War And Succession

> There is no question of Nehru's attempting to create a dynasty of his own; it would be inconsistent with his character and career.
>
> Frank Moraes, political columnist, 1960

I

Jawaharlal nehru died on the morning of 27 May 1964. The news was conveyed to the world by the 2 p.m. bulletin of All-India Radio. Two hours later the home minister, Gulzarilal Nanda, was sworn in as acting prime minister. Almost immediately the search commenced for a more permanent successor.

The central figure in the choice of a new prime minister was the Congress president, K. Kamaraj. Born in 1903, in a low-caste family in the Tamil country, Kamaraj dropped out of school to join the national movement. He spent close to eight years in jail, this spread out over two decades and six prison sentences. His status among the people was consolidated by his lifestyle – he lived austerely, and never married. He climbed steadily up the party hierarchy, and served as president of the Tamil Nadu Congress as well as chief minister of Madras before heading the party at the national level.[1]

Kamaraj was a thick-set man with a white moustache – according to one journalist, he looked 'like a cross between Sonny Liston and the Walrus'. Like the boxer (but unlike the Lewis Carroll character) he was a man of few words. The press joked that his answer to all questions put by them was one word in Tamil: '*Parkalam*' (We shall see). His reticence served him well, never better than after Nehru's death, when he had to listen to what his party men had to say. From 28 May Kamaraj began consulting his chief ministers and party bosses (the 'Syndicate', as they were called) on the best person to succeed Nehru. An early name to consider was Morarji Desai, the outstanding administrator from Gujarat who had made it clear that he wanted the job.

In four days Kamaraj met a dozen chief ministers and as many as 200 members of Parliament. From his conversations it became clear that Desai would be a controversial choice: his style was too abrasive. The person most MPs seemed to prefer was Lal Bahadur Shastri, also a fine administrator, but one who was more accessible, and from the Hindi heartland besides. It helped that Nehru had come increasingly to rely on Shastri in his last days. These factors all weighed heavily with Kamaraj, who was concerned that the succession should signal a certain continuity.

Desai was persuaded to withdraw his candidature. On 31 May the Congress Working Committee approved the choice of Lal Bahadur Shastri. The next day the appointment was ratified by the Congress Parliamentary Party and the day following, Shastri was sworn in as prime minister. Very soon the new incumbent was asserting his authority. Desai was dropped from the Cabinet because he insisted on the number two position. There was a clamour to include Nehru s daughter, Indira Gandhi; Shastri complied, yet gave her the insignificant Information and Broadcasting portfolio. Mrs Gandhi, in turn, forestalled any move by Shastri to move into Teen Murti House (where Nehru had lived as prime minister) by proposing that it be made into a memorial to her father.[2]

Announcing Shastri' s elevation to the press, Kamaraj had said that the undisputed rule of a great

man would now be replaced by a form of collective leadership. Shastri had other ideas. An early innovation was the creation of a separate Prime Minister's Secretariat, where a band of carefully chosen officials would prepare papers on matters of policy. This was to fill in the gaps in the prime minister's learning – gaps larger by far than was the case with Nehru – but also to provide him with an independent, non-partisan source of advice, freeing him of excessive dependence on the Cabinet.[3]

Not long before Nehru's death, the United Kingdom had its own 'succession' drama, with the Conservatives deeply split on the choice of Harold Macmillan's successor. The left-wing *Guardian* newspaper gleefully remarked that the 'new Prime Minister of India, in spite of all forebodings, has been named with more dispatch, and much more dignity, than was the new Prime Minister of Britain'.[4] The paper's New Delhi correspondent met Nehru's successor, whom he found 'rock-sure of himself' , a 'very strong man indeed' who spoke in short and sharp sentences – 'no words wasted'.[5]

Old colonial hands were less optimistic. Nehru's death, wrote one ICS man to another, had made India's future fraught with uncertainty. For 'I can't imagine S[h]astri has the stature to hold things together, and all the trouble-makers from Kashmir to Comorin will work to fish in troubled waters, to say nothing of China and Pakistan. Cyprus on a big scale? What revolting times we live in!'[6]

II

With his death, Nehru's Kashmir initiative also died. However, on the other side of the country, moves were afoot to resolve the dispute between the Naga rebels and the government of India. Pained by a decade of bloodshed, the Baptist Church of Nagaland had constituted a 'peace mission' of individuals trusted both by the underground movement and the government of India. The three members agreed upon were the chief minister of Assam B. P. Chaliha, the widely respected Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narayan and the Anglican priest Michael Scott, who had helped secure refuge in London for the Naga leader A. Z. Phizo.

Through the summer of 1964 this peace mission travelled through the territory, meeting members of the state government as well as of the 'Federal Republic of Nagaland'. A ceasefire agreement was signed by both sides; it came into effect on 6 September, signalled by the pealing of church bells. Two weeks later the first round of talks began between the government of India and the rebels.[7]

From Kohima, Jayaprakash Narayan wrote to a friend that, although the situation was still unpredictable, 'the strongest desire of almost every Naga at the present time seems to be for a lasting peace. The Naga people are dreading nothing more than the resumption of hostilities'. Then he added, less optimistically: 'However, it has to be said that as far as the talks between the Government of India and the underground leaders are concerned, very little progress so far has been made.[8]

The records of the talks between the government and the rebels do reveal a fundamental incommensurability of positions. The NNC leader, Isak Swu, began by saying that 'today we are here as two nations – Nagas and Indians, side by side'. The foreign secretary, Y. D. Gundevia, answered that 'we are not living as two nations side by side. History tells us that Nagaland was a part and parcel of India.' Between these two opposed positions, B. P. Chaliha and Jayaprakash Narayan tried valiantly to locate common ground.Chaliha praised the Nagas as 'a people of rare and high qualities' , and hoped that 'both parties will find a way to remove the gulf' between them. Narayan argued that 'compromise is possible because we think that both sides have part of the truth. If one were 100 per cent right, or 100 per cent wrong, there could be no question of compromise.'[9]

The demand for Naga independence presented a powerful challenge to the idea of India. Another somewhat different challenge was presented by the testing of a nuclear device by China in October 1964. Immediately there were calls for India to develop an atom bomb of its own. On 24 October the director of India's Atomic Energy Commission, Dr Homi J. Bhabha, gave a talk on All-India Radio on the nuclear question. He spoke of the need for universal nuclear disarmament, yet hinted that, pending that eventuality, India might develop a nuclear deterrent of its own. There was no means of successfully stopping a nuclear thrust in mid-flight, said Dr Bhabha, adding: 'The only defence against such an attack appears to be a capability and threat of retaliation.' Further, 'atomic weapons give a state possessing them in adequate numbers a deterrent power against attack from a much stronger state'. Later in his talk, Dr Bhabha examined the cost of constructing an atomic stockpile. By his calculations, fifty bombs would cost about Rs100 million, an expenditure that was 'small compared with the military budgets of many countries'.[10]

The scientist's talk was grist to the mill of those politicians – mostly from the Jana Sangh – who had long advocated that India test its own atom bombs. The MP from Dewas, Hukum Chandra Kachwai, moved a resolution in the Lok Sabha to this effect. In an eloquent speech he identified China as India's main *dushman* (enemy). 'Whatever weapons the enemy possesses, we must possess them too', he thundered. Evoking memories of the war of 1962, he said that the nation should not rest until it had reclaimed every inch of land lost to or stolen by China. The possession of an atomic stockpile would, he argued, also increase India s prestige in the wider world.

A lively debate ensued, with some members endorsing Kachwai, others opposing him in the name of India s reputation as a force for peace. In hisown intervention the prime minister claimed that the promoters of the bomb had misread Dr Bhabha's intentions. The scientist was calling for disarmament, while the production costs referred to the United States, whose developed atomic infrastructure made the manufacture of additional bombs possible at little expense. In India, the costs would be prohibitive, said Shastri; in any case, to manufacture these deadly weapons would be to depart from the tradition of Gandhi and Nehru. Notably, the prime minister spoke not in narrow nationalistic terms but from the perspective of the human race. These bombs, he said, were a threat to the survival of the world, an affront to humanity (*manushyata*) as a whole.

Shastri's speech was somewhat defensive, and certainly less stirring than that of the chief speaker on the other side. But the large Congress majority in the House ensured that the resolution asking India to go the nuclear route was comfortably defeated.[11]

III

India's Republic Day, 26 January, is annually celebrated in New Delhi by a government-sponsored march down Rajpath (formerly Kingsway), with gaily decorated floats representing the different states competing with tanks and mounted submarines for attention. In 1965, Republic Day was to be more than a symbolic show of national pride – it would also signal a substantial affirmation of national unity. Back in 1949 the Constituent Assembly had chosen Hindi as the official language of the Union of India. The constitution which ratified this came into operation on 26 January 1950. However, there would be a fifteen-year 'grace period', when English was to be used along with Hindi in communication between the centre and the states. Now this period was ending; henceforth, Hindi would prevail.

Southern politicians had long been worried about the change. In 1956 the Academy of Tamil

Culture passed a resolution urging that 'English should continue to be the official language of the Union and the language for communication between the Union and the State Governments and between one State Government and another'. The signatories included C. N. Annadurai, E. V. Ramaswami 'Periyar', and C. Rajagopalachari. The organization of the campaign was chiefly the work of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which organized many protest meetings against the imposition of Hindi.[12]

In the wake of the China war the DMK had dropped its secessionist plank. It no longer wanted a separate country; but it did want to protect the culture and language of the Tamil people. The DMK's acknowledged leader was C. N. Annadurai. Known universally as 'Anna' (or elder brother), he was a gifted orator who had done much to build his party into a credible force in the state. In Anna s opinion Hindi was merely a regional language like any other. It had no 'special merit'; in fact, it was less developed than other Indian tongues, less suited to a time of rapid advances in science and technology. To the argument that more Indians spoke Hindi than any other language, Anna sarcastically answered: 'If we had to accept the principle of numerical superiority while selecting our national bird, the choice would have fallen not on the peacock but on the common crow.'[13]

Jawaharlal Nehru had been sensitive to the sentiments of the south; sentiments shared by the east and north-east as well. In 1963 he piloted the passing of an Official Languages Act, which provided that from 1965 English 'may' still be used along with Hindi in official communication. That caveat proved problematic; for while Nehru clarified that 'may' meant 'shall', other Congress politicians thought it actually meant 'may not'.[14]

As 26 January 1965 approached, the opponents of Hindi geared up for action. Ten days before Republic Day, Annadurai wrote to Shastri saying that his party would observe the day of the changeover as a 'day of mourning'. But he added an interesting rider in the form of a request to postpone the day of imposition by a week. Then the DMK could enthusiastically join the rest of the nation in celebrating Republic Day.

Shastri and his government stood by the decision to make Hindi official on 26 January. In response, the DMK launched a statewide campaign of protest. In numerous villages bonfires were made to burn effigies of the Hindi demoness. Hindi books and the relevant pages of the constitution were also burnt. In railway stations and post offices, Hindi signs were removed or blackened over. In towns across the state there were fierce and sometimes deadly battles between the police and angry students.[15]

The protests were usually collective: strikes and processions; *bandhs*, *hartals* and *dharnas*.The headlines in the *Hindu* newspaper tell part of the story:

TOTAL HARTAL IN COIMBATORE

ADVOCATES ABSTAIN FROM WORK

STUDENTS FAST IN BATCHES

PEACEFUL STRIKE IN MADURAI

LATHI-CHARGE IN VILLUPURAM

TEAR-GAS USED IN UTHAMAPALTAM

There was one form of protest that was individual, and disturbingly so: the taking of one's life. On Republic Day itself, two men set themselves on fire in Madras. One left a letter saying he wanted to sacrifice himself at the altar of Tamil. Three days later a twenty-year-old man in Tiruchi poisoned

himself with insecticide. He too left a note saying his suicide was in the cause of Tamil. These 'martyrdoms', in turn, sparked dozens more strikes and boycotts.

There is a vivid account of the revolt by a police officer asked to quell it. When a party of constables entered the town of Tiruppur, they found that the rioting was over but crowds still hung around, curious or sullen. Police lorries and jeeps lay burnt and smouldering on the streets and in the *taluk* office compound. The police station was in a shambles, a spare transmitter overturned, all the glass broken and the verandah fence torn down. Injured constables were resting inside and the inspector lay on his back with a stomach injury. Dead bodies of rioters were strewn about, one on the station steps, another on a street behind. A third, shot clean through the navel, lay on a river bank close by, an abusive crowd behind it still being held at bay by a rifle party.

The 'real mistake', writes this officer, was in 'the failure to appreciate the depth of feeling' evoked by the imposition of Hindi. What some in New Delhi saw as 'an exhibition of mere parochial fanaticism' was in fact 'a local nationalist movement'.[16]

The intensity of the anti-Hindi protests alarmed the central government. Soon it became clear that the ruling Congress Party was split down the middle on the issue. On the last day of January a group of prominent Congress Party members met in Bangalore to issue an appeal to 'the Hindi-loving people not to try to force Hindi on the people of non-Hindi areas'. The hustling of Hindi in haste, they said, would imperil the unity of the country.

The signatories to this appeal included S. Nijalingappa (Chief Minister of Mysore), Atulya Ghosh (the boss of the Bengal Congress), Sanjiva Reddy (a senior Union minister), and K. Kamaraj (the Congress president). On the same day, they were answered by the high-ranking Congress leader Morarji Desai. Speaking to the press in Tirupati, Desai claimed that by learning Hindi the Tamil people would only increase their influence within India as a whole. The Congress leaders in Madras, he said, should 'convince the people of their mistake [in opposingHindi] and get them around'. Desai regretted that Hindi had not been made official in the 1950s, before the protests against it had crystallized. Only Hindi could be the link language in India, for the alternative, English, 'is not our language'. 'No regional sentiments', insisted Desai, 'should come in the way of this move of the Government to forge the integration of the country further'.[17]

The prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, was now placed in the hot seat. His heart was with the Hindi zealots; his head, however, urged him to listen to other voices. On 11 February the resignation of two Union ministers from Madras forced his hand. The same evening the prime minister went on All-India Radio to convey his 'deep sense of distress and shock' at the 'tragic events'. To remove any 'misapprehension' and 'misunderstanding', he said he would fully honour Nehru's assurance that English would be used as long as the people wanted. Then he made four assurances of his own:

First, every state would have complete and unfettered freedom to continue to transact its own business in the language of its own choice, which may be the regional language or English.

Secondly, communications from one state to another would be either in English or accompanied by an authentic English translation.

Thirdly, the non-Hindi states would be free to correspond with the central government in English and no change would be made in this arrangement without the consent of the non-Hindi states.

Fourthly, in the transaction of business at the central level English would continue to be used.

Later, Shastri added a crucial fifth assurance – that the All-India Civil Services Examination would continue to be conducted in English rather than (as the *Hindiwallahs* wanted) in Hindi alone.[18]

A week after the prime minister spoke on the radio there was a long and very heated discussion in Parliament on the riots in the Tamil country. Proponents of Hindi insisted that those who opposed

the language were against the constitution and in effect anti-national; they also claimed that by giving in to violence the government would encourage more outbreaks of violence. Tamil members answered that they had 'already sacrificed enough for the Hindi demon'. They were supported by two stalwarts from Bengal – Hiren Mukherjee from the left, who accused the Hindi zealots of a 'contemptuous disregard' for those who did not speak their language, and N. C. Chatterjee from the right, who pointed out that 'the greatest integrating force today is the juridical and the legal unity of India', this enabled by the fact that the Supreme Court and the High Courts functioned in English. The Anglo-Indian member, Frank Anthony, deplored the 'increasing intolerance, increasing obscurantism, increasing chauvinism of those who purport to speak on behalf of Hindi'. J. B. Kripalani, speaking in a lighter vein, thought that the Hindi chauvinists had no hope at all. Even Indian babies, he noted, now 'do not say: Amma or Appa, but mummy and papa. We talk to our dogs also in English.' Kripalani remarked that 'Mr Anthony is very unnecessarily excited about the fate of his mother tongue. In England it [English] may disappear, [but] in India it will not disappear.[19]

The parallels with the language question of the 1950s are uncanny. Then, too, a popular social movement led the prime minister of the day to reconsider both the stated official position and his own preferences. Nehru opposed linguistic states; Shastri believed Hindi should be the sole official language of the Union. But when protest spilled out into the streets, and when protesters were willing to offer their lives – Potti Sriramulu in 1953, a dozen Tamil young men in 1965 – the prime minister was forced to reconsider. Strikingly, in each case the Congress rank and file seemed to side with the opposition rather than with their own government. As withNehru, Shastri's change of heart was occasioned as much by considerations of preserving party unity as by the unity of the nation itself.

IV

From south India, let us move back to that old trouble spot in the north, Kashmir. In March 1965 Sheikh Abdullah set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca. He took the long route, via London, where one of his sons was based. The Sheikh had been told by Shastri, via Sudhir Ghosh – a Rajya Sabha MP and a one-time associate of Mahatma Gandhi – that the best he could hope for was an autonomous Valley within the Indian Union. Ghosh thought the Lion of Kashmir was coming around to the idea, if slowly. He wrote to Horace Alexander, a Quaker and an old friend of India, asking him to keep a watch on Abdullah in London; the solution being charted for Kashmir would 'be ruined if, under pressure from over-zealous British newspaper men, Sheikh Abdullah makes a few unwise statements in London . . . A few wrong remarks will give those elements in the Congress Party who are anxious to push their knives into Sheikh the necessary handle to upset the possibility of any settlement.' [20]

Abdullah seems not to have said anything indiscreet in the United Kingdom. He proceeded to Mecca and stopped in Algiers on his way home. There he did something far worse than speak carelessly to a British journalist; he met with the Chinese prime minister, Chou En-lai, who also happened to be in the Algerian capital. The content of their conversations was not disclosed, but it was enough that he had supped with the enemy. It was assumed that (as in 1953, when he met Adlai Stevenson) Sheikh Abdullah had discussed the possibility of an independent Kashmir. Back then it took four months for the Sheikh to be jailed. Now he was placed under arrest as he got off the plane at New Delhi s Palam Airport. He was taken to a government bungalow in the capital and, a little later, transported across the country to the southern hill town of Kodaikanal. Here he was given a charming cottage, with fine views of hills not nearly as grand as those in Kashmir, but forbidden to travel

outside municipal limits or meet visitors without official permission.

The news of the Sheikh's arrest was greeted with loud cheers in both Houses of Parliament. He was seen as having betrayed India not just by talking to a Chinese leader, but by doing so while the other foe, Pakistan, was nibbling away at the borders. For while Abdullah was on pilgrimage a conflict broke out over the Rann of Kutch, a salt marsh claimed both by Pakistan and India. In the first week of April troops exchanged fire in the Rann. The Pakistanis used their American tanks to shell enemy positions – successfully, for the Indians had to withdraw some forty miles to dry land. Angry telegrams were exchanged before the two sides agreed to international arbitration under British auspices.[21]

One person dismayed by the rise of jingoism was Horace Alexander. He wrote to Mrs Indira Gandhi and received a reply putting the inflamed sentiments in perspective. 'What Sheikh Sahib does not realize', said Mrs Gandhi, 'is that with the Chinese invasion and the latest moves in and by Pakistan, the position of Kashmir has completely changed.' For the frontiers of the state touched China and the USSR as well as India and Pakistan. And 'in the present world situation, an independent Kashmir would become a hot-bed of intrigue and, apart from the countries mentioned above, would also attract espionage and other activities from the USA and UK.'[22]

Abdullah's arrest and the clash in Kutch had put an idea into the head of the Pakistani president, Ayub Khan. This was to foment an insurrection in the Indian part of Kashmir, leading either to a war ending with the state being annexed to Pakistan, or in international arbitration with the same result. In the late summer of 1965 the Pakistan army began planning 'Operation Gibraltar', named for a famous Moorish military victory in medieval Spain. Kashmiri militants were trained in the use of small arms, with their units named after legendary warriors of the Islamic past –Suleiman, Salahuddin, and so on.[23]

In the first week of August, groups of irregulars crossed the ceasefire line into Kashmir. They proceeded to blow up bridges and fire-bomb government installations. The intention was to create confusion, and also to spark unrest. Radio Pakistan announced that a popular uprising had broken out in the Valley. In fact, the local population was mostly apathetic – some intruders were even handed over to the police.[24]

When the hoped-for rebellion did not materialize, Pakistan launched its reserve plan, codenamed 'Operation Grand Slam'. Troops crossed the ceasefire line in the Jammu sector and, using heavy artillery and mortar, made swift progress. The Indians fought back and, in the Uri sector, succeeded in capturing the pass of Haji Pir, a strategic point from where they could look out for infiltrators.[25]

On 1 September the Pakistan army launched a major offensive in Chhamb. An infantry division with two regiments of American Patton tanks crossed the border. Catching the Indians by surprise, they occupied thirty square miles within twenty-four hours. Their aim was to capture the bridge at Akhnoor, thus to sever links between Jammu and Kashmir and the state of Punjab. The defenders now called in their air force, with some thirty aircraft raining down bombs on the enemy. The Indian Vampires were answered by Pakistani Sabre jets.

By the 5th the Indian position was getting desperate, with the Pakistanis pressing hard on Akhnoor. To relieve the pressure, New Delhi ordered the army to open a new front. On the morning of the 6th, several tank regiments, supported by infantry, crossed the international border that divided the Punjab. They were heading straight for Pakistan's first city, Lahore. Pakistani troops and tanks were hastily redeployed from the Kashmir operation. Now commenced perhaps the most bitter tank battle seen anywhere since the end of the Second World War. The two sides fought each other inch for inch, sometimes in barren soil, at other times in the middle of sugar-cane fields. The Indians

routed the Pakistanis around Asal Uttar but then, attempting to recapture Khem Karan, were badly mauled in turn. The Indian commander, a veteran of the Second World War, said that he had 'never seen so many tanks destroyed, lying there in the battlefield like abandoned toys'.[26]

Overhead, the aeroplanes screamed en route to attack the enemy's bases. A large tonnage of bombs was dropped by both sides, but –as an Indian chronicler later wrote – 'luckily or unluckily some of the bombs failed to explode – they were old and had been supplied to the contending parties mostly by the same source'.[27]

As the battles raged, the Chinese weighed in with words in support of the Pakistanis. On 4 September Marshal Chen Yi, visiting Karachi, condemned 'Indian imperialism for violating the Cease-Fire Line', and endorsed 'the just actions taken by the Government of Pakistan to repel India's armed provocations . Three days later Peking issued a statement claiming that India was 'still entrenched' over large sections of Chinese territory. The next day Chou En-lai stated that 'India's acts of aggression pose a threat to peace in this part of Asia'.[28]

Back in New Delhi, a surge of patriotic sentiment had overcome the population. At the daily press briefing, newsmen would ask the government spokesman: '(Has Lahore airport fallen?' 'Is the radio station under our control?' Lahore never fell, although why this was so remained a matter of dispute. The Indians argued that capturing the city was never on the agenda – why get into a house-to-house operation with a hostile population? The Pakistanis claimed that the Indian chief of army staff had bragged that he would have his evening drink at the Lahore Gymkhana – but the brave defenders of the city never allowed himto.[29]

The escalation of hostilities alarmed the superpowers, and on 6 September the United Nations Security Council met to discuss the matter. The UN secretary general, U Thant, flew to the subcontinent, and after meeting leaders in both capitals got them to agree to a ceasefire. The decision was made easier by the fact that in the Punjab the two sides had fought themselves to a stalemate. On 22 September hostilities were finally called off.

The battle stook place principally in two sectors in the north-west – Kashmir and the Punjab. There were some exchanges in Sindh, but the eastern border – dividing the two halves of Bengal – stayed quiet. As is common in such cases, both sides claimed victory, exaggerating the enemy's losses and understating their own. In truth, the war must be declared a draw. As a reasonably independent authority had it, the Pakistanis lost 3,000 to 5,000 men, about 250 tanks and 50 aircraft, whereas the casualties on the Indian side were 4,000 to 6,000 men, about 300 tanks, and 50 aircraft. With their much larger population, and bigger army, the Indians were better able to absorb these losses. [30]

For the Western public, the *Reader's Digest* magazine provided this colourful summary of the war far away: 'The blood of Pakistani and Indian soldiers stained the wheat-lands of the Punjab and the stony ridges of Kashmir; vultures hung over corpses on the Grand Trunk Road, the immortal highway of Kipling's *Kim*; and refugees huddled against tilting bullock carts, hesitant to start the journey home.'[31]

V

Before the war Shastri and Ayub Khan had met once, at Karachi in October 1964, when the Indian leader stopped there on his way home from Cairo. There is a photograph of the two together, the army man dressed in a suit, towering over the little Gandhian in his *dhoti*. Ayub was deeply unimpressed

by the Indian, telling an aide: 'So this is the man who has succeeded Nehru!' [32]

There is little question that the Pakistani leadership seriously underestimated the Indian will to fight. Operation Gibraltar was conceived in 'the euphoric aftermath' of the Kutch conflict, which had 'shown the Indians in a poor light'.[33] In the first week of June 1965 the *Dawn* newspaper carried an essay written pseudonymously by a high official, which analysed Indian troop deployment before recommending that Pakistani strategy should 'obviously be to go for a knock-out in the Mohamed Ali Clay style'.[34] An army directive confidently stated that 'as a general rule Hindu morale would not stand more than a couple of hard blows delivered at the right time and place'.[35]

There was, indeed, an unmistakably religious idiom to an operation initiated by Pakistani Muslims on behalf of their brethren in Kashmir. Memories of wars fought and won ten centuries ago were evoked. The radicals in Pakistan believed that the *kafir* would be vanquished by the combination of Islamic fervour and American arms.[36] The hope was that after the Kashmiris had arisen, their brothers would cut off enemy communication, and 'start the long expected tank promenade down the Grand Trunk Road to Delhi', forcing a humiliating surrender.[37] The song on the lips of the warriors was: '*Hus ke liya hai Pakistan, ladh ke lenge Hindustan*' (We achieved Pakistan laughing, we will take India fighting).

As it happened, the attack united the Indians. Many Kashmiris stood with the army against the invaders. A Muslim soldier from Kerala won India's highest military honour, the Param Vir Chakra. Another Muslim, this time from Rajasthan and ironically named Ayub Khan, knocked out a couple of Pakistani tanks. All across India Muslim intellectuals and divines issued statements condemning Pakistan and expressing their desire to sacrifice their lives for the motherland.[38]

Ayub and company were encouraged by the debacle against China in 1962. But that was in the wet and slippery Himalaya, whereas this was terrain the Indians knew much better. The army commanders in 1965 had won their first spurs fighting tank battles on flat land in the Second World War. Besides, in the years since the Chinese disaster they had been provided with more (and better) equipment. The new defence minister, Y. B. Chavan, had gone on an extensive shopping spree in 1964, visiting Western capitals and the Soviet bloc to buy the tanks, planes, rifles and submarines that his forces required.[39]

This defence minister was more respected by his troops than his counterpart in 1962. Chavan was no Krishna Menon and, when it came to the conduct of war, Shastri was no Nehru either. He certainly preferred peace, writing to a friend after the Kutch conflict that in his view the problems between India and Pakistan should be settled amicably, step by step. He hoped that 'our fights and disputes do not take a form that makes battle inevitable'.[40] But when war came he was decisive, swift to take the advice of his commanders and order the strike across the Punjab border. (In a comparable situation, in 1962, Nehru had refused to call in the air force to relieve the pressure.) And when the conflict ended he was happy to be photographed – *dhoti* and all – atop a captured Patton tank, a gesture that would not have come easily to his predecessor.

However, in one respect Shastri was indeed like Nehru – in his refusal to mix matters of state with matters of faith. Days after the ceasefire, with patriotic feelings riding high, he spoke at a public meeting at the Ram Lila grounds in Delhi. Here he took issue with a BBC report that claimed that 'since India's Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri is a Hindu, he is ready for war with Pakistan'. Shastri said that while he was a Hindu, 'Mir Mushtaq who is presiding over this meeting is a Muslim. Mr Frank Anthony who has addressed you is a Christian. There are also Sikhs and Parsis here. The unique thing about our country is that we have Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis and people of all other religions. We have temples and mosques, *gurdwaras* and churches. But we do not bring

this all into politics . . . This is the difference between India and Pakistan. Whereas Pakistan proclaims herself to be an Islamic State and uses religion as a political factor, we Indians have the freedom to follow whatever religion we may choose [and] worship in anyway we please. So far as politics is concerned, each of us is as much an Indian as the other.' [41]

VI

During the Pakistan war, the prime minister coined the slogan 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' (Hail the Soldier, Hail the Farmer). To salute the ordinary *jawan* in a nation given birth by Gandhian pacifism was distinctive, but so was the invocation of the humble *kisan*, in a nation taught to admire blast furnaces and high hydroelectric dams.

In fact, one of Shastri's first acts as prime minister was to increase budget allocations to agriculture. He was deeply concerned about the shortfalls in food production in recent years. The rate of increase of food grain had just about kept pace with the growth of population. If the rains failed, panic set in, with merchants hoarding grain and the state desperate to move stocks from surplus to deficit areas. There had been a drought in 1964, and another in 1965. Seeking along-term solution, Shastri appointed C. Subramaniam to head the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Born in 1910 into a family of farmers, Subramaniam had degrees in science and the law, and practised as an advocate before joining the freedom struggle. He had been a member of the Constituent Assembly, and was a widely admired minister in Madras before he joined the Union Cabinet. Subramaniam was known to be intelligent and a go-getter, which is why Nehru had placed him in charge of the prestigious Ministry of Steel and Mines. To shift him from Steel to Agriculture signalled a major change indeed.[42]

Subramaniam took to his new job with vigour. He focused on the reorganization of agricultural science, improving the pay and working conditions of scientists and protecting them from bureaucratic interference. The Indian Council for Agricultural Research, previously a somewhat somnolent body, acquired a new life and identity. Besides reviving the ICAR, Subramaniam also encouraged the states to set up agricultural universities, whose research focused on crops particular to that region. He began experimental farms, and set up a Seed Corporation of India to produce, in bulk, the quality seeds that would be needed for the proposed programmes of agricultural intensification.

Two of Subramaniam s key aides were, like him, from the Tamil country. One was the able secretary of agriculture, B. Sivaraman; the other was the scientist M. S. Swaminathan, who was directing the research teams adapting Mexican wheat to Indian conditions. It was around this crop that the new strategy revolved. Notably, while wheat is grown principally in the north of the country, these three architects of India s agricultural policy were all from the (very deep) south.[43]

Meanwhile, Subramaniam prevailed upon the United States to provide food aid till such time as the Indians were able to augment their own production. He met with and impressed the American president, Lyndon Johnson, and forged a close partnership with the US secretary of agriculture, Orville Freeman. In December 1965 Subramaniam and Freeman signed an agreement in Rome whereby India committed itself to a substantial increase in investment in agriculture, to a reform of the rural credit system, and to an expansion of fertilizer production and consumption. In return, the Americans provided a series of soft loans and agreed to keep wheat supplies going to tide over the shortages at the Indian end.[44]

While Subramaniam was signing what was informally called 'The Treaty of Rome', his prime

minister was preparing to go to Moscow to sign a treaty of his own. This was with his Pakistani counterpart, Ayub Khan. After the war had ended, the Soviets offered their help in working out a peace settlement. In the first week of January 1966 Shastri and Ayub met in Tashkent, with the Soviet prime ministerAlexei Kosygin as the chief mediator. After a week of hard bargaining the two sides agreed to give up what they most prized – international arbitration of the Kashmir dispute for Pakistan, the retention of key posts captured during the war (such as the Haji Pir pass) for India. The 'Tashkent Agreement' mandated the withdrawal of forces to the positions they held before 5 August 1965, the orderly transfer of prisoners of war, the resumption of diplomatic relations and the disavowal of force to settle future disputes.[45]

The agreement was signed on the afternoon of 10 January 1966. That night Shastri died in his sleep of a heart attack. On the 11th his body was flown to New Delhi on a Soviet aircraft. The next morning the body was placed on a gun carriage and taken in procession to the banks of the Jamuna, to be cremated not far from where Gandhi and Nehru had been. *Life* magazine made the event a cover story – as they had done with the death of Shastri's predecessor twenty months before. There were vivid pictures of the million-strong crowd, come to honour a man 'with whom many [Indians] felt a closer affinity than with Nehru'. What Shastri gave India, said *Life*, 'was mainly a mood – a new steeliness and sense of national unity'. The Chinese war had brought the country to a state of near collapse, but this time, when war came, 'everything worked – the trains ran, the army held fast, there was no communal rioting. The old moral pretentiousness, the disillusion and drift, the fear and dismay were gone.' [46]

This was a handsome tribute, but more notable perhaps were the compliments paid by those predisposed by ties of kin to see Shastri as an interloper. In the first months of the new prime minister's tenure, Mrs Indira Gandhi had complained that he was departing from herfather's legacy. Within a year she was constrained to admit that 'Mr Shastri is, I think, feeling stronger now and surer of himself'.[47] Then there was Vijayalakshmi Pandit, who was even more fanatically devoted to her brother's memory. In July 1964 she thought that the morale of the government of India was at 'an unbelievably low level' – and 'there is now no Jawaharlal Nehru to stand up and restore confidence in the minds of the people'. On Shastri's death, however, she felt 'very sad', for 'he had begun to grow and we all thought he would put India on the right road'.[48] The condescension was characteristic, but when we consider who was writing this and when, this must be considered very high praise indeed.

Lal Bahadur Shastri may perhaps be seen as being in relation to Jawaharlal Nehru as Harry Truman was to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Nehru and FDR both came from upper-class backgrounds, enjoyed long periods in power, undertook fundamental changes in their society and nation and were greatly venerated for doing so. Shastri, like Truman, was a small town boy of modest background, whose lack of charisma concealed a firm will and independence of mind. As with Truman, his background had endowed him with a keen practical sense, this in contrast to the more consciously intellectual – not to say ideological – style of his predecessor. Where the comparison breaks down is with regard to length of service. Whereas Truman had a full seven years as president of the United States, Shastri died less than two years after being sworn in as prime minister of India.

VII

On Shastri's death, Gulzarilal Nanda was once more sworn in as interim prime minister, and once

more Kamaraj went in search of a permanent successor. Once more, Morarji Desai threw his hat in the ring. Once more, Kamaraj rejected him in favour of a more widely acceptable candidate.

The person whom the Congress president had in mind to succeed Shastri was Mrs Indira Gandhi. She was young – having just turned forty-eight – attractive, known to world leaders, and the daughter of the best-loved of Indians. To soothe a nation hit by two quick losses, she seemed the most obvious choice. True, Mrs Gandhi had little administrative experience, but this time the Congress 'Syndicate' would ensure that hers would be a properly 'collective' leadership.

The chief ministers consulted by Kamaraj quickly endorsed Mrs Gandhi's name. So far, so good – except that Morarji Desai decided he would contest for the leadership. So New Delhi now 'became the cockpit of concerted canvassing, large-scale lobbying, and hectic horse-trading'. Mrs Gandhi and Morarji Desai met with major leaders, while their seconds stalked the rankand file.[49]

In terms of experience as well as ability Desai should have been the favourite. Jawaharlal Nehru had once written of him that there 'were very few people whom I respect so much for their rectitude, ability, efficiency and fairness as Morarji Desai'.[50] It is doubtful whether he would have written about his own daughter in quite that fashion – certainly, he had no hope that Indira Gandhi would ever succeed him as prime minister. However, the words I have quoted are from a private letter; neither Desai nor his supporters were privy to it. Even if they had been, it is unlikely that it would have helped. With Kamaraj and the Syndicate so solidly backing Mrs Gandhi, and others in the Congress Party having their own reservations regarding Desai, Nehru's daughter commanded majority support in the Congress Parliamentary Party. When that body voted to choose a prime minister on 19 January 1966, she won by 355 votes to 169. Kamaraj had 'lined up the State satraps behind Mrs Gandhi', wrote one Delhi journal somewhat cynically, because 'the State leaders would accept only an innocuous person for Prime Minister at the Centre'.[51]

VIII

Mrs Gandhi was the second woman to be elected to lead a free nation (Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon having been the first); and the second member of her own family to become prime minister of India. Her first months in office were, if anything, as troubled as her father's. Nothing much happened in February, but in March a major revolt broke out in the Mizo hills. A tribal district bordering East Pakistan, these jagged hills were home to a population of a mere 300,000 people. But, as in Nagaland, among them were some motivated young men determined to carve out a homeland of their own.

The origins of the Mizo conflict go back to a famine in 1959, when a massive flowering of bamboo led to an explosion in the population of rats. These devoured the grain in the fields and in village warehouses, causing a scarcity of food for humans. A Mizo National Famine Front was formed, which found the state's response wanting. The first 'F' was then dropped, leading to the creation of the Mizo National Front (MNF). This asked first for a separate state within the Indian Union and then for a separate country itself.

The leader of the MNF was a one-time accountant named Laldenga. Deeply affected by the famine, he sought succour in books – the detective stories of Peter Cheyney to begin with, graduating in time to the works of Winston Churchill and primers on guerrilla warfare. In the winter of 1963/4 Laldenga made contact with the military government of East Pakistan, who promised him guns and money, and a base from which to mount attacks. The arms so obtained were cached in forests along

the border.[52]

After years of patient planning, during which he recruited many young Mizos and trained them in the use of modern weaponry, Laldenga launched an uprising on the last day of February 1966. Groups of MNF soldiers attacked government offices and installations, looted banks, and disrupted communications. Roads were blocked to prevent the army moving troops into the area. In early March the MNF announced that the territory had seceded from the Indian Union and was now an 'independent' republic.[53]

The MNF captured one main town, Lungleh, and pressed hard on the district capital, Aizawl. The Indian response was to call in the army, and also the air force. Lungleh was strafed to force the rebels out, this the first time air power had been used by the Indian state against its own citizens. As in Nagaland, the rebels took refuge in the jungle, visiting the villages by night. After a fortnight caught up in the fierce fighting, a Welsh missionary working in the area managed to smuggle out this report to a friend in England:

> On Saturday morning we packed as many of our things as we could into trunks . . . and packed [a bag] to carry to go to Durlang through the jungle . . . Five minutes before we were due to start an aeroplane came overhead machine gunning . . . They were not firing at random, but trying to aim at the rebels' position as it were . . . We were there all day and the men were digging a trench, and we sheltered in it every time the jets came over firing. Pakhlira saw his house go up in flames. We prepared a meal of rice in a small house, but decided that it wasn't safe to sleep there and we all slept out in a terrace in the jungle where there was a sheltering bank. Not much sleep. We rose in the night and saw the whole Dawrupi go into flames from the furthest end to the Republic Road. They say that it was an effort by Laldenga's followers to burn the Assam Rifles out of the town.

The letter vividly captures the frightening position of ordinary Mizos caught in the cross-fire between the insurgents and the state. It goes on to speak, in more reflective vein, of how the conflict

> will be a very serious setback for the country . . . The government had to send in an army such as this so as to put a stop to this thing from the beginning in case it turns out to be like the country of the Nagas. We can only hope that the rebels will surrender so that things can get back to normal as soon as possible, but education will be in a complete mess for some time. The Matric[ulation] Exam is supposed to start next week. Avery great responsibility rests on the shoulders [of rebel leaders] like Laldenga and Sakhlawliana for reducing the country to this sad condition . . . [54]

Far from surrendering, the rebels fought on, the conflict running for the rest of the year and into the next. Meanwhile, in Nagaland, the Peace Mission had collapsed. In the last week of February 1966 Jayaprakash Narayan resigned from the mission, saying that he had lost the confidence of the Nagas. 'JP' had told the underground that in the aftermath of the IndoPakistan war they should drop their demand for independence, and settle for autonomy within the Indian Union instead. In the federal system, foreign affairs and defence were in the hands of the centre, but the things that most mattered – education, health, economic development, culture – were in the control of the states. So JP advised Phizo's men to shed their arms and contest elections, thus to take over the administration by peaceful

means.[55]

At the same time as JP became disenchanted with the rebels, Michael Scott had lost the confidence of the Indian government. They accused him of seeking to 'internationalize' the Naga issue by approaching the United Nations. Scott had suggested that likely models for Nagaland were Bhutan and Sikkim – nominally independent countries each with its own flag, currency and ruler, but militarily subordinated to India. In May 1966 New Delhi asked Scott to leave the country, making it clear that he was not welcome to return.[56]

There was no question that Michael Scott was deeply committed to the Naga cause. Between 1962 and 1966 he must have visited India a dozen times on Phizo's behalf. Sadly, he could not see that political independence for the Nagas was unacceptable to the Indian government. They were prepared to grant Phizo amnesty, safe passage into Nagaland, even the chief ministership of the state if he so desired. But the old rebel doggedly held out for more; and Scott supported him. Thus it was that another Englishman with long experience of India, the journalist Guy Wint, was constrained to comment that 'the main obstacle to peace [in the Naga hills] lies in the fanaticism of such people as Michael Scott and David Astor; both of whom allow themselves to be used by Phizo. Neither has any conception of what is at stake in accepting the Naga claim for complete secession.[57]

The breakdown of the peace talks was signalled by a wave of attacks on civilian targets. On 20 April a bomb went off in a train in upper Assam, killing fifty-five passengers. Three days later a similar explosion claimed a further forty lives. The Naga radicals were now making contact withPeking, whose help they sought in renewing their struggle.[58]

Tribes were restive on the borders, and in parts of the heartland as well. Food scarcity in the district of Bastar, in central India, had sparked a popular movement led by the deposed Maharaja, Pravi Chandra Bhanj Deo. Pravi Chandra and his followers claimed that prosperity would return only when he, the rightful heir, was returned to the throne. The Maharaja was traditionally regarded as quasi-divine, as the key intermediary between the people and their gods. A man whose eccentricity bordered on lunacy – the reason the government had replaced him with his brother –Pravi Chandra was nonetheless revered by his people. There were a series of protests asking for his restoration and then, on 25 March, a several-thousand-strong march on the old capital, Jagdalpur. A battle broke out between the tribals, using bows and arrows, and the police, using tear-gas and bullets. When the smoke cleared about forty people were dead, one policeman and the rest tribals. Among those killed was Pravi Chandra. This was, to quote the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh – writing to the home minister in New Delhi – a 'tragic incident' , 'shocking and regrettable'.[59]

From these rebellions the new prime minister turned with relief to the creation of a separate state for the Sikhs. In the war against Pakistan, Sikh commanders as well as *jawans* had distinguished themselves in large numbers. So had the ordinary Punjabi. Farmers opened stalls on the roadside to feed troops with the choicest delicacies. Others offered their homes; yet others nursed the wounded. As the general in command remembered, 'the whole province was electrified to a man. There were no reservations in offering help for the cause.[60]

Their bravery in the war impelled the government of India to concede a longstanding demand of the Sikhs. In March 1966 a committee of MPs recommended a threefold division of the existing state, with the hill districts going to Himachal Pradesh and the eastern, Hindu-majority areas coming to constitute a newstate of Haryana. What these deletions left behind was a Punjab that, finally, was both Punjabi-speaking as well as dominated by Sikhs.[61]

IX

Also in March the prime minister left for her first foreign tour. She stopped at Paris and London, but her main destination was the United States, a country whose goodwill (and grain) was greatly desired by India, for it would be some time before the new agricultural strategy would take effect. C. Subramaniam had ploughed up the lawns of his bungalow in Delhi to plant a new high-yielding variety of wheat, one of a series of experiments to test these new seeds in local conditions. Meanwhile, American farmers had perforce to help put food in Indian mouths.[62]

'New Indian Leader Comes Begging', was how one Alabama paper headlined Mrs Gandhi's visit. She made a more positive impression on the East Coast, handling the press well and impressing the public with the elegance of her dress and the dignityof her manner.Lyndon Johnson seems also to have quite warmed to her.[63] But after her return LBJ chose to keep his supplicants on a tight leash. Whereas the Indians had asked for an annual commitment of food aid, the American president released ships month by month. The American ambassador in New Delhi privately described LBJ's attitude as a 'cruel performance. The Indians must conform; they must be made to fawn; their pride must be cracked.' Despairing of the Indians ever getting their act together, at one stage Johnson suggested sending 1,000 extension workers to teach them how to farm. His ambassador found the thought 'appalling'; not only would these Americans know nothing about agriculture in Asia, they would bring with them '950 wives, 2,500 children, 3,000 air-conditioners, 1,000 jeeps, 1,000 electric refrigerators (many of which won't work), 800 or 900 dogs and 2,000 or 3,000 cats'.[64]

In both 1965 and 1966 India imported 15 million tonnes of American wheat under a public loan scheme known as PL-480, this going to feed 40 million mouths.A memorandum prepared in the US Department of Agriculture stated baldly that 'India was destitute'. When the rains failed again in 1966 the prospect for India was 'one more drought, one more year of acute dependence on PL-480 imports, one more year of exposure to the world as paupers .[65]

Sections of the Washington establishment thought the Indians hypocritical, asking for aid with one hand while attacking American foreign policy with the other. New Delhi s criticisms of the Vietnam War rankled deeply. Lyndon Johnson was not pleased when the Indian president, S. Radhakrishnan, sent a message urging that 'the United States unilaterally and without any commitments cease bombing North Vietnam', adding that when that happened, 'the rest of the world would, through the force of world opinion, bring about negotiations'.[66]

X

The purchase of arms and grain from abroad, along with the import of machinery and materials for industrial development, caused a dangerous dip in India's foreign exchange reserves, which were down to $625 million in March 1966. To counter this, the government decided to devalue the rupee in June. Earlier pegged at Rs4.76 to the US dollar, the exchange rate now became Rs7.50.[67]

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had both recommended devaluation, though its magnitude exceeded even their expectations. However, in India the action was greeted by a storm of protest from the left. The communist MP Hiren Mukherjee claimed that devaluation had been forced on India 'by the cloak and dagger aid givers of America'. A communist trade union called it 'a shameful act of national betrayal'.

Large sections of Mrs Gandhi's own party were opposed to devaluation. Kamaraj, for one, saw it as undermining the policy of national self-reliance. But the action was supported by the free-market Swatantra Party, whose main spokesman in Parliament, Minoo Masani, said that 'if devaluation constituted a first step in a policy of economic realism in place of the doctrinaire policies pursued by the Congress government, it would have some desirable results in boosting the exports and promoting the inflow of foreign capital'.

Writing to a friend, the prime minister said that the devaluation was a 'most difficult and painful decision', taken only 'when various other palliatives which had been tried for the last two years did not produce satisfactory results'[68] The liberal Delhi journal *Thought* went further – this, it said, was 'the hardest decision the Government of India has taken since this country became independent'. The weekly hoped that it would lead to a redirection of economic policy, towards producing goods for export and strengthening India's trading position. Devaluation, said *Thought*, should 'logically mean the end of giganticism in our efforts to develop the nation's economy'.[69]

In the end, though, devaluation was not accompanied by a liberalization of the trade regime. Controls on the inflow of capital remained in place, and there was no push to increase exports. It appears that the criticisms from within and outside her party inhibited Mrs Gandhi from promoting more thorough going reform. The support from Swatantra would not have helped either – if anything, it would have tended to push Nehru's daughter back towards the left.

XI

Throughout 1966, one place that had been unusually quiet was the Valley of Kashmir. The war of 1965 had put secessionists on the back foot. The chief minister, G. M. Sadiq, was providing an efficient and clean administration, conspicuously so in comparison to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed's. The tourist trade was booming, as was the market for Kashmiri handicrafts.

In the late summer of 1966 Jayaprakash Narayan wrote Mrs Gandhi a remarkable letter seeking a permanent solution to a problem that had 'plagued this country for 19 years'. 'Kashmir has distorted India's image for the world as nothing else has done', said JP. Even now, while peace reigned on the surface, beneath there was 'deep and widespread discontent among the people'. The only way to get rid of this was to release Sheikh Abdullah after promising 'full internal autonomy, i.e., a return to the original terms of the accession'. A settlement with Abdullah, believed JP, 'may give us the only chance we may have of solving the Kashmir problem'. For 'the Sheikh is the only Kashmiri leader who could swing Muslim opinion in the valley towards his side'.

His talks with Chou En-lai led to Sheikh Abdullah being dubbed a 'traitor', but in JP's view that act, though indiscreet, was certainly not treasonous. In any case, the Sheikh had come back to India to answer his detractors. JP's associate Narayan Desai met the Kashmiri leader in Kodaikanal and found him amenable to the idea of full autonomy. In the aftermath of the recent war with Pakistan, Abdullah saw quite clearly that an independent Kashmir was out of the question. So Narayan now suggested that the government release Abdullah and permit him to contest the upcoming 1967 general election, to assure the Kashmiris that 'they would be rid of the overbearing Indian police and enjoy full freedom to order their lives as they liked'. If the Sheikh fought and won in the election, if 'it could be shown that they [the Kashmiris] had taken that decision freely at an election run by their own genuine leaders . . ., Pakistan will have no ground left to interfere in their affairs'.

To 'hold a general election in Kashmir with Sheikh Abdullah in prison', remarked Narayan, 'is

like the British ordering an election in India while Jawaharlal Nehru was in prison. No fair-minded person would call it a fair election'. This was a point that should have counted with Mrs Gandhi, but in case it didn't, JP offered this melancholy prediction:

> If we miss the chance of using the next general election to win the consent of the [Kashmiri] people to their place within the Union, I cannot see what other device will be left to India to settle the problem. To think that we will eventually wear down the people and force them to accept at least passively the Union is to delude ourselves. That might conceivably have happened had Kashmir not been geographically located where it is. In its present location, and with seething discontent among the people, it would never be left in peace by Pakistan.[70]

The prime minister wrote a brief note back, thanking JP 'for sharing your views on Kashmir and Sheikh Sahib'.[71] But no action was taken on his letter, and Sheikh Abdullah remained in confinement. However, in October 1966 the prime minister visited the Kashmir Valley for the first time since assuming office. Speaking at the sports stadium in Srinagar, she spoke of her 'special love' for Kashmir and Kashmiris. A large crowd turned out to hear her; in fact, wherever Mrs Gandhi went in the Valley, the people milled along the roads to see her.[72]

XII

For now, Kashmir appeared quiet and its people quiescent. But down south, in Andhra Pradesh, an agitation was gathering ground. The protest was led by students, who demanded that a Planning Commission proposal for a steel plant in Vishakapatnam (Vizag) be implemented forthwith. The plant had been sanctioned several years earlier, but the fiscal crisis besetting the government had led to its being put on the shelf.

The decision to delay the Vizag steel plant caused an outcry in the Andhra country. For the young, a massive state-run factory still carried enchantment – and the hope of productive employment. Protesters blockaded roads, halted trains, and attacked shops and offices. The movement spread through the state – 'The entire student community of Guntur seems to be on the streets', said one report. The police were mobilized in several cities, while in Vizag itself the navy stood guard over key installations. A railway station was set ablaze in one place, a crowd fired upon by the police in another. Students damaged the lighthouse in Vizag and forced the radio station to go off the air. All trains running through the state were cancelled. [73]

Meanwhile, to the north, a famine loomed in Bihar. The tribal areas were worst hit; in Monghyr district, the adivasis were reduced to eating roots. There were acute shortages of water and fodder. The poor had looted grain here and there; the upper classes in the countryside now lived in fear of amore generalizedrebellion.[74]

To striking students and starving peasants was added amore curious group of dissidents – Hindu holy men, or *sadhus*. The Hindu orthodoxy had long called for an end to the killing of the sacred cow; now, with the help of the Jana Sangh, the call had been converted into asocial movement.

On 6 November a huge procession was taken through the streets of the capital. Among the 100,000 marchers were many *sadhus* brandishing tridents and spears. The march culminated in a public meeting outside Parliament House, where the first speaker was Swami Karpatri (of Anti-

Hindu Code Bill fame).The crowd were further warmed up by Swami Rameshwaranand, a Jana Sangh MP recently suspended from the Lok Sabha for unruly behaviour. He asked the *sadhus* to *gherao* (surround) Parliament. The 'excited crowd made a beeline for the building, shouting "*Swami Rameshwaranand kijai*"'. At this point the Jana Sangh leader Atal Behari Vajpayee appealed to the swami to withdraw his call. It was too late. As the *sadhus* surged towards Parliament's gates, they were turned back by mounted police. A ding-dong battle ensued: tear-gas and rubber bullets on the one side, sticks and stones on the other. As thick columns of smoke rose over the Houses of Parliament, the crowd retreated, only to vent its anger on what lay in its way. The security kiosk of All-India Radio was gutted, and the house of K. Kamaraj, the Congress president, set on fire. Also destroyed were an estimated 250 cars, 100 scooters and 10 buses. By the evening the army was patrolling the streets, for the first time since the dark days of 1947.

An agitation led by holy men, commented one journal acidly, had resulted in an 'orgy of violence, vandalism and hooliganism'. A. B. Vajpayee issued a statement deploring the fact that 'the undesirable elements, who resorted to violent activities in the demonstration against cow-slaughter, had done a great harm to the pious cause'.[75]

XIII

There was a line of thinking, widely prevalent in the West, which held that only the personality and example of Jawaharlal Nehru had kept India united and democratic. The quick changes of guard since his death, the successive droughts, the countless small rebellions and the major war with Pakistan – these, taken together, seemed only to confirm these fears. In December 1965 the *Sydney Morning Herald* worried for the future of democracy in India. The paper saw a 'sweeping upsurge of nationalistic spirit' in the country, which was 'in danger of turning into chauvinism, with increasing bitterness towards the Western powers'. This intolerance seemed also to be directed inwards: 'What many foreign observers are finding particularly perturbing is that free expression of liberal views by Indians seems to be in danger.'[76]

The same year, 1965, the writer Ronald Segal published a major study titled 'The Crisis of India'. On a tour of the country he found it on 'the economic precipice', with the 'ground . . . crumbling beneath her . Meanwhile, 'her international stock was low and falling'. With poverty, scarcity, regional conflicts and corruption all rampant, India reminded Segal at times of Weimar Germany, at other times of Kuomintang China. He held little hope of democracy surviving. Among the 'authoritarian alternatives' on offer were 'Communism on the left' and 'militant communalism on the right', one or other of which was likely to prevail before too many years had passed.[77]

Also despairing of the country's future was Reverend Michael Scott. A friend who met him in May 1966 found him

> very depressed, not about his failure in regard to the Naga settlement, but about India in general. His view is that the older and abler generation is now dying off and being replaced by little, corrupt and wholly inefficient men. He has a strong feeling that sooner or later India is going to disintegrate and that the whole thing may sink into a Vietnam-type morass into which Britain and America may be drawn.[78]

When the monsoon failed again in 1966, the predictions were of mass starvation rather than of the break-up of India or the abrogation of democracy. To many Western environmentalists, India seemed to provide striking proof of Malthus's prophecy that human population growth would one day outstrip food supply. The respected Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich wrote that while he had 'understood the population explosion intellectually for along time', he 'came to understand it emotionally one stinking hot night in Delhi a couple of years ago'. As his taxi crawled through the streets, he saw around him 'people eating, people washing, people sleeping. People visiting, people arguing and screaming. People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating. People clinging to buses. People herding animals. People. People. People.'[79]

The same year Ehrlich was writing this, two other American biologists were finishing a book which argued that 'today, India is the first of the hungry nations to stand at the brink of famine and disaster'. Tomorrow, 'the famines will come', and 'riding alongside will surely be riots and other civil tensions which the central government will be too weak to control'. They predicted 1975 as the year by which 'civil disorder, anarchy, military dictatorships, runaway inflation, transportation breakdowns and chaotic unrest will be the order of the day'.[80]

In truth, even some knowledgeable Indian observers had begun to fear for the fate of their country. In the first week of November 1966 a traditionally pro-Congress paper published a leading article entitled 'The Grimmest Situation in 19 Years'. The student strikes and the food scarcities were attributed to a 'virtual breakdown of authority'. The article predicted that 'the wave of violence will grow in intensity', with 'many other parts of the country being turned into Bihars'. 'The future of the country is dark for many reasons', said the *Hindustan Times*, 'all of them directly attributable to 19 years of Congress rule.'[81]