

A CEC who instils confidence, not awe

"HATE him or admire him", it was generally said about former Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan, "but you cannot ignore him". In the case of his successor, Mr Manohar Singh Gill, the word "hate" has long been dropped. He has to be only admired and, of course, no CEC, more so, at the time of election, can be ignored. Missing in his functioning is Seshan's pranks, exploits, quotable quotes and tiff with men who matter. He instils confidence, not the awe, in his massive election machinery at "Nirvachan Sadan" and kindles faith in the poll aspirants.

While Seshan, his ham-handed style of functioning notwithstanding, has firmly established the supremacy and independence of the commission, Mr Gill quietly and steadily picked up the thread from his ebullient predecessor and consolidated the gains without raising controversies. One of his major achievements, as the country prepares for yet another general election, is initiation of a series of measures to minimise the role of candidates with criminal background and also elimination of non-serious nominees. The steps taken by the Commission had yielded results in the last elections reducing the number of bogus candidates in the fray. There may be further improvement in the run-up to the mid-term poll.

Mr Gill is concerned at the unusually short term of the 12th Lok Sabha — barely 13 months — and toying with the idea of introducing another set of electoral reforms to ensure that the country could have a Parliament which lasts for a full term and

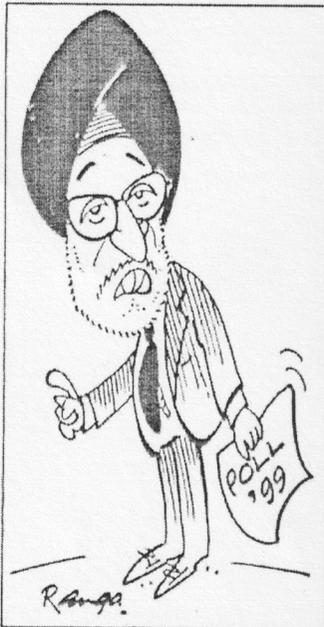
helps in providing a stable government. No concrete proposal has been yet formulated and he wants the major political parties to take the lead at an appropriate time.

When Mr Gill left for the USA on a private visit in early April, he had not thought that another election would be thrust upon the

dispensation to hold the mid term poll in June as this may give advantage to the BJP and its allies.

Mr Gill was convinced after holding rounds of discussions with leaders of political parties and top officials of the Home Ministry that fair polls were not possible in June. Apart from the weather conditions and the possibility of outbreak of monsoon in many parts of the country, deployment of paramilitary forces in the remote areas was not possible. The elections could be held earliest in the last week of September and early October and Mr Gill had no option but agree to this time frame. He will be arbiter for five long months (one month is already over) of the acts of omissions and commissions by the political parties and also of the caretaker government.

Sixty-three-year old Gill is a bureaucrat having qualified for the IAS at an early age.



Profile

Harihar Swarup

but agriculture remains his first love. He is highly qualified in this sphere having obtained Ph D degree in agriculture sciences. He is a writer too and his books make lucid reading, marked by clarity of thinking and expression. He is also an expert in the co-operative movement and has done a lot of work in Punjab in this field.

"My interest in the development of the cooperative movement in Punjab", says Mr Gill "was first aroused by a reading of Sir Malcolm Darling's classic study", "The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt", Darling was passionately interested in the welfare of Punjab's farmers. Subsequently, he read Calvert's classic, "The Wealth and Welfare of the Punjab", "Both Englishmen", says Mr Gill, "coincidentally from King's College, Cambridge, had worked long years to lay the foundations of the cooperative movement in Punjab".

As an agriculture expert, Mr Gill's notable achievement was setting up and running the largest World Bank supported Agriculture and Rural Development Programme at Sokoto in Nigeria. He spent five years — 1980 to 1985 — in Nigeria as programme manager for \$ 500-million project.

Another passion of Mr Gill is mountaineering. As President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, he wrote two books Himalayan Wonderland and Travels in Lahaul Spiti and Folk tales of Lahaul.

Long live Nachiketa!

According to official Pakistani reports, Flight Lieutenant K. Nachiketa, kept in captivity by the Pakistan Army after he bailed out when his aircraft's engine developed a snag near the Indian side of the Line of Control on Thursday, is "safe and sound. He is being treated according to Islamic traditions of hospitality".

Owing to continuous ambiguous Pakistani briefings, in sections of the Press including The Tribune, the name of the brave Nachiketa was confused once with that of Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja, the other illustrious pilot whose plane was shot down by a Pakistani missile. The Tribune expresses its sense of pride while reporting the martyrdom of Squadron Leader Ahuja. It wishes Flight Lieutenant Nachiketa a long life and a brave soldier's heroic home-coming.

country so soon and he would have to curtail his trip. He landed in Delhi on April 27, the day President K.R. Narayanan dissolved the 12th Lok Sabha. Even before he could come out of his jet-lag, he convened a meeting of the commission to discuss the preliminaries and called on the President.

Judging by its size and enmity of India's population, Mr Gill described the elections in this country as "mother of all polls". Involving 600 million voters spread across the country is an Herculean task indeed. The first question that confronted him was if elections be held in June or in September. Secondly, whether it would be feasible to link the elections due in nine states this year and early next year with the Lok Sabha poll. There were political pressures by the ruling