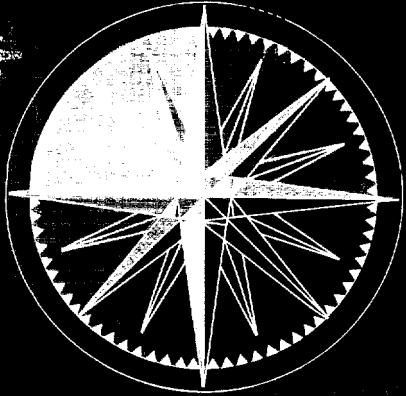


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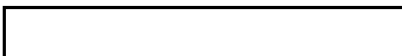
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SPECIAL REPORT

AN AILING NEHRU AND THE INDIAN LEADERSHIP

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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AN AILING NEHRU AND THE INDIAN LEADERSHIP

Illness has removed Jawaharlal Nehru from the day-to-day control of the Indian Government which he has exercised without respite for 17 years. His present incapacitation--the result of a mild stroke suffered while attending his Congress Party's biennial convention in Bhubaneswar, capital of Orissa State in eastern India--seems certain to alter the established pattern of Indian leadership even if the prime minister recovers. Before he was stricken, in fact, his slow decline was evident and moves were under way to shift responsibilities within the ruling party primarily with an eye to distributing power more widely.

The man most likely to be chosen as Nehru's successor is Lal Bahadur Shastri, a trusted political veteran who would carry on the main lines of Nehru's policies. The transition period, however, could itself stir political and communal tensions that have been generally dormant for years.

Sources of Nehru's Power

As Gandhi's heir and next to him the best known of India's independence leaders, Nehru arrived at the pinnacle of governmental and party power in 1947 at the age of 58, in vigorous health, with 35 years of experience in Indian politics, and with most of the levers of power already in his hands or within his grasp. By the early 1950s, the death of some long-time colleagues and the political isolation of others had eliminated all potential rivals. Nehru's leadership of the Congress Party's massive majority in the lower house of Parliament has provided his formal base of power.

Nehru also has long held the external affairs portfolio

and has personally handled finance and defense for short periods of time. He has directly supervised India's small atomic energy program, has been the guiding hand behind India's five-year economic development plans, and has been the Congress Party's best vote-getter. Although rarely holding any organizational post within the party other than that of "permanent invitee" to its key 21-member working committee, his will has been decisive in all matters of consequence, from programs to candidates.

Signs of Decline

After early 1962 Nehru's physical vigor--and along with it his political influence--had appeared to be in gradual decline. In part this resulted from a more

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ambitious electioneering program at that time than a 73-year-old should have undertaken as well as from the accumulated weariness of his burdens as India's "prime mover." The death of a succession of strong, able lieutenants had added to his load.

the Chinese rout of Indian forces in the Himalayas demonstrated the complete failure of Nehru's China policy and called into question the effectiveness of his government.

Despite this series of blows, Nehru seemed ultimately to draw some strength from the challenge posed by the threat of mutiny within his own party and by the demands of managing the national emergency. His reluctant sacrifice of Defense Minister Krishna Menon served to deflect much of the criticism of his government; a surge of national indignation against the Chinese helped with the rest.

By mid-1963, Nehru appeared to have made a remarkable recovery, both politically and physically, even though his bursts of physical vigor seemed more infrequent and short-lived. He had even managed to avoid the opprobrium attached to the belt-tightening measures in his first postemergency budget. It fell instead on Morarji Desai, then finance minister and second-ranking man in the cabinet.

There were, nonetheless, suggestions that something had

changed. While Nehru remained the strongest figure in Indian politics, his pronouncements and policies no longer were accepted without challenge. The executive committee of even the Congress parliamentary group, fresh from its success in pressing for Menon's ouster, operated with a new independence of spirit and seemed less intimidated by Nehru's presence than before. For the first time, Indian politicians, both within his party and outside it, seemed to be increasingly willing to contemplate seriously a period when Nehru would not be around.

Jockeying for position increased slightly and intraparty factionalism at the state level grew steadily, often in what appeared to be total disregard of the prime minister's wishes. Nehru seemed concerned, but his powers of decision

and his ability to enforce adherence to his views in execution seemed gradually to be waning.

The Kamaraj Plan

Nehru displayed flashes of vigor in 1963, most strikingly in the implementation of what came to be known as the Kamaraj Plan, a set of proposals for revitalizing the Congress Party. As conceived by Kamaraj, the strong man of southern India and then chief minister of Madras State, the scheme called for shifting a number of influential ministers at both the national and the state level to full-time party work. This, it was felt, would restore to the party some

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of the vigor and talent which its years of power and the lure of ministerial privilege had diluted.

The plan was motivated in large measure by Kamaraj's concern for rural disaffection from the Congress cause in his own state, but it had national appeal as well, in view of the rising crescendo of ministerial-organizational factionalism which was diverting other state leaders from their principal tasks. A number of losses in prestige by-elections strengthened the idea that the Congress was losing touch with the people. Growing disgust and public cynicism about Congress slogans and about the prevalence of corruption lent support to suggestions that something drastic had to be done to rehabilitate the party's image.

Another aspect of this scheme was unspecified but nonetheless important; Nehru seems to have sensed it. Kamaraj, like several other regional strong men, had for years been eclipsed by Nehru's paramountcy. Nehru could lead and the others had no alternative but to follow. For years there had been no need for the give and take which, in the absence of a man of Nehru's overpowering stature, would have been part of the relationship among the political leaders of a parliamentary democracy and federal republic.

In part this had been the result of Nehru's successful efforts to establish a strong central government--under his

control--and to transfer to that government the powers of decision which in the days prior to independence had been the province of the Congress movement. Kamaraj's proposals would have restored to the party some of its lost power for use, not so much under Nehru, but under any successor government. The mere fact that they were put forward served notice that strong regional leaders like Kamaraj were determined to force any successor to heed others' views more than Nehru had done.

Nehru turned the plan considerably to his own advantage. He used it not only to assign several strong but troublesome ministers into vaguely defined party positions but also to send others, both strong and weak, into the wilderness. Some party organs have undeniably been strengthened by the accretion of talented former ministers. Some key leaders, like Kamaraj who has become the new party president, and Shastri, Nehru's chief political troubleshooter when he was home minister, have enhanced their authority. Others, like former Finance Minister Desai--long regarded while he was in the cabinet as Nehru's most likely successor--have lost strength.

The cabinet as a whole is a more homogeneous group, dropping in political stature relative to the prime minister but in some aspects enhancing its technical competence. The best evidence of its fallen stature

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is that neither G. L. Nanda nor T. T. Krishnamachari ("T.T.K.") the ranking home and finance ministers who are handling ad interim Nehru's burdens in the domestic and foreign fields respectively, is considered a contender for the prime minister's mantle.

The Immediate Future

Even if Nehru--reputedly a very poor patient--subscribes to the regimen his physicians have apparently laid out for him and gradually recovers, he is unlikely ever to take back all of the burdens he has shouldered. He can go along for some time with the present ad hoc arrangement involving Nanda and T.T.K. If his convalescence is prolonged, he might be persuaded to appoint a deputy prime minister, such as Shastri. He has avoided this step in recent years because of his reluctance to give any appearance of naming an heir.

During Nehru's confinement, however, there will be a prolonged moratorium on decision-making within the Indian Government on a broad range of matters from fertilizers to fighters to factionalism. Few if any senior officials or politicians will be willing to accept responsibility for any decision of importance, partly because they are unaccustomed to doing so and partly because of the uncertainties in the leadership question.

Indira Gandhi

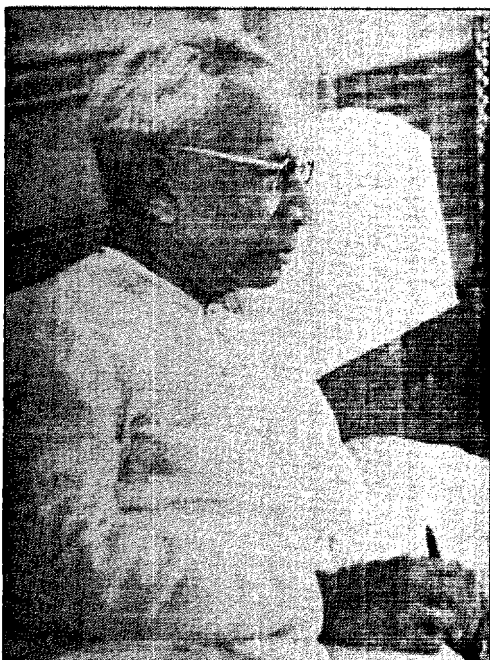
During his convalescence, Nehru's main window to the outside world will be his daughter, Indira Gandhi, who will strongly influence the prime minister's appointments calendar during this period. Mrs. Gandhi is a strong-willed widow who, at 46, knows her way around the rough-and-tumble of Indian politics, and she undoubtedly will be tempted by her present unique position to play a role comparable to that of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson during her husband's long illness. However, she probably does not seriously aspire to succeed her father as prime minister.

She has nevertheless long been promoted for the job by the left wing of the Congress Party. Krishna Menon and his noisy associates on the left have always counted their influence with Nehru as the main factor which has forced respect for their views. In fostering a dynasty, they see an opportunity to weather Nehru's demise and the shift by the Congress Party somewhat to the right which is expected to follow his departure.

Aside from her relationship to Nehru, Indira Gandhi's considerable skills and the desirability of having a woman in the cabinet make her a likely ministerial candidate in any successor government. Barring her formal designation by Nehru himself, however, she does not appear



Indira Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri at
Bhubaneswar on 8 January 1964.



President Radhakrishnan on the occasion
of his 75th birthday last September.



Nehru at the Congress Party con-
clave in Bhubaneswar on 6 January,
the day before he took ill.

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to have the necessary support throughout the party to step into her father's shoes.

President Radhakrishnan

If Nehru's incapacitation is prolonged, President Radhakrishnan is likely to make himself heard. From the start of his presidency in 1962, Radhakrishnan has shown himself to be more activist minded, within the confines of his constitutional position, than his only predecessor in the post. He takes his role seriously and would seek to influence the choice of a successor to Nehru, either temporary or permanent, in any way he could.

Not the strong socialist that Nehru is, the President would lean somewhat toward the right, at least toward a moderate such as Shastri, and could be expected to oppose any move by the left to have Indira Gandhi move into the vacuum.

Even if Nehru should make a relatively complete recovery, Radhakrishnan might counsel him to step down so as to precipitate a decision on the succession now rather than to leave it unsettled any longer.

Lal Bahadur Shastri

Lal Bahadur Shastri, now 59 years old, is generally conceded to be the logical successor to Nehru as prime minister. His re-appointment to the cabinet--announced on 22 January--as minister--without-portfolio will be widely regarded as the first step in this process. He will probably function as the party's leader when Parliament reconvenes early next month.

A fully recovered cardiac patient, he has been one of Nehru's most loyal lieutenants during the past three years both as a cabinet minister and as a party wheel horse. He is generally well liked within the party, has a reputation as a conciliator, and has the parliamentary experience necessary to the job.

Shastri's disabilities are few. Among these are his colorlessness and his frailness, his lack of travel outside South Asia, and his unproven capacity for decision; in all of his life in politics, he has been someone's number-two man, never number one.

Either as a deputy prime minister during Nehru's remaining days or as prime minister in his own right, Shastri's politics would be cautious, pragmatic, and moderate. Where they are known, his views appear to hew closely to the broad consensus which forms the basis of the Congress Party's democratic socialist philosophy. He would lean heavily on the catch phrase of nonalignment as a foreign policy, the field in which he would be at his weakest, and would probably turn his attentions toward internal matters more than Nehru has done.

The portfolios Shastri has held--home affairs, commerce and industry, transport and communications, and railways--and the organizational posts he has occupied in the party strongly suggest he would feel on surer ground on domestic matters. He would, moreover, have a good background on internal security,

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having held posts at both the national and state levels in this field.

More of a practicing politician than Nehru has ever been, Shastri would be amenable to genuine consultation with the party's regional bosses, at least until such time as he felt sufficiently sure of his position to strike out on his own. Party President Kamaraj is known to prefer Shastri as Nehru's successor and would probably work well with him. Kamaraj himself is not in the running because of his southern origins and his lack of fluency in either of India's two official languages of government at the center. The party presidency would, in any event, be a more important post under Shastri than it has been under Nehru.

Issues to Be Faced

One specific issue which might give a Shastri government more trouble at the outset than any other would be India's perpetually bad relations with Pakistan and its domestic concomitant, Hindu-Muslim tensions.

Rightly or wrongly, Pakistan has looked upon Nehru's role at the time the Indian subcontinent was partitioned and in the years since as a major impediment to the development of more normal relations. All the leaders on the Pakistani side at that time are dead now, and a new set of leaders on the Indian side might suggest the possibility of some small amount

of progress to heal the old wounds. However, while Shastri has never been counted among the "Pakistan-baiters" within the Indian Government, he would, as would almost any successor, be acutely conscious of the strength of anti-Pakistan feeling in India, both on the Krishna Menon left and on the Morarji Desai right, and of the need to make it clear at the outset that his government would be appropriately zealous in defending India's interests against encroachments from Pakistan or any other foreign country. Any progress toward an Indo-Pakistani rapprochement would therefore be slow indeed.

On the domestic front, India's leaders have just witnessed their worst communal rioting since 1950, growing out of the theft of the Muslim hair relic in Kashmir and exploding on the streets of Calcutta (as well as in neighboring East Pakistan). Deep communal passions easily rise to the surface when authority appears to falter, and Calcutta officialdom did falter in its initial failure to realize the enormity of the problem there. At fault also were organized Hindu extremists who, under Nehru, have never been allowed a voice in the determination of national policy and who were formally removed from the Congress Party nearly 50 years ago. The conservative and illiterate masses of India are, nonetheless, more attracted to some of the emotion-charged preachments

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of these extremists than they are to the secularism of Nehru. Fanatics could see the uncertainty involved in the transition to a successor government as a time to demonstrate their appeal.

By the same token, India's nearly 50 million Muslims have always looked upon Nehru's secularism as their best guarantee that the usual social and economic discrimination against

Muslims by Hindus would at least not be officially countenanced. A new prime minister, and especially one who is more genuinely Hindu than the agnostic Nehru, might find his most taxing and immediate task to be the problem of establishing himself with India's various communities so as to prevent communal violence. Shastri, by all accounts, is secular minded, but his first crisis on assuming power might well involve his having to prove this.

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