

# THE INDIAN EXPRESS

New Delhi: July 24, 1978

## *Sanjay* Southern sycophant

**A**FTER the scale of excesses confirmed by the interim reports of the Shah Commission, it may appear that other commissions inquiring into events that took place during the emergency can have little to add. Even so, the report of the Vimadalal Commission, which was set up to inquire into allegations against the former Chief Minister, Mr J. Vengala Rao, and other ministers of the Andhra Pradesh Government, deserves close study. For it demonstrates that the fervid atmosphere of sycophancy surrounding Mr Sanjay Gandhi—whose only public qualification was that he was the then Prime Minister's son—was not purely a north Indian phenomenon. Aided by complaisant officials, Mr Vengala Rao showed he could toady just as well in Andhra Pradesh.

The Vimadalal Commission report provides instructive details of the mechanics of sycophancy and the extent to which it can be carried under authoritarian auspices. It confirms charges that the then Chief Minister persuaded the managing director of Singareni Collieries—apparently without too much effort—to misuse his office to finance a "royal reception" for the "Prince of Wales" in Kothagudem on December 25, 1976. A helipad was constructed for the occasion and those who gathered dutifully to pay their respects were rewarded with a sumptuous dinner and other comforts. The cost, borne by Singareni Collieries which is owned jointly by the Central and State governments, was estimated by the auditors at well above Rs 5 lakhs.

This was not enough. To make Mr Sanjay Gandhi's later visit to Guntur equally memorable, the entire government machinery, comprising the district administration, railways and road transport corporation, was mobilised. The cost to the State Government was Rs 32,982. Private parties were also persuaded to do their bit. The report notes that the gentleman who made the local arrangements "did achieve his long-felt desire of becoming a Minister".

The Commission, however, gives the benefit of the doubt to the State Film Development Corporation which spent Rs 60,000 on producing a colour newsreel, entitled "Memorable Moments", on Mr Gandhi's visit to Kothagudem. It finds that no impropriety was involved because rightly or wrongly the visit did arouse considerable public interest.