

# ATTEMPTS TO SHIELD THE GUILTY?

By OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: Stage is being set to whitewash the management of Dhori colliery and to possibly exonerate them from the responsibility for the terrible disaster which befell more than 500 of the miners on the night of May 28.

**T**HIS is the only conclusion that can be drawn from the announcement made by the Government of India setting up a court of enquiry to enquire into the disaster.

Nobody can have any quarrel with the constitution of the court of enquiry. But the assessors named to help the court of enquiry, consisting of Justice S. K. Das, retired judge of the Supreme Court, has caused considerable anxiety among trade union circles.

The government has not only excluded from the assessors' list any representative of the workers or the trade union movement, but it has also packed it with representatives of employers, both from the private and public sectors.

One assessor is B. H. Engineer, coal advisor to the Tata Iron and Steel Company; another S. C. Dey, director of planning and production of the National Coal Development Corporation. The third assessor is a government man: P. K. Ghosh of the Geological Survey of India.

The government has not even included a Member of Parliament as assessor. In past cases of enquiries into colliery accidents, Members of Parliament were associated.

## STRANGE BEHAVIOUR

This strange behaviour on the part of the powers-that-be has caused considerable resentment among trade unions.

Both the AITUC and the Indian Mine Workers Federation have protested against non-inclusion of labour leaders and demanded representation for TU representatives on the court of enquiry.

Misgivings are being expressed in trade union circles over the moves of the government, especially in view of the farce which was made out of the Chinakuri mine disaster enquiry (1958) by official circles.

The role being played by the Inspectorate of Mines vis-a-vis the employers and in particular the management of the Dhori colliery has to be taken note:

For example, the very fact that the Dhori colliery had been declared non-gassy by this Inspectorate of Mines ("dead non-gassy" are the words used by the Chief Inspector of Mines, G. S. Jabbi) is suspicious.

Dhori colliery is just part of the East Bokaro coalfields, all three seams of which have been declared to be gassy. The fact is that one of the collieries in this complex, the Jarangdih mine, had to be closed down because it was found to be the gasiest mine in the country.

## WILL THE CHINAKURI STORY BE REPEATED?

The Inspectorate of Mines, again, had permitted the Dhori colliery to be worked without any mechanical ventilation system on the specious plea that it was non-gassy. And yet, this very inspectorate has no compunctions in insisting on mechanical ventilation in even non-coal mines!

The fact is that it is only once in a while that the staff of the Inspectorate of Mines visited the Dhori colliery. And the main motive for such visits was the earning of travelling allowance. Dhori is situated in a circle (now called region) which has earned the nickname of T.A. Circle.

The officer in charge of this circle (Ramgarh circle in the records) stays in Dhanbad town and has his offices right in the Inspectorate of Mines premises. To visit any of the mines under its charge, he has to travel at least 60 miles.

May be that is why the Inspectorate of Mines did not take particular care to inspect the Dhori colliery for any signs of coal gas or other lurking dangers when the mine was reopened after the strike. Even if they wanted, there were no equipments to test the presence of gas, for, it had already been declared a non-gassy mine.

A very pertinent question to be asked is why this Chief Inspector of Mines had stopped the rescue operations abruptly on June 1. Was it to keep the number of the dead nearer to the guess made earlier by the management?

An expert in mining engineering has expressed very strong feelings against the callous attitude of the Mines Inspectorate towards safety of the workers. He is K. V. Subramaniam, Professor of Mining Engineering at the Osmania University.

In an exclusive interview to NEW AGE, Prof. Subramaniam expressed great surprise at the reported statement of the Chief Inspector of Mines that the Dhori colliery was absolutely non-gassy.

"Unfortunately for the miners, the Mines Inspectorate has never been guided by any objective criteria in deciding whether a mine is gassy or not", he said and narrated a particular instance to prove his point.

"During the Chinakuri disaster enquiry, I was summoned to appear before the court of enquiry on the initiative of the Indian Mine Workers Federation.

"In the course of my cross-examination by the present Chief Inspector of Mines, who was being briefed by his predecessor, I was asked whether I had any practical experience of gassy mines in India.

"I answered that I had such experience in the Sirka seam

at the Sirka colliery and that it was gassy since methane had been detected there on more than one occasion.

"This was treated with veiled contempt by the Chief Inspector of Mines who made the court of enquiry believe on his authority that Sirka was a non-gassy mine. This was in August 1958.

"Within six months, just on the day the Mines Safety Conference was holding its second session in Dhanbad, an explosion occurred at the very same Sirka seam.

## SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

"In his report, the Chief Inspector of Mines had the cheek to write that this was unfortunate as the seam had never been known to be gassy and thus the accident could not have been anticipated!"

Prof. Subramaniam gave his view on the possible reasons and sequence of events leading to the explosion at Dhori:

He was of the opinion that the Dhori mine, having been certified as non-gassy by this very same Chief Inspector of Mines, was allowed to accumulate coaldust underground in quantities sufficient to blow up a dozen Dhoris.

There was no provision for mechanical ventilation. The long stoppage due to strike

enabled the gas to accumulate, helped by the hot season when the surface temperature was higher than underground.

When work was resumed no safety precautions were taken by the management, helped as it was by the non-accessibility and inherent failure to bother about the miners' lives on the part of the Mines Inspectorate. The death trap was set equally by the management and the Mines Inspectorate.

The accumulated coal gas got somehow ignited and this was followed by a coaldust explosion, blowing up the entire mine and causing the death of not only all the miners underground but even workers on the surface.

Prof. Subramaniam is of the strong opinion that no effort should be spared to ensure that the enquiry now ordered is really exhaustive and does not end up in a whitewash, as was done at the time of the Chinakuri disaster.

## HOW MANY REALLY DIED?



The Dead Cry Out For Justice







# Ahmedabad: The Future

By SADHAN MUKHERJEE

Ahmedabad is a city of poignant memories. It is a city with a chequered past.

ASSOCIATED with Gandhiji, it became a place of world fame; its millowners represented the developing class of Indian bourgeoisie and its workers were made a basis for an experiment with a new type of trade-unionism in which strike is a taboo.

Ahmedabad Major Mahajan, the upshot of this experiment is not a name alone; it is a philosophy too. It embodies the philosophy of class collaboration.

Hence right from British viceroys down to Congress ministers, every body always hailed the Mahajan as the ideal machinery for ensuring industrial peace. Over the years therefore it became a bastion of Cong-

gress misrule hastened the progress of the front.

Today Ahmedabad is a city not only with poignant memories; it is also the city of bright hopes. Just recently the democratic front swept the polls at the municipal corporation elections.

Out of the 78 seats in the corporation, as many as 48 belong to the front, 13 to Congress, 10 to PSP and 7 to Independents. Not a single seat from the working-class areas could be won by the Mahajan. The middle-class had of course rejected the Congress even during the earlier elections.

How could this change come about? What has happened to Ahmedabad?

the workers whose representatives hand in hand with the middle-class representatives control all offices of the corporation which has a budget of rupees nine crores annually for a population of 12 lakhs.

What are the new elects going to do to better the lot of the citizens of Ahmedabad? How will they resist the onslaught of millowners? Will Ahmedabad change its face? These and myriads of other questions have to be answered.

It is therefore two veterans of hundreds of battles—S. A. Dange and Indulal Yagnik, the chief of the Janata Parishad and president of the Rashtriya Sangram Samiti sat down for parleys to chart out the strategy of action: both for the Ahmedabad Corporation as well as for the working-class, and discuss the programmes for the cor-

poration and the trade union. The first point that was agreed upon was the question of bonus. For the last three years the 1,10,000 textile workers of Ahmedabad did not receive any bonus under the benign dispensation of the INTUC Major Mahajan. After the Bonus Ordinance was issued, the Mahajan did not formally make any demand upon the millowners.

But the workers are entitled to at least a minimum bonus of four per cent of their annual earnings for the years 1962, 1963 and 1964 irrespective of profit or loss of the millowners. The minimum bonus for three years would thus be Rs. 240 to the lowest-income worker and proportionately higher to other categories of workers according to wage-rates.

The second point was a joint statement issued by Yagnik and Dange on the question of oil. The statement called for strong measures against the Anglo-American oil companies and demanded

immediately, falling which the water taps might be disconnected and workers be urged to help the municipality in realising this amount.

Another most interesting fact revealed was that till today there is no petrol pump run by the Indian Oil Corp. The earlier Congress corporation had refused to provide the IOC with land for this purpose. The IOC now has some storage depots.

At present the Ahmedabad Municipal Transport service buys about 70 per cent of its transport fuel from the IOC and 30 per cent from ESSO, Burmah Shell etc. Very soon, only IOC fuel would be purchased by the AMTS. The annual consumption is about seven million litres.

Another idea that transpired was that henceforward no land should be given to any oil company except the IOC

either sewage gas or the natural gas from Cambay and the neighbouring areas could be harnessed.

If the existing gas cylinder manufacturer did not cooperate with the corporation, it was suggested that the corporation might even undertake to manufacture such cylinders for supply of gas to the consumers. This would bring down the cut-throat prices of Burmah (Burmah Shell) and ESSO gasses. It was revealed during the meeting that these gasses were being supplied to the consumers at 1,200 per cent profit to the companies.

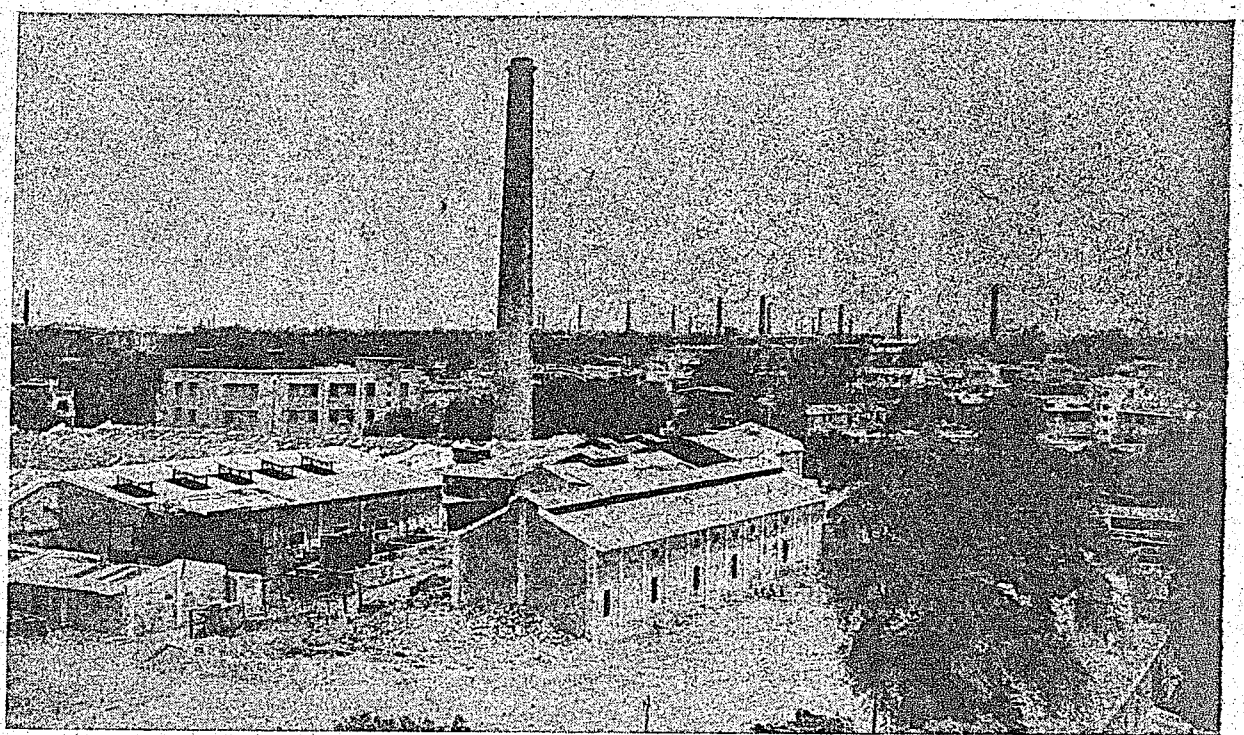
The generation of electrical power and its supply in Ahmedabad are in the hands of a private company. Suggestions were made to take over the distribution system to begin with which will ensure better supply as well as add to the income of the corporation.

The corporators are also planning to impose octroi duty on cotton balls. According to estimates, this would add about Rs. 15 lakhs to the income of the corporation.

The corporation would seek to undertake rehabilitation of the slum dwellers. For this purpose, it would utilise the area around the city, known as the green belt to settle them. The corporation would make arrangements for electricity, water, conservancy and conveyance to the dwellers in these new colonies.

The corporation has already increased wages of the AMTS employees and plans to do the same for other employees. For this purpose, it would change the house tax slabs in a manner that those who can pay would be required to pay a little more than at present. The system of taxation of water, conservancy and housing may undergo some changes.

Indulal Yagnik very clearly described the programme envisaged by the corporators during the coming days and added: we are clearing the decks to start on a militant programme.



Ahmedabad Skyline: Chimneys punctuate the vista

## KUTCH: Intrigues of Right Reaction

By Our Special Correspondent

Pakistan's aggression in the Rann of Kutch and its use of American arms against Indian army jolted the Indian people into the grim realisation that there are imperialist designs behind this aggression.

BUT besides condemning the intrigue, the people of India had to gear up for the defence of the country and in that rush the real source of danger was ignored vis-a-vis the immediate focal point.

Then came the offer of British Prime Minister for a me-

diation. The ruling party and the parties of the right reaction welcomed the proposal.

There was the demand for restoring the status quo ante to start the negotiation and an air of thankfulness was created in the country for the use of the good offices of the British Prime

Minister so promptly and sympathetically!

But what was not probed deep enough was the reason of such prompt offer and the extent of the British interest in the Rann of Kutch.

Today, the Rann of Kutch is a hotbed of conspiracy of British and American imperialism, of rightwing parties and of reactionaries inside the Congress. Each one is trying to utilise the situation according to one's specific design.

The name of an Englishman, Rushbrook Williams is closely associated with Kutch. This man acted as the envoy of British government for quite some time and has an interesting background.

He was in Bhuj, as a personal guest of the Maharao of Kutch till recently, as late as April. His activities were of extreme indiscretion and he was called to Delhi and quietly bundled out of the country. His departure is

shrouded in mystery and no one in the know of things opens his mouth on this subject.

Rushbrook, of the Government of India Reports and the BLACK HILLS OF KUTCH fame, was a former member of the Round Table Conference and the then secretary of Indian Chamber of Princes. He became the constitutional adviser to Pakistan during the reign of Jinnah.

This man Rushbrook later became the adviser to the Maharao of Kutch. It is under his advice that the Maharao wanted to join Pakistan instead of India when the question of accession arose.

Pannalal Shah, popularly known as Kutch Kesari, told NEW AGE that the Maharao's bid could be foiled only because a movement of the people, known as the Praja Parishad, fought for the accession of Kutch to India and the setting up of a responsible government.

In 1956 a powerful movement of the kisans grew in Kutch and next year the Mahagujarat Janata Parishad took roots in Kutch. In 1958, Congress was ousted from all the municipalities of Kutch, namely Bhuj, Mandhavi, Mundhra, Anjha and Gandhi Dham.

The Congress Party seeing these results got panicky and began instituting false criminal cases against the leaders of the Janata Parishad. Just before the 1962 elections, the Kutch Kesari was expelled from Kutch and the Parishad organisation suppressed.

The result was quite interesting. All the five seats for state assembly and the Lok Sabha seat, won by the brother of the Maharao, went to the Swatantra Party. Congress did not get a single seat.

In 1964 the order of extermination on the Kutch Kesari expired and slowly the Janata Parishad activists began their painstaking work of rebuilding facing the onslaught of both the Congress and the Swatantra parties.

But the Swatantra had already made a lot of headway in Kutch by then. The representative of right reaction, in the Lok Sabha, Himmat Singhji, demanded on the floor of Parliament that an independent political unit of Kutch be established. Propaganda was let loose among the people of



Dange addressing the workers' representatives on bonus. Indulal Yagnik on the extreme right hand corner

ress power—a city with its finance and labour completely under the command of the Congress Party and the INTUC.

But Ahmedabad remained a living city; its spirit endured. Cracks appeared in the Congress bastion with the coming into existence of the Communist Party and later the Mahagujarat Janata Parishad—a democratic front of several progressive parties including the CPI. The Con-

Everything has reversed its course!

Into this changed city, where the Assembly sessions are held in a part of the civil hospital and a number of government offices are accommodated in the mental block, a flying visit for a couple of days with S. A. Dange, Chairman of the Communist Party of India was not only an exhilarating experience but also a peep into the future.

The city now belongs to

porators and the trade union.

The first point that was agreed upon was the question of bonus. For the last three years the 1,10,000 textile workers of Ahmedabad did not receive any bonus under the benign dispensation of the INTUC Major Mahajan. After the Bonus Ordinance was issued, the Mahajan did not formally make any demand upon the millowners.

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take-over of oil distribution and storage system of the oil companies by the Government of India.

It had also fully supported the proposed action, now postponed, by the Petroleum Workers' Union to resort to strike in defence of country's policy and as a protest against the artificial crisis created by the oil tycoons.

There were a number of meetings between the corporators, Dange and Yagnik where discussions centred around the idea of creating a better Ahmedabad city by improving its amenities.

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation must foil the intrigues of the millowners and emerge before the country as a well-run civic body, rooting out the evils engendered over the last several decades and making it a genuine organisation meant for the citizens, was the guiding theme of these meetings.

In the course of discussions, certain very interesting facts emerged.

The millowners of Ahmedabad have not cleared their dues of water tax and an outstanding amount about Rs. six lakhs is yet to be paid to the corporation on this count. Suggestions were made that the millowners must be compelled to pay this amount

to set up any more pumps and service stations.

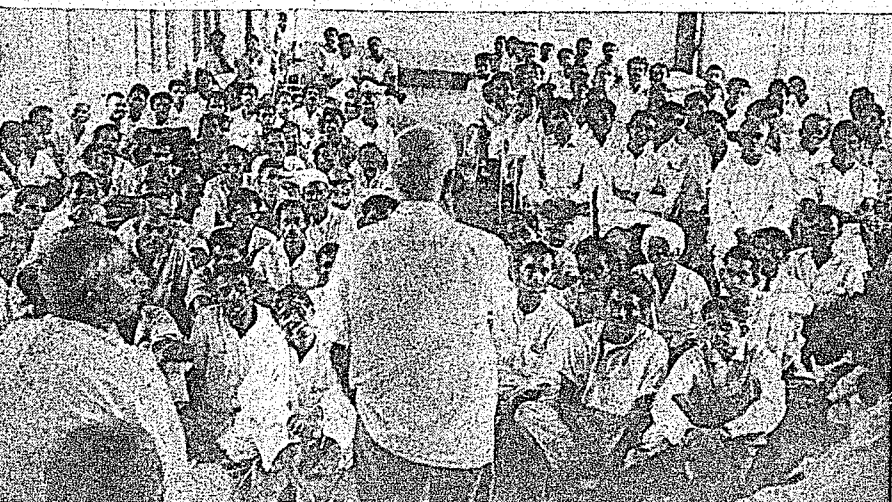
As regards improvement of transport facilities, an idea was mooted out that it could be possible to experiment with trolley buses instead of adding more diesel buses, the fume of which is injurious to the health of the people. The trolley buses could be had from rupee-payment areas without involving spending of foreign exchange.

Another suggestion was to improve fuel facilities for domestic purposes. For this

## Gujarat : Party Is Growing

In Ahmedabad, the Party is steadily enhancing its prestige and influence. By sustained work among the middle-class and working-class people, the Party has been able to make considerable headway.

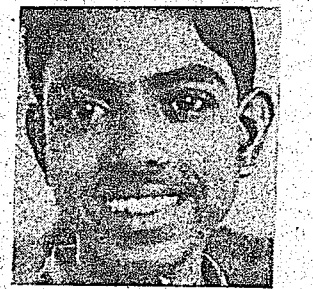
It was extremely heartening to attend the Party's membership card distribution ceremony where the PMS were handed over their cards by Chairman Dange.



Dange addressing the new Party members

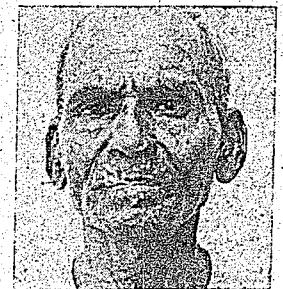
Out of 230 cards distributed in the Ahmedabad city, 195 were new cards. These new members came from various strata of society; the youngest member is a student of 18 and the oldest a well-known textile worker Khan aged 72.

Addressing the meeting of the Party members Chairman Dange emphasised the role of the Party which it should play in the democratic front in Ahmedabad.

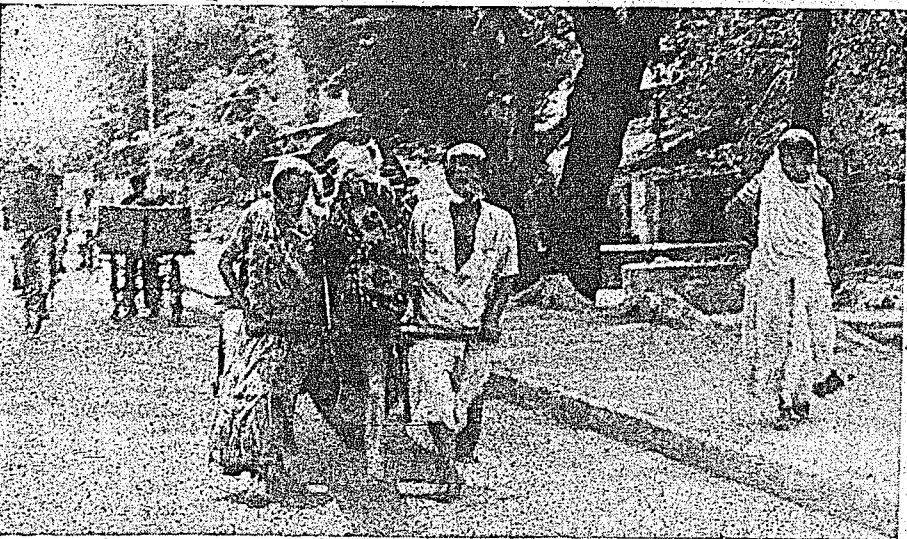


The youngest member

He presented before the PMS the picture of a new Gujarat, an emerging Gujarat, rich in oil and natural resources. It is in this new context the Party members will have to tune themselves to serve best the interests of the working-class and foil the capitalist bids of greater exploitation.



Khan, the oldest



Husband and wife toil together: Another facet of Ahmedabad









# CABINET CRISIS IN ASSAM OVER 'INFILTRATION' ISSUE

## EDUCATION MINISTER'S RESIGNATION THREAT

From M. BHATTACHARYA

SHILLONG: A cabinet reshuffle in Assam is reported to be imminent. According to reports current here, Education Minister Dev Kanta Barua will tender his resignation, officially "on health grounds".

This resignation threat of Barua, however, has not come as a surprise to well-informed sources here. These sources maintain that for quite sometime now the Education Minister has not been pulling on well with his chief, as well as some other cabinet colleagues.

ACCORDING to some sources, the bone of contention is the issue of expeditious deportation of "illegal Pak infiltrants." Barua is reported to maintain that the Home department, which portfolio is held by the Chief Minister himself, has not been moving with the desired speed in the matter.

Some other sources, however, maintain that Barua's aspiration is to become eventually the Chief Minister of the State, but for the time being, he would not mind becoming No. 2 in the cabinet. In the present cabinet Finance Minister F. Ali Ahmed is No. 2.

These sources say that during the 43-old "no work" movement of the employees of the Assam Secretariat, the Education Minister's supporters in the Party openly demanded that the Home portfolio should be handed over to Barua, but the Chief Minister did not respond favourably to this proposal.

These supporters of Dev Kant Barua are said to have begun to argue that there were "too many" portfolios concentrated in the hand of the Chief Minister who "could not do justice" to all these portfolios.

This same argument is reported to have been revived during the recent illness of the Chief Minister.

Circles close to the Education Minister maintain that his resignation threat is intended to put pressure on the Chief Minister, who would not like the strength of the anti-Ministerial group to be increased further. If the Education Minister's resignation is accepted, the possibility of which

MLAs as "anti-national". A Calcutta daily enjoying circulation in this state also condemned these MLAs as anti-national.

A meeting of the Gauhati Lawyers' Association expressed its "concern" at this reported resignation threat. Significantly, that meeting of the Lawyers' Association was presided over by Bishnu Ram Medhi, the former Chief Minister of the State, whom the Chaliha group had dislodged. Medhi is now believed to be allied with the anti-Ministerial group of the Congress.

Industries Minister Tripathi, on the eve of his recent trip to New Delhi, in a statement characterised this reported resignation threat of 13 MLAs as "motivated". He said in that statement that this charge of the 13 MLAs would strengthen the hands of President Ayub Khan of Pakistan.

A couple of days later the

State Finance Minister F. Ali Ahmed who also went to New Delhi at the same time and for the same purpose reportedly said in New Delhi that the report was not true. He is reported to have said that in the first place no Muslim MLA had threatened resignation. Secondly, no such communication was ever addressed to him; a letter jointly signed by 13 Muslim MLAs had been addressed to the Chief Minister on April 6 giving certain suggestions regarding deportation of Pak infiltrants without any harassment to any Indian Muslim, and a copy of that letter was also sent to him.

Thus, if the Finance Minister's statement is correct, there remains no basis for all the "concern" expressed.

Could the Industries Minister be unaware of what the Finance Minister reportedly said? Why did he then make the statement mentioned above without checking it up with the Finance Minister who was not unavailable?

It is common gossip here in political circles that the Industries Minister has not been on very good terms with the Finance Minister for sometime now. So are said to be the relations of the Education Minister with the Finance Minister.

However, it is pointed out that the Finance Minister enjoys not only the trust of the Chief Minister, but also of New Delhi, being a member of the Working Committee. Besides, because of his long association with the Congress, he cannot be easily and convincingly accused of being "pro-Pakistani", as his opponents would wish.

Hence, the Chief Minister is being made the target of attack for allegedly being "soft" towards the Pak infiltrants, said to be operating in this State. In private, it is being said that the Chief Minister is being guided by the Finance Minister and hence he is not moving fast against the infiltrants.

In the context of the current aggressive moves of Pakistan and discovery of some persons, alleged to have been planted by that country in this state, there is a feeling of some anxiety in the state about the possible vulnerability of the state's security. In this atmosphere this campaign, both overt and covert, cuts some ice, despite its factional motivation, among the general rank and file of the Congress, according to informed circles.

The possibility of a broader realignment of forces inside the ruling party, in which some of the present cabinet members may also be included, is not ruled out by competent observers. These observers think that with the next general election drawing closer, this factional tussle will also grow fiercer. These events are but an indication of the growing tug-of-war inside the ruling party in this state.

# Food Campaign Gains Momentum in Bihar

From K. GOPALAN

PATNA: Widespread discontent among the people over the failure of the government to check the galloping prices and tackle the food crisis has turned into a mass agitation all over Bihar.

DEMONSTRATIONS and mass rallies were held in different parts of the state on June 11 to put pressure on the government to change its pro-hoarder policy and to take effective measures to bring down the prices and provide enough food for the people.

The demonstrations were held in response to a call by

the state council of the CPI. This was the beginning of a series of mass actions planned by the CPI to mobilise people for positive actions in order to force the government to adopt a popular food policy.

According to reports so far received in the state headquarters of the CPI, demonstrations were held in over 30 places before the subdivisional and block offices. Nearly 20 thousand people participated in those demonstrations. Activities in those offices were completely paralysed as the demonstrators surrounded them and squatted for hours.

These demonstrations were preceded by intensive campaign in the countryside by the CPI workers. Scores of mass meetings were held in different parts of Bihar. In some districts squads were taken out in the villages and demands of the CPI on food and high prices were explained. This has helped in mobilising the people for the demonstrations.

Mass meetings were held at all places at the end of the demonstration.

In Darbhanga district demonstrations were held at 11 block headquarters. In Muzaffarpur district demonstrations and meetings were held at ten places. Nearly two

thousand people participated in the demonstrations in three blocks of Saran district. In Bhagalpur demonstrations were held at five block headquarters.

In Giridih (Hazaribagh) over one thousand coal workers staged a militant demonstration before the sub-divisional office.

The CPI is now making preparations for intensifying the struggle for people's food. Party units all over the state have been asked to enrol volunteers. The state executive of the CPI is meeting here to finalise the programme for launching a massive struggle.

Meanwhile organisers workers, who are hard hit by high prices and food scarcity, have started agitation in different industrial centres. Patna Trade Union Coordination Committee representing industrial workers and employees including bank and insurance employees and working journalists, at its meeting on June 11, has set up an action committee to agitate against high prices and food crisis.

The committee is planning to hold a series of meetings and demonstrations to press the demand for linking DA with cost of living index, subsidised foodgrains and other essential commodities.

The Bihar SSP is also planning to start a food agitation. Their programme includes meetings, demonstrations and ghera dalo. They also propose to call for a Bihar Bandh with the cooperation of other opposition parties.



A SLUM IN AHMEDABAD (SEE CENTRE PAGES)