conducted by impartial British officers of the Indian Army, specially selected and deputed by him personally.

All party leaders have promised to strive to prevent further strife and bloodshed. The Interim Government was determined to stop violence by any and every means, including the use of troops.

(Details on page 5)