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Indian Foreign Minister

Mahomedali Currim Chagla

"WHEN I went to Washington as Ambassador," India's Foreign Minister once recalled, "the first question I was asked was, 'Are you a Moslem?' I said, 'I don't ask whether you're a Catholic, Protestant or Jew. Why ask me my religion? That's my own affair. I'm an Indian.'" Ma-

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in the Chagla was dis-
News missing the sug-
gestion that his
religion might

not have been entirely unrelated to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's decision last November to shift him from the Education Ministry to foreign affairs. A Moslem Foreign Minister, after all, is living proof that what is Moslem can be Indian—a valuable point when he has to debate Pakistan's claims to predominantly Moslem Kashmir.

Mr. Chagla, who spoke in the Indian Parliament yesterday of what he termed the nuclear menace posed by Communist China, has had considerable experience in debating the Kashmir issue—first as delegate to the United States, then as Ambassador to Britain and, during the short Indian-Pakistan war in the fall of 1965, as a representative on the U.N. Security Council.

Whether the fact that he is a Moslem had nothing to do with his gaining that experience is something that might still be doubted. But there can be no doubt that he is right when he insists that it was his experience and not his religion that made him a logical choice for the Foreign Ministry.

A Question of Health

Indeed, some observers who followed Mr. Chagla's performance as Education Minister say he displayed notably more interest in lecturing Parliament on international issues than on matters nearer to his own portfolio.

If there were any raised eyebrows over his appointment, they related only to his health. Being a Foreign Minister is a strenuous job, involving much travel. Mr. Chagla, who is 66 years old, had a serious heart attack last year. He says, however, that he is sure hard work will be good for his heart.

He has no political base. He did not even belong to the governing Congress party until he entered the Cabinet in 1963. He brings to Indian diplomacy at the highest level



United Press International

A blunt advocate of his country's viewpoint.

an urbanity and flair that it has lacked since the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was always his own Foreign Minister.

Mr. Chagla's tenure in Washington from 1958, to 1961 spanned the Eisenhower Administration, which often seemed to consider Indian non-alignment faintly immoral, and the Kennedy Administration, which was warmly sympathetic.

The Ambassador proved to be a blunt advocate of his country's point of view. In 1960 he wrote to Senator John F. Kennedy expressing his confidence that the Democratic candidate would be elected President and inviting him to attend the premiere of an Indian film shortly after the inauguration. President Kennedy accepted.

U.S. Policy Deplored

In recent months he has said the United States missed a "golden opportunity" for starting peace talks with North Vietnam when it resumed bombing the North after a short pause.

On the other hand, he refused to join attacks by some Indian legislators on the United States and the Central Intelligence Agency earlier this month. He said the accounts of C.I.A. activities in India were "wild reports" and "vague charges."

He did pledge increased Government vigilance against intelligence operations in In-

dia, but he made it clear that he meant all nations' intelligence operations, not merely those of the United States.

Born in Bombay in 1900 the son of a prosperous trader, young Chagla went to Oxford and got his legal training in London, returning to India as a professor of law. He became a member of the Bombay High Court in 1941 and Chief Justice in 1947, the post he held until he went to Washington.

Mr. Chagla, a widower, has a daughter who is married to an Air-India pilot, a son who is an engineer and another son who is following in his father's footsteps as a lawyer in Bombay.

Before Mr. Chagla, who is usually known by his initials, became a diplomat and a minister he was a regular bridge player, but he never gets a chance to play in New Delhi, he says.

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