

Sanjay

BOO TO JUSTICE

“SOMETIMES this flattery becomes sickening.” That was Justice J. C. Shah’s verdict on the fawning courtiers of the Emergency days—a tribe of senior politicians and officials represented by Jagmohan, former vice-chairman of the Delhi Development Authority. In a television interview at the height of the Emergency, Jagmohan had heaped lavish praise on Sanjay Gandhi, son of the former prime minister, singling out his “decisiveness, initiative and drive”.

Sanjay made a brief appearance before the Shah Commission on April 8. It was expected that he would not give evidence. Like his mother, he too chose to defy Justice Shah and face prosecution. But the son fared better. The summons meant for him, he pointed out, had been served on his driver. It was found from the records that the commission had bungled badly.

The judge upheld the objection and “requested” Sanjay to receive fresh summons before leaving. Having put the commission on the defensive, Sanjay pressed his point home. He arrogantly demanded to know if he was being detained until the summons arrived. “No,” said the judge, “but I would like you to wait.” Sanjay spurned the request and walked out. “I am busy,” he retorted.

He left in the style he had come, protectively encircled by Youth Congress muscle-men who shouted *zindabad*. In the evening he was served with fresh summons directing him to appear on April 22 to explain his role in the demolition of several colonies in Delhi which, according to B. R. Tamta, former municipal commissioner of the city, were pulled down at Sanjay’s orders.

Kapashera village on the Delhi-Gurgaon road was razed because it was an eyesore to Sanjay on his way to his factory. One day a dog dashed across the road, forcing him to brake sharply. He ordered several village dogs to be slaughtered.

Tamta said he and Jagmohan used to jointly take orders from Sanjay. Jagmohan,

however, denied the Sanjay connection. He testified that the residents of Turkman Gate had moved voluntarily as they were “attracted” by the alternative plots offered by the Delhi Development Authority.

Why, then, had he waited for the Emergency to start the demolition spree? Why was demolition at Turkman Gate speeded up after the police firing in April 1976, when the area was still under curfew? the judge asked. Government Counsel Pran Nath Lekhi jumped up to provide the answer.

He produced a newspaper clip in which Jagmohan had quoted Mrs Gandhi as saying: “The Emergency offers us a fresh opportunity to push ahead without tasks.” Lekhi had also nailed down Jagmohan earlier by producing the transcript of the television interview. His past utterances had caught up with him once more.

The judge dismissed the voluntary demolition, theory as pure “fantasy” and added that the twice decorated Jagmohan (Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan) had an “infinite capacity to mislead”.

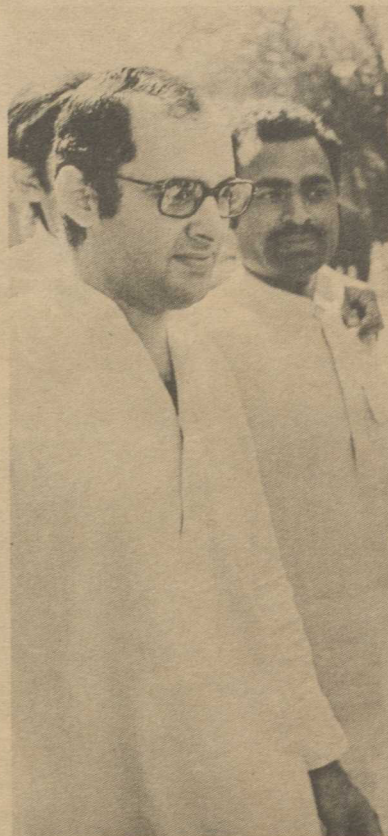
The high point of the hearings was the appearance of Dhirendra Brahmachari, the jet-set swami who needed an aircraft to levitate in. The plane, imported as a gift for his ashram, was used

by Sanjay to barnstorm the country during the 1977 election campaign.

The bare-chested swami caused much amusement. He came wearing a Sumo wrestler’s G-string barely covered by a transparent *dhoti*. A wet-leather lady’s handbag hung from his arm. He refused to testify and was ordered to be prosecuted. Asked to furnish security, he fished out a thick wad of currency notes from the bag and peeled off the required sum.

As the commission counsel, Karl Khandalawala, pointed out, swamis in the olden days lived in grass huts in the forest, but Brahmachari preferred the six-star comfort of his Himalayan pleasure haunt at Mantalai.

—Roopa Singh



Sanjay Gandhi—man in a hurry