

JRD TATA

AN ECONOMIC TIMES PRESENTATION



For well over half a century, the destiny of the country's largest industrial house has been guided by Mr Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhai Tata. A man of many parts, Tata's hallmark has been self-effacing modesty. Rarely, if ever, has he ever taken credit for the successes of the group of companies which he headed until last year and which employ over a quarter million people.

These fifty-odd years are packed with history. Pioneering civil aviation on the subcontinent, being present at the historic Gwalior Tank maidan when the Quit India movement was launched, funding Homi Bhabha's ambition to catapult India into the nuclear age, promoting the family planning cause and now, witnessing the new economic policies of liberalisation.

Mr Tata, who is eighty eight years old, has never hesitated to speak out his mind. Whether it was criticism of the government's economic policies or support for the Presidential system of governance, he has helped stimulate debate and clarify issues. In hindsight, he has even admitted his mistakes, such as his brief support for the emergency.

For his endeavours, Mr Tata was awarded the Bharat Ratna this year. And tomorrow, in New York, he is being presented the United Nations Population Award for 1992.

To commemorate the occasion, The Economic Times, in a first time ever presentation, profiles the life and times of J R D Tata.



The crest of the House of Tata was designed by its founder, Sir Jamsetji Tata. The words Humata, Hukhta and Hvarshta in the ancient Avesta language mean good thoughts, good words and good deeds. Mr J R D Tata later redesigned the wings.

The age of liberalisation comes too late for its most vocal proponent

AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH

At the end of a quiet road along Bombay's fashionable Cumballa Hill is a bungalow, The Cairn. It is owned by one of the city's foremost business families of yesteryear, the Petits. Built in a more leisurely age, with a tiered structure, an outhouse and surrounded with trees, it was vibrant with life not too long ago. Today, it is witness to the more sedate pace of its eighty eight year old tenant, Mr J R D Tata.

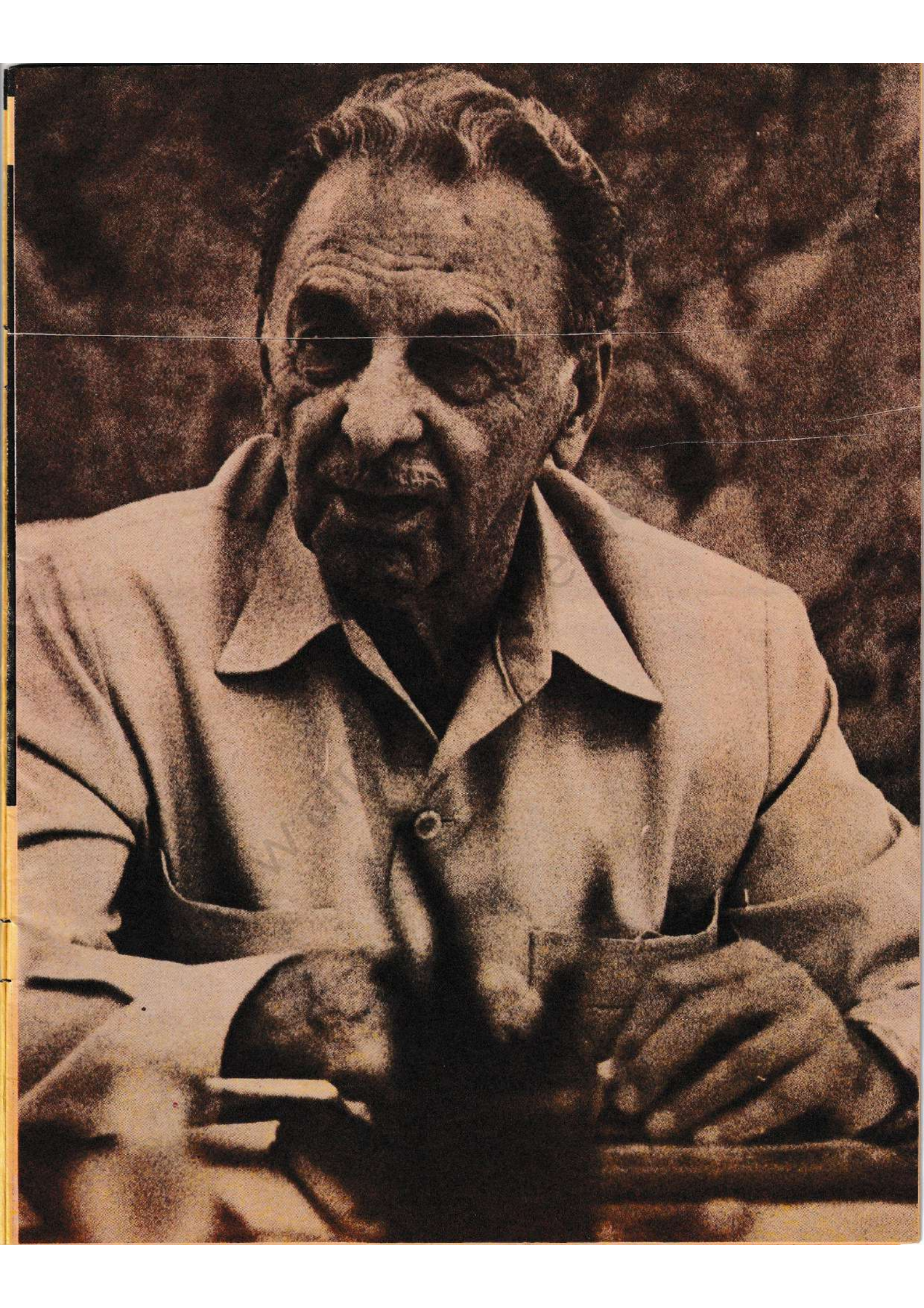
Mr Tata is most certainly the only top flight industrialist who has always lived in a rented house. But that is not the only distinction which sets him apart from other industrialists. Ever since the early fifties, when the first controls on business houses were imposed by the enactment of the Industrial Development and Regulation Act, he has been the most vocal spokesman against the imposition of such controls.

His outspoken views may not have cost him anything personally during the fifty three years when he was at the helm of the House of Tata, apart from the celebrated termination of his services as chairman of Air India by prime

minister Morarji Desai in 1978. But a director of his group is on record as having stated that all the license applications of the industrial group during the sixties and seventies "ended up in the wastepaper basket."

For him, therefore, the new era of liberalisation which was ushered in by the P V Narasimha Rao administration last year is tinged with irony. Because, just a few months earlier, he had stepped down from the chairmanship of Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata group, in favour of Mr Ratan Tata. It was a job which he had held since 1938, much of which time was spent in "battling the government."

Mr Tata did not seek that battle. He says he would have preferred to have achieved the same results without a squareoff. Today, though he is not actively enunciating the business policies of the House of Tata, there is a quiet sense of vindication. There is a satisfaction of having lived to see economic pragmatism having eventually scored over Nehruvian socialism. The other titan of his times, Mr G D Birla, with whom he was often compared, was not so fortunate.



Ratan — Sooni

Roda ghangir Sylla Darab Jimmy

Life was not always a battle for Mr Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhai Tata, the second child of Mr Ratanji Dadabhai Tata and his French wife Sooni. Born in Paris on July 29, 1904, the young Tata had a comfortable childhood as his father was a business associate of Sir Jamsetji Tata's sons Dorab and

Ratan and a director of the family company Tata Sons. As a director Mr R D Tata could draw a princely income of upto Rs 2 lakhs per year in the 1920s.

The Tatas had five children who grew up and schooled in France, and

R D Tata holding Jehangir while wife Sooni (seated) holds daughter Sylla. To Jehangir's right is grandmother Madame Briere.

Above right: JRD Tata's favourite picture of himself as a young boy.

Far right: Sooni Tata with her children. Clockwise from left, Rodabeh, Jehangir, Sylla and Darab. Sooni is in the centre holding Jimmy.





sometimes in Bombay whenever the family visited the city. Consequently, for many years, JRD was more fluent in French than in English. And even now, according to sources in Bombay House, the elegantly designed sand coloured headquarters of the group in the city's business district, the patriarch counts in French.

When JRD was five, the family initially bought a house at Hardelot, a beach on the Channel coast of France, and later several villas as Mr R D Tata took up to property development. The Hardelot stay was to leave an abiding impression on JRD as it was here that his interest in flying was kindled.

That interest was sparked off because the family's neighbour during summer was the legendary French aviator Louis Bleriot who achieved world renown in 1909 by being the first to fly a plane across the Channel. Bleriot would land his plane on the beach, much to the delight of everyone. "None were more starry-eyed than myself. From then on, I was hopelessly hooked on aeroplanes and made up my mind

that, come what may, one day I would be a pilot," recalls Mr Tata to his biographer R M Lala in *Beyond the last Mountain*.

Five years later, at the outbreak of the First World War, Sooni and the children were in Paris while Mr R D Tata was in India. The heroic tales of the magnificent men and their flying machines once again captivated JRD, who was now ten and who fervently wanted the war to last until he became a pilot! His father however ordered the family home and soon Mrs Tata and her children boarded a liner, braved the German U boats and the air attacks and reached Bombay safely.

For a while, the Tatas stayed at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay and in 1917, after Sooni delivered her last

child Jimmy, the family moved on to Japan to be with Mr Ratanji Tata who was engaged in trading in Yokohama. The family returned to India the following year and in 1919, a few months after armistice was declared, Sooni and her children left for France.

Looking back, Mr Tata feels that when he returned to Europe in 1919, his father should have sent him to England to brush up his English, so that he could have entered a British University, instead of spending three more years with his mother in France. But as Sooni was recovering from tuberculosis, which she had contracted during the months she was in Paris in the early years of the war, perhaps the elder Tata wanted Jehangir to look after her since he was pre-occupied with business in Bombay.



In late 1922, just when Mr Ratanji Tata was thinking of calling his family to Bombay and sending Jehangir to England to study, news reached him that Sooni had taken a turn for the worse. And, as he was boarding a liner to France, a telegram arrived announcing her demise. Sooni was barely forty three.

October 1923 saw the Tata family back in India, with Jehangir in Suffolk, near the North Sea, at a crammer brushing up on his English to get to Cambridge. Just as his stint was coming to an end in the crammer, a new law was passed in France making it compulsory for all French boys above twenty to serve in the army for two years. The only concession was reserved for the eldest sons of families, who were allowed a reduced one year conscription.

So instead of becoming a scholar at Cambridge in 1924, Jehangir was serving in a regiment called Le Saphis (The Sepoys) with the French army near Lyon. After the end of the one year period, Jehangir wanted to extend his army days by opting for an Officers' Training Course. But his father angrily vetoed the idea and called him to Bombay to join the Tatas.

Upset as Jehangir was, he owes his life to his father's decision. Shortly after he sailed for Bombay, his company moved to Morocco to capture the rebel chief Abdel Karim. There it was ambushed and no one survived the massacre. Though Mr Tata is grateful that he was called to Bombay, he rues the fact that his father did not let him attend Cambridge. "Father decided that a college degree was not essential for a career in Tatas and summoned me to India. This decision is one I've regretted throughout my life and which caused me to have a life-long inferiority complex," he says.

The year 1924 was also significant for the industrial group as it during that year when its corporate headquarters, Bombay House, was inaugurated. The building was designed by George Wittet, the man who was the architect



of the Gateway of India. Until that time, the Tatas were operating out of the brick coloured Navsari Buildings.

When Mr Tata arrived at Bombay House in 1925, his father took him to Mr John Peterson, the director-in-charge of Tata Steel and introduced him, "John, you know my son Jehangir. I would like you to look after my boy." Peterson was from the ICS and was director of munitions in India during the war, after which he resigned and joined the Tatas. Peterson ordered a small desk to be installed in a corner of his room for Mr Tata that very day. "From then on, Peterson never had a moment of privacy," comments Mr Tata wryly.

"Every single paper going to his desk was routed through me. I studied it before I sent it up. And I studied his comments before I sent them out. I must say that was a very formative and important time of my career, when I saw how a highly trained ICS administrator worked. I learnt a lot from that." Except for one major break, Mr Tata worked with Mr Peterson until 1931 when the latter returned home to England.

After a few months with Mr Peterson, Mr Tata was urged by his father, who was a cousin of Sir Jamsetji Tata, to visit the steel complex at Jamshedpur. Hence in early 1926, Mr Tata took a train from Bombay's famed Victoria Terminus to the steel city to familiarise himself with Tata Steel's operations. When Mr Tata was learning about steelmaking in the country's industrial belt, his father, who was then 70, left for France to spend summer with his other children. On a Saturday, after dancing with his daughter Sylla, he collapsed.

"I had no inkling that I was not going to see him around but he seemed to

Fédération Aéronautique Internationale
British Empire

We the undersigned,
recognised by the
F. A. I. as the
sporting authority
in the British Empire
certify that

Nous soussignés,
pouvoir sportif
reconnu par la
F. A. I. pour l'
Empire Britannique
certifions que

Mr. Jehangir R. D. Tata
Born at *Paris* on the *29-7-1904*

having fulfilled all
the conditions stipulated
by the F. A. I. has
been granted an

ayant rempli toutes
les conditions
imposées par la
F. A. I. a été breveté

AVIATOR'S CERTIFICATE.

PILOTE-AVIATEUR.

On behalf of

THE ROYAL AERO CLUB
THE AERO CLUB OF INDIA & BURMA.
ASSOCIATED ROYAL AERO CLUB OF GREAT BRITAIN.

P. D. Peterson Chairman.

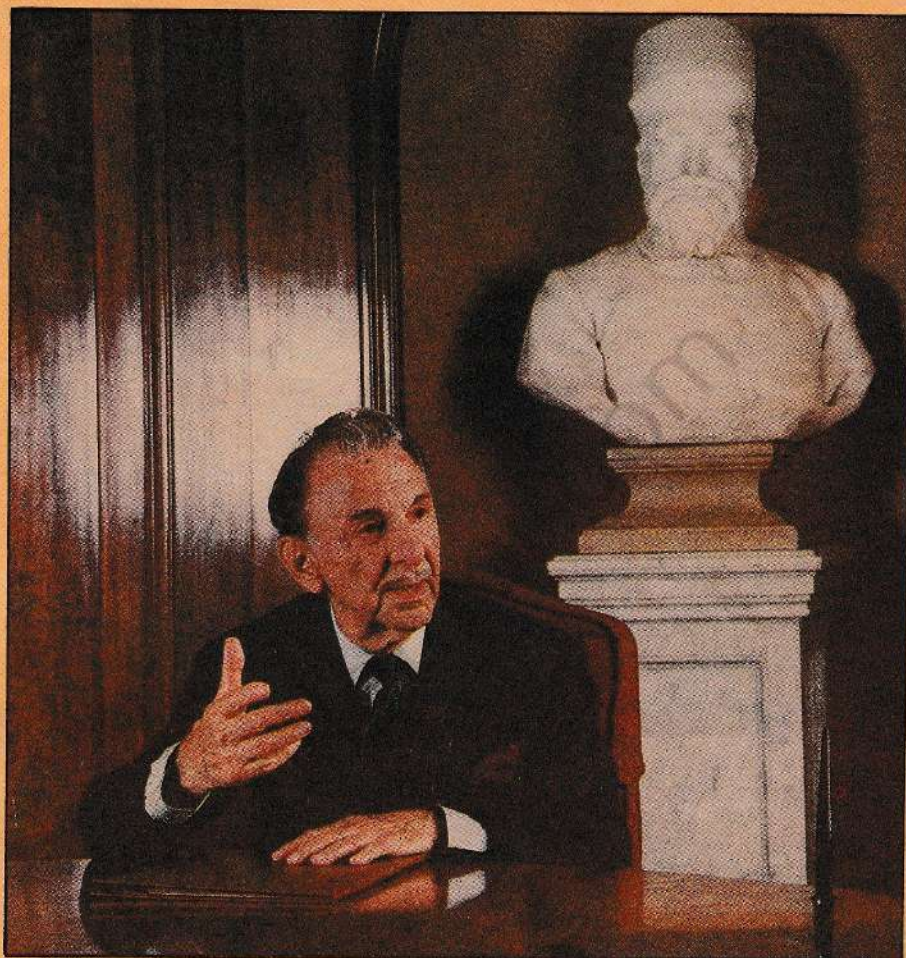
P. D. Peterson Secretary.

Date *Feb. 10. 1919.*

have had a premonition about his death otherwise he would have allowed me to go to Cambridge and get a degree of some kind," says Mr Tata in his biography. "We were separated so much of the time. It was always a joy to get together again but it didn't last very long."

With his father's death, Mr Tata found himself at twenty two the head of the family. His elder sister Sylla was two years older and yet to be married, his younger sister Rodabeh was nineteen and brothers Darab and Jimmy were fourteen and ten respectively. Added to these responsibilities were the issues of settling his father's debts to Sir Dorabji Tata. By selling the Hardelet property and his father's properties in Bombay and Pune, Mr Tata paid off the debts. The one security which Mr Tata inherited was his father's position as a permanent director of Tata Sons and the company started him with a salary of Rs 750 per month.

It was Mr Tata's love for fast cars that was to lead him to Thelma Vicaji, the niece of one of Bombay's most celebrated lawyers, Mr Jack Vicaji. The Vicajis were originally the



Far left: As a conscript in the French Army.

Left: The first pilot's license issued in India.

Above: Under the bust of the founder of the House of Tata, Sir Jamsetji Tata, who was the major influence in his life.

pioneers in banking and one of them reportedly lent a staggering sum of Rs 41 lakhs to the Nizam, Nasar-ul-Daulat of Hyderabad, in the 1840s. The Nizam refused to pay back the amount and the family was virtually ruined.

In the mid-twenties, Mr Tata was gifted a Bugatti by his father and he used to drive flat out to Pune (a distance of roughly 200 km) in two and a half hours. Even today, the regular taxi drivers on the route take an hour more. Predictably, the Bombay Police of the day was not too happy with the Bugatti. Unfortunately however, they were determined to frame Mr Tata in an accident.

It was in one such frame up that Mr Tata visited Mr Jack Vicaji to retain his services and saw the beautiful Thelma, popularly called Thelly. A romance blossomed, facilitated by the



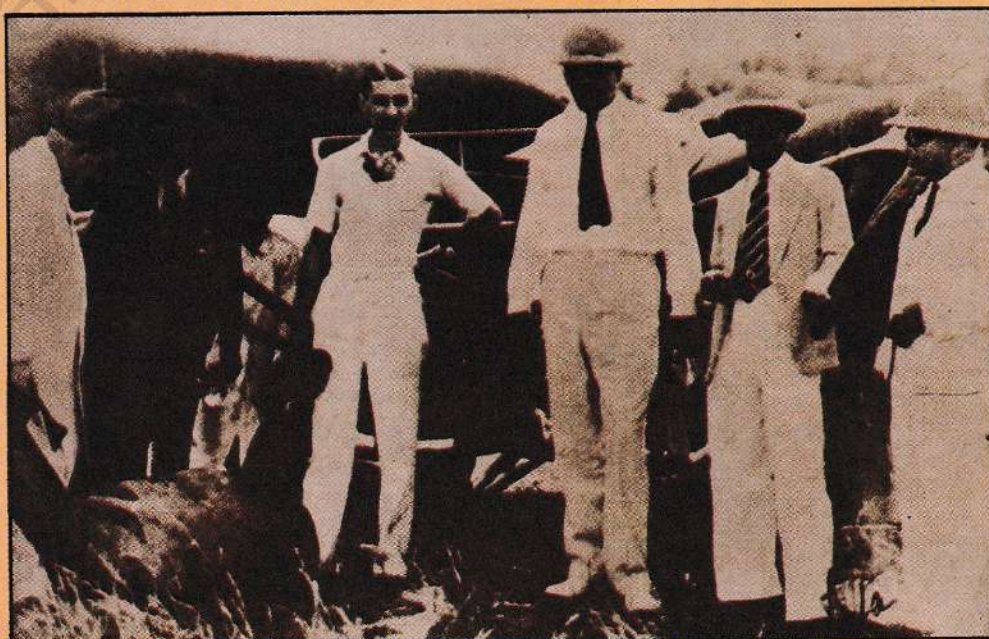
Rohinton T.D. Tata
(Signature of Holder)



With wife Thelma.

Right: Mr Tata arrives in Bombay piloting the inaugural flight of Tata Aviation. To his left is Mr Nevill Vintcent.

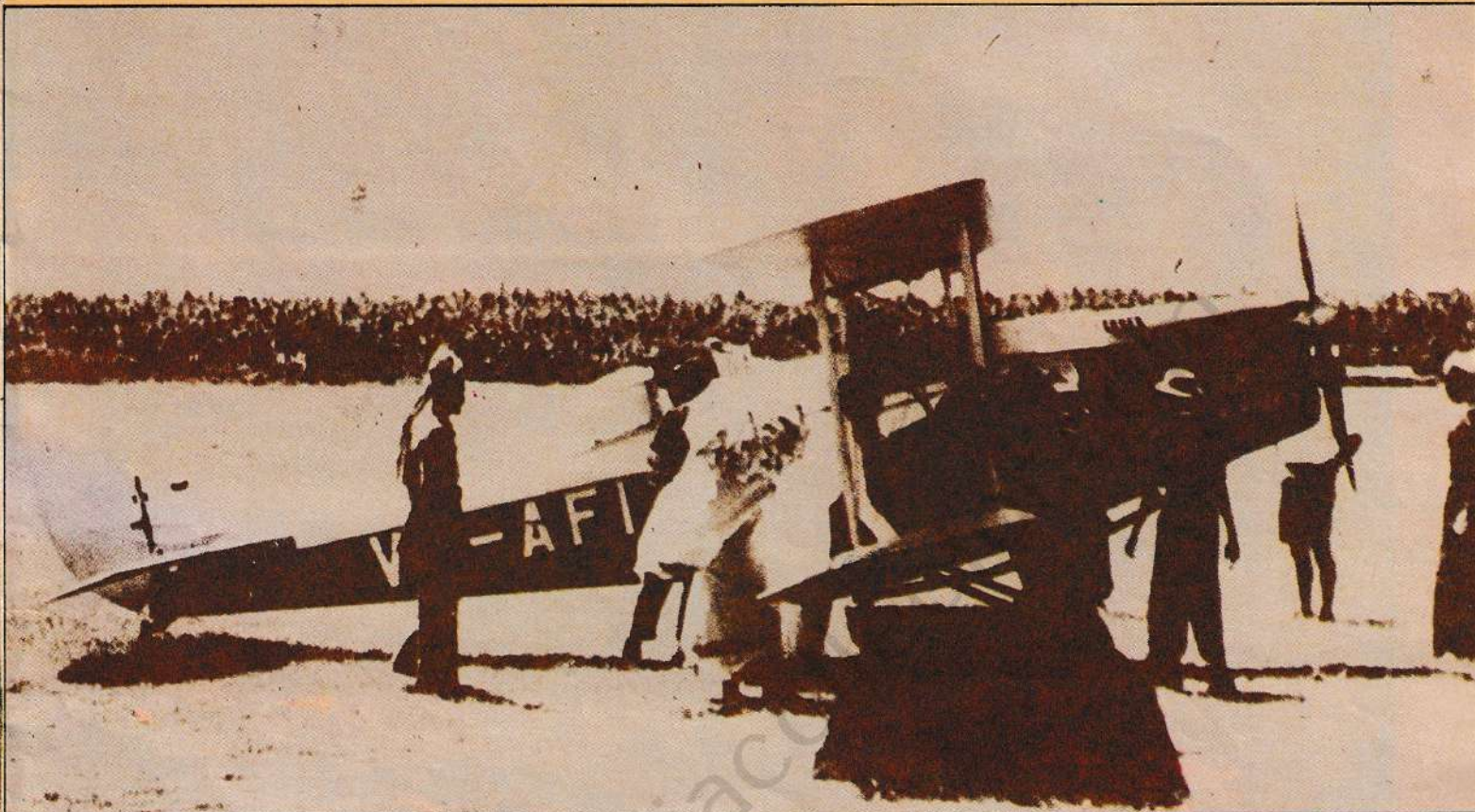
Far right: An early flight of Tata Aviation readying for take-off.



fact that since the sale of their house Mr Tata and his siblings had taken up residency at the Taj Mahal hotel, which was in front of the Vicaji residence. For the record, Mr Tata won his case but decided to sell his Bugatti.

Thelma became Mrs JRD Tata in 1930, the year after the latter became the first to secure a pilot's license in undivided India. In the same year he participated in the race for the Aga Khan prize of 500 Pounds for the first Indian to fly between India and England or vice versa. While Mr Tata flew from Karachi to London, the winner Aspy Engineer, who was later to become chief of staff of the IAF, flew out from England. Their paths crossed at Alexandria where Mr Engineer was temporarily grounded as he needed some spark plugs. Mr Tata who had some spare gave them to him and that was how Mr Engineer landed in Karachi around the time Mr Tata was over Paris.

Mr Tata's interest in the possibility of civil aviation was kindled by a boxing champion of the RAF who was going around the country in the late twenties doing survey work. His name was Nevill Vintcent. With Imperial Airways planning an air service between London and Calcutta via



Karachi, which would also carry mail, Mr Vintcent realised that the hinterland of peninsular India would be left out of the air network. His idea was to connect Karachi with Ahmedabad and Bombay by establishing a feeder service to carry the mail.

'When Vintcent's proposal came to Tatas in 1929 they were recovering from the downswings of the 1920s and they had had to withdraw from some enterprises. Furthermore, the chairman, Sir Dorab, was past his prime and was not likely to respond to JRD. Once again it was John Peterson who came to JRD's rescue. He persuaded Sir Dorab to let JRD have his way. "Let the young man do it. It doesn't cost much." The initial investment needed was only Rs 2 lakhs. Finally, Sir Dorab agreed,' writes R M Lala in *Beyond The Last Blue Mountain*.

That decision, which led to the formation of the Tata Aviation Service, later Tata Air Lines which became Air

India, did not take into cognisance the possibility of passenger traffic. "Who will pay Rs 100 per seat to fly between Bombay and Karachi," was the response of Mr Peterson on this issue. Such errors in perception seem comical in hindsight.

Though the Tatas had taken a decision, government approval seemed a long time in coming largely due to the innovative nature of the business proposal. When the clearance finally came in April 1932 Mr Tata left for England to purchase two Puss Moths. Of the two, Mr Tata hoped to fly to India himself, accompanied by his wife. They flew to Naples where Mr Tata developed high fever. On his recovering, the idea of flying was abandoned. So Mr Tata towed the plane to the steamer leaving for Bombay and brought it along as his personal baggage!

The first flight of Indian civil aviation took off at Drigh Road airfield in Karachi on October 15, 1932 with Mr Tata at the controls flying solo to

Ahmedabad and on to Bombay. He was flying the Puss Moth. At Bombay, the postmaster of the city was there to receive the mail, fifty-five pounds of it. Mr Vintcent climbed in at Bombay and flew to Madras with forty seven pounds of mail. From Madras the plane would turn around and carry mail on the return journey destined for UK.

The complete journey would take four days, with overnight halts in Bellary and Madras. But in the very first year of its service, Tata Aviation achieved what Indian aviation is now struggling to achieve. Cent per cent punctuality. Indeed, the Directorate of Civil Aviation in its report for 1933-34 asked Imperial Airways to send a team to the Tatas to learn a few lessons on reliability!

"As an example of how an airmail service should be run, we commend the efficiency of Tata Services who on October 10, 1933, arriving at Karachi as usual on time, completed a year's working with 100% punctuality ... even



during most of the difficult monsoon months when rainstorms increased the perils of the Western Ghats portion of the route no mail from Madras or Bombay missed connection at Karachi nor was the mail delivered late on a single occasion at Madras ... our esteemed trans-Continental Airways, alias Imperial Airways, might send their staff on deputation to Tatas to see how it is done," said the report.

In its first year of operations, the Tata Aviation Service, later Tata Airlines, chalked up a profit of Rs 10,000. It was a slender profit, but what was noteworthy was that it was done without any government subsidies at a time when there were scarcely any airlines operating without

government support. The profits increased to Rs 66,000 in 1937 and Rs 6 lakhs the following year. In the first five years of its operations, the punctuality average was 99.4 per cent.

In 1938, when Sir Nowroji Saklatvala, the chairman of Tata Sons who had succeeded his cousin Sir Dorab Tata in that position a few years earlier, expired, Mr Tata was catapulted to head the country's largest industrial empire. He was barely thirty-four. The appointment was made at the board meeting of the company at Bombay House on July 26. When asked what made the directors repose such faith in him, especially in days when the weightage accorded to age and experience was enormous,

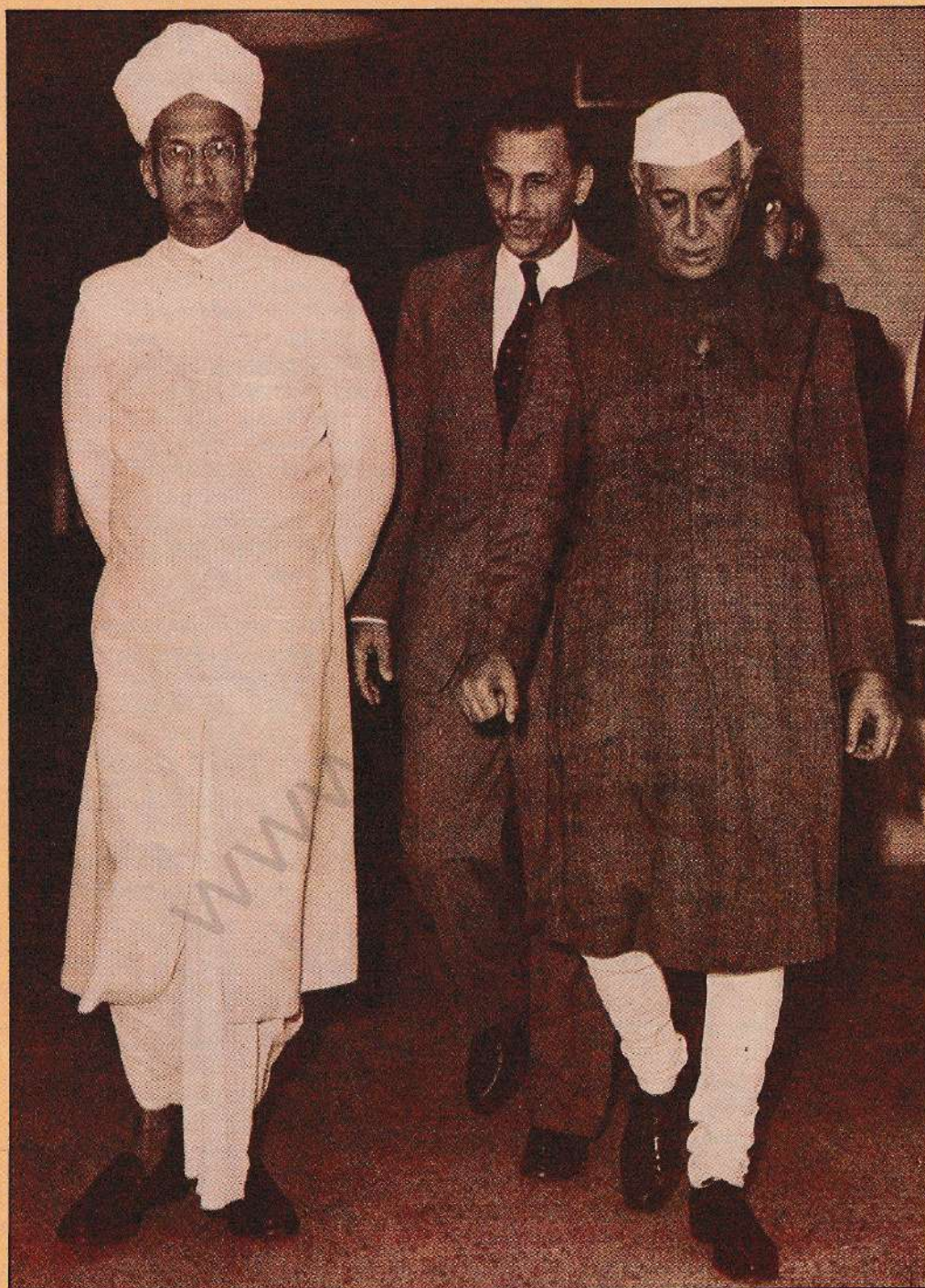
Mr Tata is known to have given several facetious replies. "It was a moment of mental aberration," he says. At other times, he has attributed it to the fact that he was the only permanent director of the firm apart from Lady Tata.

In the early forties, Mr Tata had a brief flirtation with the freedom movement largely due to his friendship with Nehru. Their friendship was forged at a time when Mr Tata was twenty and Nehru thirty six and the latter had accompanied his father Motilal to stay in Bombay with the Tatas. Mr Tata attended a few Congress sessions, including the famous one in 1942 when the call for the Quit India movement was raised.

However, the interest did not last long for Mr Tata who felt that he could contribute to the struggle more positively in ways other than courting arrest and spending days and nights in jail. Mr Tata's belief was convenient, and comfortable, and in the roster of industrialists who funded the freedom movement, where the names of Birla and Bajaj figure prominently, Tata is conspicuous by its absence. The only

known public protest that Mr Tata made against the Raj, was in Simla during his honeymoon when he and his wife stopped the car of the governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson, and gave him a piece of their minds for causing a traffic jam. This is not to make Mr Tata into a sympathiser of the British. On the contrary, he turned down an offer to be knighted.

During the years when the second World War was drawing to a close, the thought engaging Mr Tata the most was about the building up of the country's industrial capacity. In this endeavour, though he did not share Nehru's visions of a socialistic state, he was prescient enough to foresee the hand of the government in the planning exercise. Therefore, he called together other industrialists



With Dr Radhakrishnan and Pandit Nehru during the early days of the republic.

Facing page: Landing in Bombay in 1962 after a solo flight from Karachi, which was a re-enactment of his flight 30 years earlier, which introduced civil aviation to the sub-continent.



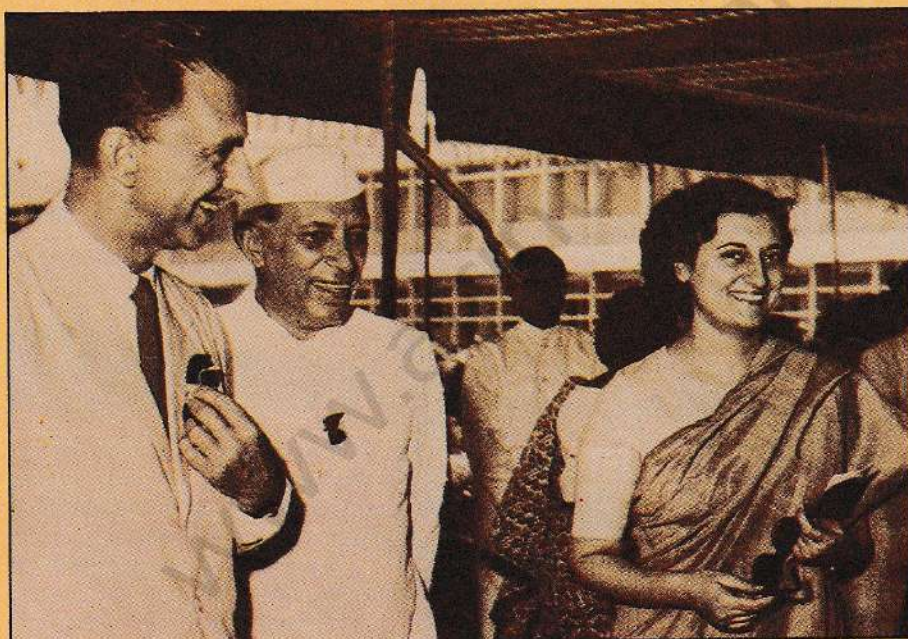
such as Mr G D Birla and Mr Kasturbhai Lalbhai, and technocrats from Bombay House such as Dr John Matthai, Sir Ardeshir Dalal and A D Shroff and got such an endeavour off the ground.

The result was the Bombay Plan announced in January 1944 which envisaged a 15-year plan in three five-year stages. The plan called for an outlay of Rs 10,000 crores and aimed at doubling the per capita income at the end of the period. Predictably the plan was skewed in favour of industrial investment for which half the resources were earmarked. Twenty five per cent was allocated for housing and and only ten per cent was the share of agriculture.

Though the plan drew criticism from the Leftists who termed it reactionary and the Gandhians who found it too un-Gandhian, it gave an impetus to the planning process. Most remarkable was the fact that it looked at the distribution of income and recommended the fixing of prices and restrictions on dividends. Many years later, economists were to admit that the "methods of the Bombay Plan anticipated those of the three Five-Year Plans."

The British themselves were forced to take cognisance of the plan since it looked as if the natives were competent to produce a plan document. One fallout of the publication of the plan was, therefore, the request to Mr Tata from the Viceroy asking him to spare the services of Sir Ardeshir Dalal to be inducted onto the Viceroy's Executive Council to start a planning department.

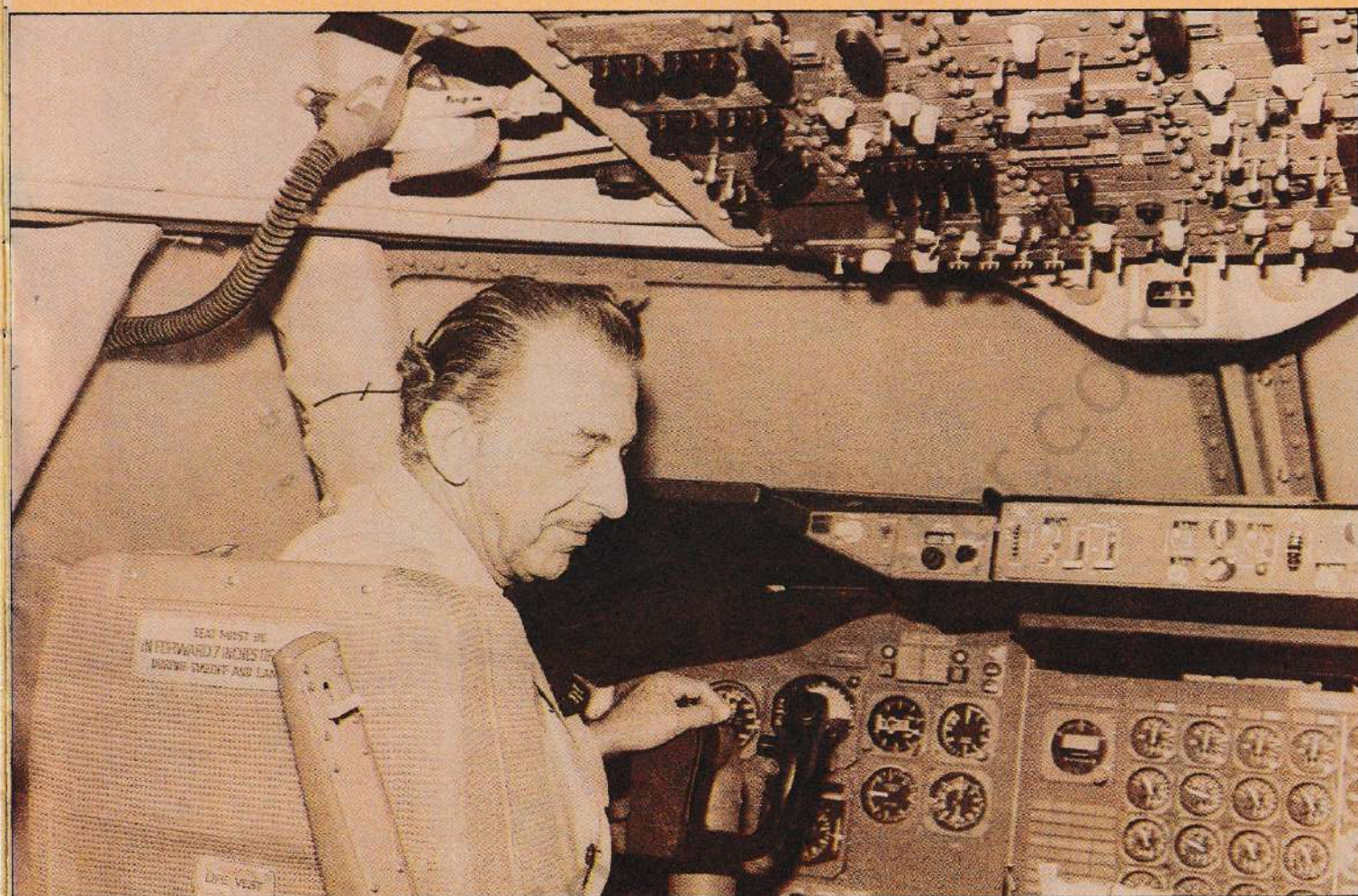
The formation of Air India International came about at the most traumatic period in the subcontinent, partition. But the speed at which his proposal to start a global carrier surprised Mr Tata, who had anticipated a wait of several months. Apart from the crisis wracking the country, Mr Tata was all too aware that the government itself had been toying with the idea of setting up such an airline. But what clinched the deal for Mr Tata was the gestation period involved. The government realised



Top: At an Indian Embassy party in Washington in 1957

Above: With Pandit Nehru and Mrs Indira Gandhi watching the demonstration of an Air India flight in 1960.

Facing page: At the controls of a Boeing 707 while flying over north America.



that it would take at least two years before its airline could take off. Mr Tata on the other hand had already placed orders for three Constellations for delivery with Lockheed. Further, the government was all too aware of the success of Air India, the new name for Tata Airlines.

The green signal came through in a matter of weeks and the joint sector airline had the government holding 49 per cent of the equity, the Tatas 25 and the public the balance. Years later, Mr Tata was moved to ask Mr Jagjivan Ram, the longest serving minister in independent India, how the government could decide so quickly in those days of crisis in contrast to the prevalent tardiness. Mr Ram's reply was, "We did not know better in those days!"

With Air India International on the starting block, Mr Tata spent all his

time setting up systems, and standards, for an international carrier where none existed in the country. The training of the pilots and cabin crew had to be organised, as also for the rest of the staff. The feverish pitch of activity could be best imagined by the fact that though the airline was incorporated on March 8, 1948, regular service was introduced within three months.

The inaugural flight from Bombay to London carried Mr and Mrs Tata, industrialist Neveille Wadia and the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar, among others. Touchdown at London airport was dead on time. Manager Maneck Dalal, who received the flight at Heathrow along with the Indian High Commissioner, remembers Mr Tata being the first one off the plane and calling out, "Set your watches boys! We are right on schedule." Later, in an interview with the BBC, Mr Tata

underscored that with the flight Air India International had become the first Asian airline to link East with West by a regular service.

At the end of the first year, Air India International's load factor was 70 per cent and it made a profit of Rs 77,000. And the driving force behind the venture made his presence felt in all areas to ensure excellence. On every flight which Mr Tata flew, he made copious notes which were turned into memos on arrival. These were prefaced as his observations and not to be treated as complaints or instructions from the chairman.

The memos covered a variety of topics from the correct angle of recline for seats and suggestions to staff to avoid smoking in the galleys to the colour of the beer and the quality of the tea served aboard. Air India sources report that it was once



At the Air India office in New York, admiring a replica of the Puss Moth he flew.

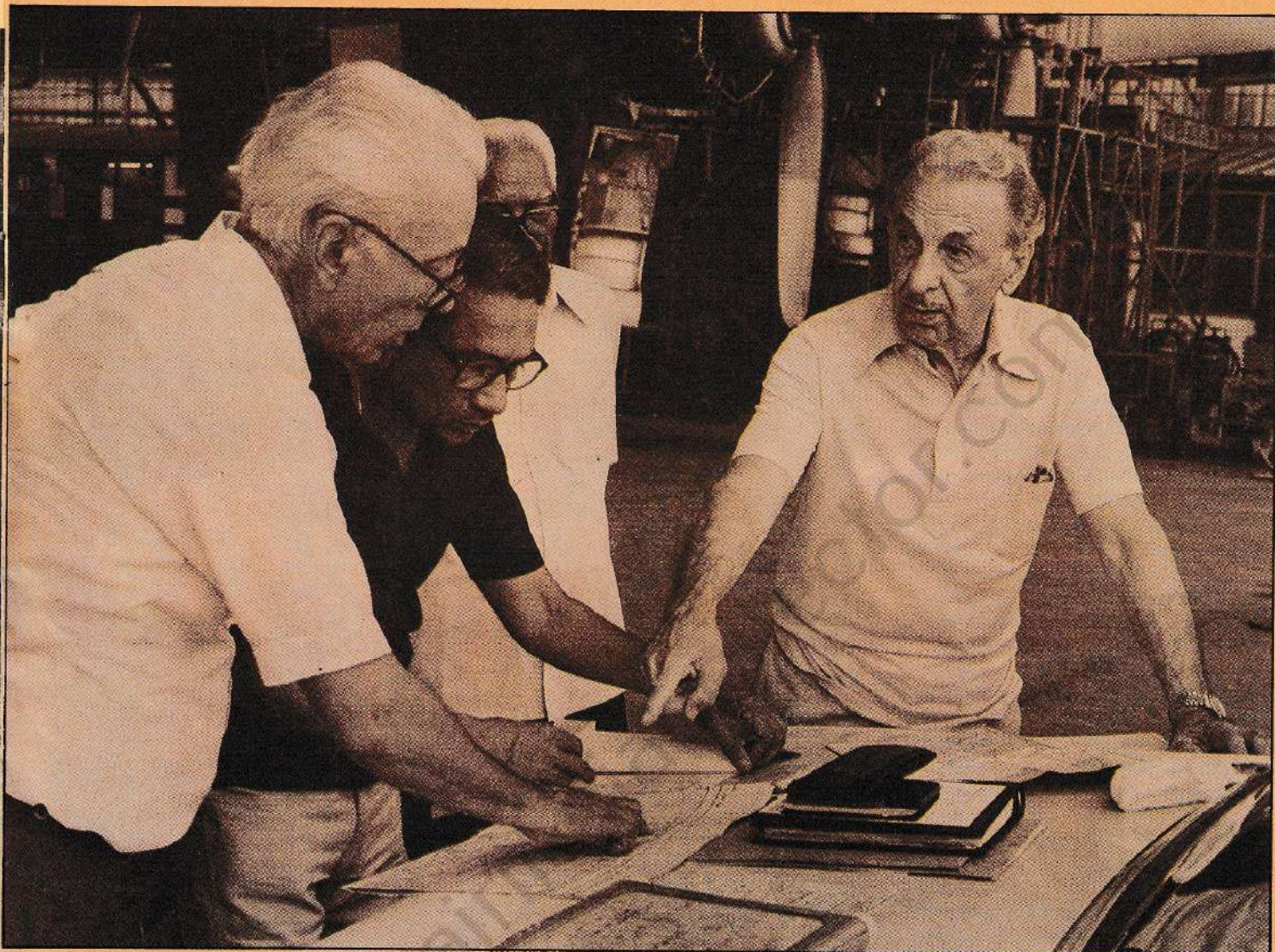
Facing page: *Checking the flight plan at Bombay airport.*

brought to Mr Tata's notice that he had written more than a million words in such memos!

Mr Tata knew that he could not compete with the giant foreign airlines in terms of size. So his emphasis was on the quality of service. The kernel of his marketing approach which focussed on the passenger's needs can be found in a speech he made to the early employees of the airline. "I want that the passengers who travel do not have occasion to complain. I want to establish that there is no airline which is better liked by passengers, that is safer and more punctual, where the food and service is better and which sets a better image than Air India."

Even though Air India International had struck a high note for Indian aviation, the domestic airline scenario was fast turning into a mess with the uncontrolled proliferation of airlines. By 1949 two airlines had been liquidated and Mr Tata feared that increasing competition would see a lowering of safety standards. This stand of Mr Tata brought him into a position of some conflict with Mr G D Birla, with whom he had shared a fine relationship till then.

Mr Tata anticipated that the government would nationalise the business unless there was some regulatory mechanism to prevent new entrants into an already overcrowded field. Mr Birla, who wanted to start an



airline, wanted free competition to prevail so that the most efficient would rule the skies. Mr Birla's executives' attempts to headhunt Mr Tata's pilots hardly helped matters. A government report in late 1949 said that about 50 Dakota aircraft would suffice for the country's aviation needs and the standard of economical operation would require that they be flown between 2500 to 3000 hours per year. Against this standard, it was reported that many aircraft were flying only 500 hours, less than a fifth of the time required to break even on costs.

Things grew worse between 1949 and 1952. At that point in time the Planning Commission recommended that the government merge all airlines

into a single carrier in which the government had the controlling stake. Mr Tata had another plan. He wanted separate airlines for the domestic and international operations, well aware of the possibility of dilution of the high standards he had set for Air India International. While the government went with Mr Tata, instead of acquiring a controlling share, it nationalised the entire business.

Mr Tata, who was upset at the decision and the compensation offered, was offered the chairmanship of both airlines. After much soul searching, he agreed to chair the global airline.

The constant refrain among senior

Tata executives has been the disproportionate time Mr Tata spent with Air India, where he did not draw any salary and was in a part-time capacity as chairman. Mr Tata disarmingly used to attribute it to the lure of the goodlooking airhostesses the airline employed. But the reason was not difficult to fathom. Apart from his love for flying, the airline was one business enterprise he had founded, and operated. The rest of his group companies were all run by efficient chief executives he had personally recruited.

That was why the sudden termination of his services in Air India by Mr Morarji Desai in 1978 was a bodyblow. Mr Tata has compared the experience to losing a child. He felt

particularly bad, he says, because he was sure that it was the beginning of the process of politicisation of the airline's management, something which he had stoutly opposed all along. Also hurtful was the shameful way in which the prime minister had chosen to show the door to the pioneer of civil aviation in the subcontinent without informing him of the decision.

On February 3, Mr Desai had called Air Chief Marshal P C Lal, who had retired from the air force, and told him that the government had decided to appoint him as chairman of Air India effective the first of the month. When the air marshal asked about Mr Tata, he was told by Mr Desai, "He has been there long enough." The irony of the matter was that Lal was an employee of Mr Tata since he was the chief executive of Indian Tube Co, a Tata enterprise and had therefore to ask the permission of the latter for a release from service to succeed him.

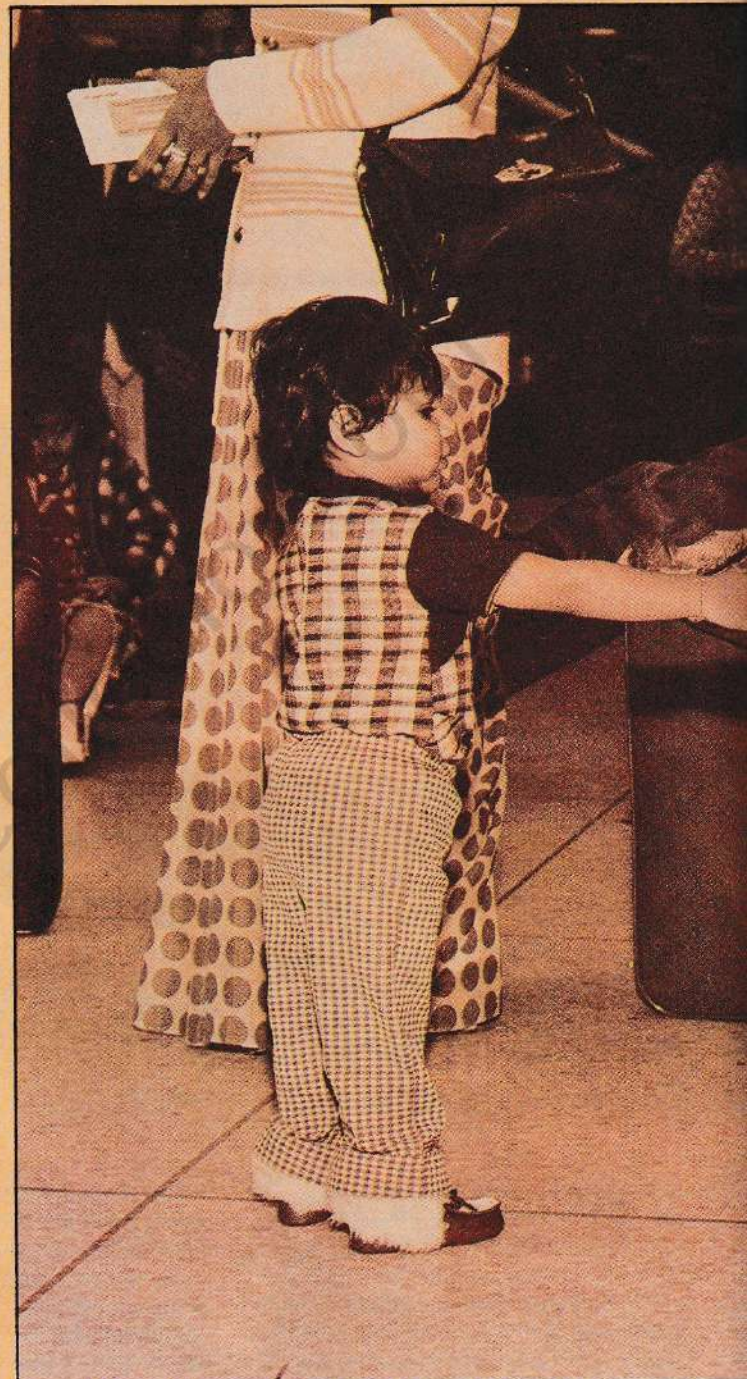
Though Mr Tata was re-appointed to the board of the airline by Mrs Gandhi, shortly after Mr Desai's party lost the 1979 elections, it was clear that an era in aviation had ended.

Predictably, there was a spate of resignations from the senior executives of the airline and among those who put in their papers were managing director K G Appuswamy and deputy managing director Nari Dastur. And it was also a rare occasion when the management and the unions came together. Both the cabin crew association and the officers' association protested the government action.

For Mr Tata, the dismissal had a sense of déjà vu. He had offered the government equity in the airline when it started, as an experiment in the concept of a joint sector where the government and industry joined hands. Unfortunately, there was very little evidence to show that the experiment had succeeded. It only reinforced his disillusionment with politicians and the government, a process which began with the first prime minister.

There was a lot in common between

*Greeting a young
Air Indian in the
course on keeping
an eye on
check-in routines.*



Pandit Nehru and Mr Tata. Both shared a wealthy background, westernised upbringing, foreign education and a modern outlook. In Nehru, Mr Tata found an equation he never could with Mahatma Gandhi. There are many warm letters exchanged between the two on record. But the fact that Mr Tata did not share the socialistic values of the other created a chasm. Pandit Nehru also felt, after the contentious issue of

nationalisation of the airlines, that it was perhaps necessary to maintain a distance from the country's top ranking industrialist.

Nehru did invite Mr Tata to be a member of the UN delegation for two consecutive years, 1948-49, and also offered him the chairmanship of Indian Rare Earths, one of the first public sector enterprises. But there were many irritants in the relationship for it



to be close through the tumultuous years.

One of the people who held Nehru in their thrall was Mr Krishna Menon. Mr Tata used to tell the prime minister that Mr Menon used to flay the US at the UN in the style of the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Vishinsky. "Krishna Menon is the Vishinsky of India," said Mr Nehru. "But Jawaharlal, Vishinsky speaks for the

second most powerful nation in the world. Whom does Krishna Menon speak for?" asked Mr Tata. Mr Nehru was not amused.

Another time, when the two were discussing the lack of profit in the public sector, Mr Nehru told Mr Tata, "Never talk to me about the word profit. It is a dirty word." The most serious divide between them came over the sympathy Mr Tata had for the

Swatantra Party. When Mr Tata told Mr Nehru about it, he blew up. "You have no business to do that," he exclaimed. Small wonder then that every time Mr Tata would engage Mr Nehru in a conversation about business policy, the prime minister would look at the garden outside.

Mrs Gandhi preferred to open mail if the conversation got too close to the bone. As with her father, the relationship was warm at times but what was lacking was confidence and trust. It was in supporting Mrs Gandhi's declaration of emergency that Mr Tata committed his major faux pas. Though he regrets it now, he felt at the time that "in those days the apparent disintegration that could have led to anything, appalled me." Quite possible. But in an interview to the Hindustan Times, Mr Tata lauded the "conditions of discipline, productivity, industrial peace" which the emergency had imposed.

Though Mr Tata does not like to speak about his contribution to industry, the most significant legacy which he will bequeath is the impetus he gave to professional management in the country. Apart from the visible acts of setting up the Tata Management Training Centre and initiating the elite Tata Administrative Service within his organisation, the freedom and support he accorded his managers was the envy of the fraternity.

He also took the conscious decision, after the managing agency system was abolished in April 1970, of letting the chief executives of the various Tata companies take over from him as chairman and actively encouraged them to become megastars. Consequently it is not surprising to find no other business house with a comparable galaxy of high profile chief executives as the House of Tata. Among them are legal luminary Nani Palkhivala, technocrat Darbari Seth, hotelier Ajit Kerkar, business economist Freddie Mehta, management guru Russi Mody, and watchmaker to the nation Xerxes Desai.

In each case, the success of the companies which these titans

managed was in large measure to the support of Mr Tata, coupled with their savvy. It is because of this encouragement which they received in ample measure that they all share a sense of being beholden to the patriarch. According to Mr Tata, the crux of the issue lies in finding a person with a deep sense of values, and then giving him the latitude to carry on with his job.

Not everyone agrees with the Tata style. One of his own chief executives preferred a more hands-on style. But given the vast canvas of Mr Tata's empire, it would be extremely difficult

to adopt such a style across a business manufacturing products as diverse as soaps and trucks to yarn and steel. Dr Freddie Mehta, chairman of the Forbes group and the first recruit to the Tata Administrative Service, has a more perceptive insight into the style of Mr Tata. "He believed in intrapreneurship among his senior employees," says Dr Mehta.

Apart from having a successful managerial style, it is also important to have breadth of vision to lead an industrial house. And this Mr Tata had in ample measure, as attested by almost all his chief executives. His

entry into the airline business is one stunning example, but there are many other instances when he backed ventures in the teeth of opposition from his directors.

At a time when the Tatas interest in hotels was confined to just the Taj Mahal Hotel and when the business seemed destined to remain a small one, he backed Mr Kerkar's ideas of establishing a hotel chain. Though the Tata venture in electronics was lacklustre and almost everyone wanted him to close down Nelco, he stood firm and believed that electronics was a sunrise industry. Even outside industry, Mr Tata has had an impeccable record. When no one at the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust was keen to fund Dr Homi Bhabha's vision of nuclear energy being the fuel of the future, it was Mr Tata who as chairman of the trust decided to use his vote and back him. The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, which the Trust set up under Dr Bhabha, proved to be cradle for the country's nuclear programme.

The matter of who would succeed Mr Tata at Tata Sons had always been a \$ 64,000 question. One inkling of his likely choice came through when he appointed Mr Ratan Tata as his successor chairman in Tata Industries, the subsidiary of Tata Sons, in 1981. Another significant clue was when Mr Ratan Tata was appointed the chairman of Telco four years ago. Finally, the guessing stopped when the Mr Tata announced his retirement at the board meeting of Tata Sons on March 25 last year.

The meeting was redolent with emotion as the patriarch walked down memory lane and spoke about the highpoints during his six decade long association with the House of Tata. Even though he rambled at times, no one disturbed him. At the end of it all, he proposed the name of the "gentleman sitting to my right," Mr Ratan Tata, as his successor. And then, after the motion had been passed and the round of applause began, Mr Tata got up and offered his chair to the younger Tata.

Though Mr JRD Tata may be



Above: Being led by Bombay's sheriff Mrs Bakul Patel at a citizen's reception in his honour earlier this year.

Facing page: Passing the baton; with Mr Ratan Tata who has succeeded him at Tata Sons.




leading a semi-retired life, he is still called upon to offer advice on crucial issues. He mediated last year between the warring clans of Mr Russi Mody and Dr Jamshed Irani of Tisco when the former had issued some controversial promotions to some executives. Most recently, when the

issue of a retirement age for directors of Tata companies was mooted, he backed the idea and followed through with a visit to the prime minister when there was some speculation about Mr Russi Mody being truculent and seeking the government's support to dig in.

With more such contentious issues likely to crop up at Bombay House in the near future, and Mr Ratan Tata needing all the support and encouragement of his predecessor, it will take a long time for the aura of the patriarch to fade away.

INTERVIEW





J R D Tata speaks about his beliefs, concerns, regrets and the distinctive management style he made famous

"Get the best people, and then set them free..."

Mr J R D Tata's suite on the fourth floor of Bombay House is very large and well appointed. The walls are pale green, adorned with paintings and the large windows, through which the evening sun shines, are screened with brocade tapestry. Behind a massive glass topped desk sits Mr Tata, in a white leather upholstered chair. Matching chairs face him around the table.

The silver haired industrialist is working on the draft of the speech he will be delivering in New York, after accepting the prestigious UN award. He is not particularly pleased with the idea of being interviewed. "Leave an old fellow like me in peace," he says. Who is interested in the views of an eighty eight year old man, he asks.

After much persuasion, and more of such banter, the patriarch agreed to be interviewed by Saisesh Kottary. Over tea and cakes.

○ *Isn't there a sense of irony, as far as you are concerned Mr Tata, that liberalisation of the country's economy has come about after you, perhaps the most vocal critic of our socialistic policies, have effectively retired from leading the destiny of the largest business house?*

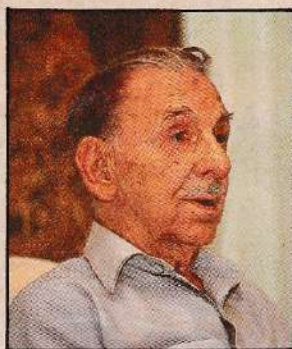
● Well I'm happy it has happened in my lifetime at least, and therefore I don't feel the irony of it. Perhaps I could feel vindicated....

○ *Did you ever foresee such an era of liberalisation?*

● Yes... ultimately. I always knew that the socialism which we had adopted, which was based on the British Fabian philosophy, would eventually fail. It is similar to what the Russians tried to achieve, but they did it the extreme way by adopting communism. And if it failed in so great a society as Russia, and its satellites in Eastern Europe, I knew that the Indian experiment too was nearing its end. But its suddenness surprised me.

○ *Do you feel that if this era of liberalisation had occurred much earlier, perhaps in 1951 itself as a sort of Industrial Development Act, would it not have meant a more exciting time for you in industry?*

● I must say I can't complain as I was not personally restrained in any way. But yes, there were many projects which kept getting delayed interminably. For myself, certainly it could have been a more exciting and fulfilling



I was a great devotee of Nehru's struggle for independence and I used to keep meeting him on and off and the relationship grew even after independence even though I didn't share his economic views.

time had liberalisation come earlier. But it also depends on what you mean by excitement. For some people it means fighting a battle. I fought a battle against the economic policies of the government of India all these years. I would have preferred to achieve the same results without the battle, but there it was. And the result, however delayed, is satisfactory.

○ ***Due to the permit raj which prevailed in the intervening years, many business houses grew faster than the House of Tata as they were, perhaps, better equipped to manage the business environment. Do you have any regrets that the competition was not equal on***

that score?

● I have no regrets whatever. If anything, I do wish, however, that we had been happier if others had followed our line of philosophy from the start. It is not that we claim to be different from others, but we hold certain values which others do not seem to hold. They no doubt have values of their own but they are not the values we espouse.

○ ***What have been the major influences in your life?***

● The prime influence in my career in Tatas was certainly that which was inspired by Jamsetji Tata. Jamsetji was a towering personality in every sense and above all, he was a man of



vision. At a time when the British were sceptical about Indians setting up a steel plant, Jamsetji never had any doubts whatsoever. And even though there were several vicissitudes, Tisco emerged as the largest corporate entity in the country. The same could be said about his entry into the power generation business and also hoteliering. I don't think anyone was on par with Jamsetji as an industrial visionary. But that is not the sole reason why I have been an admirer of Jamsetji. The major reason was his sense of values, sterling values, which he imparted to this group. If someone were to ask me, what holds the Tata companies together, more than anything else, I would say it is our shared

ideals and values which we have inherited from Jamsetji Tata.

○ ***Have there been other influences on you, apart from Jamsetji Tata?***

● Much as I admire the British, I greatly objected to being ruled by them. I was so exercised by it that I even toyed seriously with the idea of joining politics, to follow in the footsteps of Jawaharlal Nehru in the freedom movement. I attended one or two Congress political meetings and then I realised that there was something more useful I could do for my country than to go to jail. So I kept out of politics completely. I was also greatly influenced by the extreme poverty of

the people of India, as opposed to conditions in say France, where I had grown up. I resolved quite early that I would strive to help actively in reducing poverty. And my course was chalked out as a member of an industrial group by Jamsetji Tata who believed that industrialisation and providing employment was the chief method of reducing poverty.

○ ***How were you drawn to the cause of population?***

● Though I didn't have the education nor the economic training to understand the full implications of our relentless population growth, as far back as 1951, I came across statistics which showed that the population of India had already grown to over three hundred and fifty million. Against the backdrop of the rapid pace at which we were adding millions to our population annually, I realised that the growing numbers would be a serious drag on the economic progress of the country. In those days I used to include in my speeches at annual general meetings of all our companies of which I was chairman, some expression of my views on the situation in the country. So that year, in 1951 in my Tisco AGM, I spoke of the alarming population issue, to which of course nobody paid any attention.

○ ***I remember reading somewhere that Nehru was not amused***

● Quite right. When I told him of what I had said on the population problem he was angry, or else he did a very fine job of pretending to be angry. I was a great devotee of Nehru's struggle for independence and I used to keep meeting him on and off and the relationship grew even after independence even though I didn't share his economic or international views. When I told him when I met him some time after the speech, I did not expect a compliment from him, but I didn't expect the severity of his reaction. He said, "Nonsense, a large population is the greatest source of power of any nation". I memorised his words. Just imagine, in the forty years that have followed since my talking to Nehru, we added another four hundred to five hundred million. Even today we add every year eighteen million to our population, equivalent to the whole of Australia.



○ ***Mr Nehru's response must have come as a damper. So how did you propagate the family planning cause?***

● I spoke to a few people I knew, to check if my rationale was right. They agreed with me. Among them was the head of the Ford Foundation in India, Dr Douglas Ensminger who advised me to continue in my efforts and to establish a foundation to propagate family planning, which I did by creating the Family Planning Foundation in 1970 with the efforts of the Ford Foun-

ation which gave it an initial grant of \$200,000.

○ ***Your style of management, which shaped the House of Tata for over a half century, has been the subject of much discussion and debate. How would you define that style?***

● There was no style, because for a style you need to expose it to others and I wanted none of that. But if you insist on calling it a style, I essentially believed that every Tata company

shared the same tradition, same philosophy and same values as those of the group. And so we had to make sure that the chief executive and key managers of the enterprises should be people who believed in and followed the Tata tradition and philosophy. If we didn't find such people from within the organisation, we got them from without. Even before I joined the firm we recruited senior civil servants including Mr John Peterson to whom I was attached. We continued the tradition even after independence. For



instance, we inducted Dr John Matthai who became the finance minister in the Nehru cabinet. We got Homi Sethna and more recently Raja Ramanna and B.G. Deshmukh.

○ ***I appreciate that the recruitment policy is the crux of any management policy but what about the style and leadership you imparted to the group holding company, Tata Sons?***

● I am coming to that. Once you got the best people, the people who shar-

ed our values and ideals, we left them free to act on their own. We do not fetter them. We encourage them and give them opportunities for leadership. That is how Russi Mody at Tisco, Sumant Moolgaokar at Telco and Darbari Seth at Tata Chemicals developed leadership of their own. Just provide the opportunities for leadership and allow your people to exercise their own intelligence and skills in management and entrepreneurship. I think you may say that this is the style of Tata, it is not an original

The chief executive and key managers of the enterprises should be people who believed in and enforced the Tata tradition and philosophy.

style I created, but one that was naturally there and in which I believed strongly and strove to maintain.

○ **Would you say you have a knack for spotting talent?**

● No, not a knack but I did believe in my colleagues and encouraged them.

○ **What about the wrong choices?**

● Well there were a very few who left, shall we say. Tatas never fired anybody, at least not at senior echelons.

○ **You mentioned leadership a while ago. Did your leadership make any significant impact in any of your companies?**

● Yes. In the airline business which later became Air India. I was fond of flying but the initiative was that of a British air force pilot Nevill Vintcent who came down to India who sold me the idea of opening an airmail line, in those days we were not prepared for a passenger airline. Tata Air Lines began operations in 1932 and was a success which later led to the founding of Air India. That was the only company in Tatas in which I provided personal leadership.

○ **It has been said that you spent half your time on Air India, even though you only held an honorary post of chairman. What made you do more?**

● Because it was the one company which I had personally created and managed from the start. It was also the only one in whose operations I participated for some years including the very first flights of the airline. Even after it was well established and finally a nationalised airline, I was in every management decision. We grew rapidly, though carefully, carrying both passengers and mail. By the mid-fifties, we flew westwards to America and to Europe and eastwards as far as Japan. Even though we were a relatively small airline, our standards were as high as the best. Our presence was felt in the international routes.

○ **Despite getting off to such a fine start, why did Air India lose out on the momentum of the early years?**

● Because of the usual ills which afflict the public sector units. Unfortunately, the bureaucracy could never accept the position of not ruling the

roost. Discipline was the first attribute to suffer. The labour unions became powerful. And soon found they didn't have to respect management decisions as they could always, and they did, get them changed by going to the government secretaries or even to the minister to pass direct orders. The rot was inevitable.

○ **It has often been reported that you viewed the abrupt termination of your tenure as chairman of Air**

India as a most significant setback in your career. Is this correct?

● Yes. It was the biggest moral and mental setback I had ever to suffer. I remember saying somewhere that I felt like a parent who had lost his favourite child. I was not feeling upset so much for no longer being the chief executive as I was sad to see the quality of Air India's service, which I had assiduously built up over the years to a high standard, slide rapidly downhill.



Air India was the one company which I had personally created and managed from the start. It was also the only one in whose operations I participated for some years including the very first flights of the airline.



○ **What were the reasons that made you chose Ratan Tata as your successor as chairman of Tata Sons when you stepped down last year? Was it because you would like to see another Tata at the head of the eponymous business house?**

● No, I have supported the Tata tradition of choosing top management solely on comparative merit. I have watched Ratan in action for years. I knew what his strengths and abilities

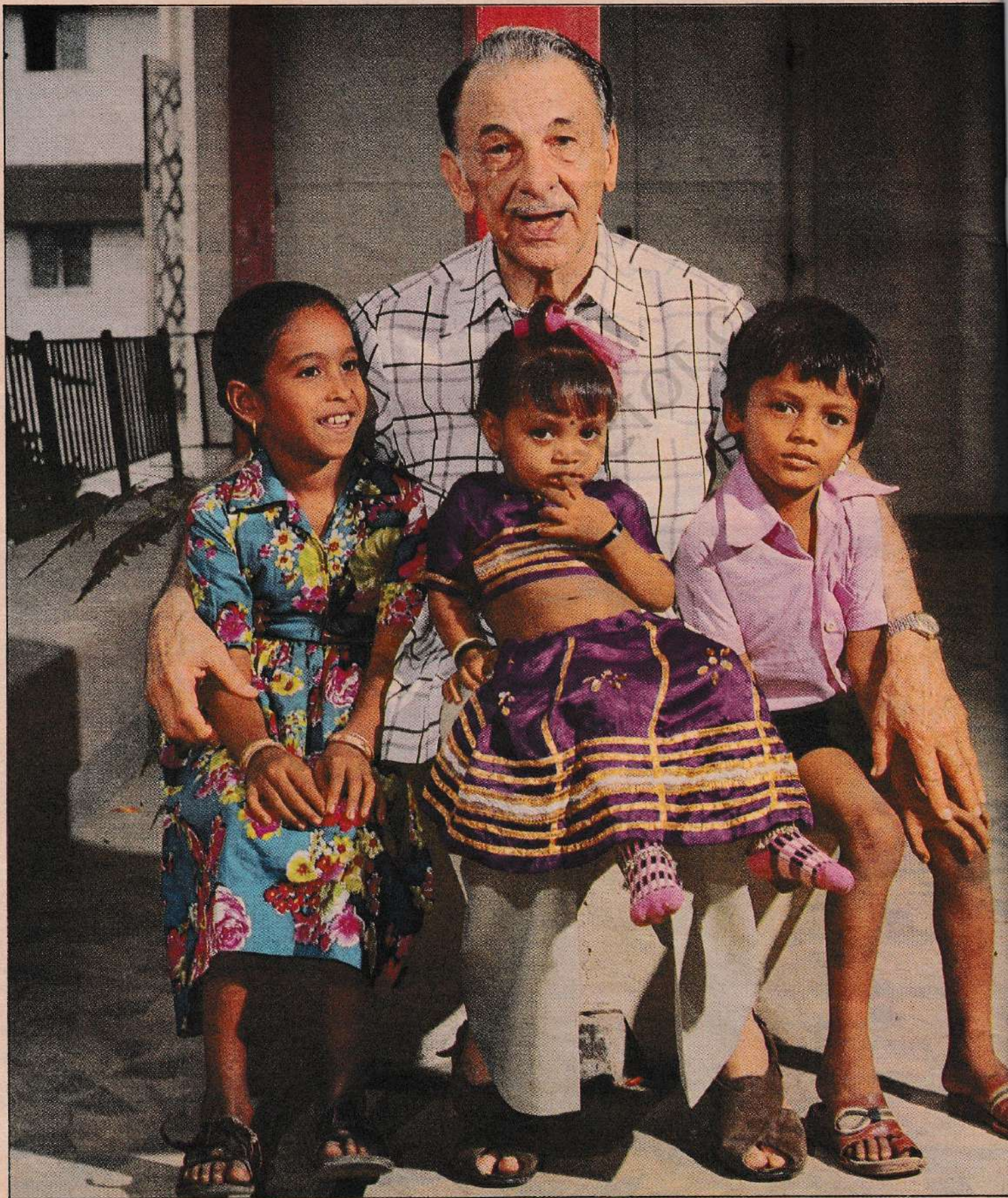
were and I was totally convinced that he was the best man to succeed me not only because of his abilities but also because he totally shared my sense of values. Mind you I recognised that the decision should not be mine alone, it was one with which my colleagues on the board shared totally and agreed with, which they did. Youth was a factor too, may be if some of our company chiefs had been younger men, the decision could have been a close one for me

considering the outstanding ability and experience in our team. Apart from sharing my values absolutely, he is totally honest, hardworking, able and of course, much better educated than I am.

○ **Why do you have this feeling, a hang up as it were, that you are not adequately educated?**

● It is a hang up because it is true. I did not go to college, even though I was all set to attend Cambridge







Do you know that in certain parts of the country today, out of every 100 girls who are born only 10 might go to school.

University. My father who was getting old wanted me to join the firm while he was still there. In fact he died within a year, may be he had a premonition. With the experience of the modern world I might have felt I could do without a college education and I joined the firm in 1925 without it.

○ ***What did you want to become when you were young?***

● I wanted to be an engineer and to apply for a job in Tata Steel!

○ ***Do you have any regrets in life, at this stage?***

● Apart from the lack of a college education, the other thing I regret very much about is not being able to speak any Indian language fluently because I spent all my formative years abroad. But it is a belief I hold dear, that it is important for a person to converse with people in his group in his native language.

○ ***With advancing age, you have had to curtail some of your activities. What do you miss most?***

● Skiing, flying and fast driving! I used to ski every year in Europe from 1945 until I quit when I was 85 years old. I was also very fond of driving fast cars when the law allowed it. I drove Buggatis for some years in Europe and here until my friends in Mercedes Benz with whom we were associated used to lend me a fine and fast Mercedes sports car for driving on holidays in Europe. I stopped driving altogether when reaching the age of 80 and I realised that if I was involved in a crash, in the eventuality of a stroke or a heart arrest or some such thing, I might be endangering the life of others.

○ ***Is there anything you would like to do between now and the time you cross the great divide?***

● No, nothing. I don't think I would have enough left in me, in knowledge or skill, to achieve anything worthwhile any more. I am 88 years old now, and in another two years I will be 90. So what could I look forward to achieving, except greater understanding of religion or things of the spirit?

○ ***Not for yourself, perhaps for others?***

● Before I die I would like to see

great changes in the economic and social life of our people, particularly of our women. Do you know that in certain parts of the country today, out of every 100 girls born each year, only 10 might be able to go to school. And the vast majority of our population still views the birth of a female child as a near disaster. Women's social and educational status have a direct effect on the birth rate. Southern states such as Kerala and Karnataka, where women have higher education levels and better status than women in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, have a much lower birth rate than in the North.

○ ***Are you a religious or spiritual person by nature?***

● No. I am in fact against organised religions as they divide people, but I certainly believe in the basic goodness of most religions and in the power for good of the Spirit in our lives.

○ ***Do you believe in rebirth?***

● I would say yes and no. Yes I believe in the survival of the soul perhaps through rebirth. I sometimes wonder whether rebirth after death isn't the most likely explanation for the supernatural powers and talents of young geniuses -- great artists, great composers, great scientists and great authors.

○ ***If you are born again in this world, what would you like to be?***

● I would like to come back with intelligence, and intellectual abilities in a powerful capacity with which I would help India and the people.

○ ***Would you like to come back to your same job.***

● No, but I would want to be creative in my new life. Now will you let me carry on with my present job in this life at least....

○ ***Most certainly, but just a last question. Being at the top is often a very lonely existence. Have you ever felt lonely?***

● No, because I have always been lucky to have such a fine team around me to share my work. I don't know if I inspired them, but they certainly inspired me.

○ ***Thank you Mr. Tata.***

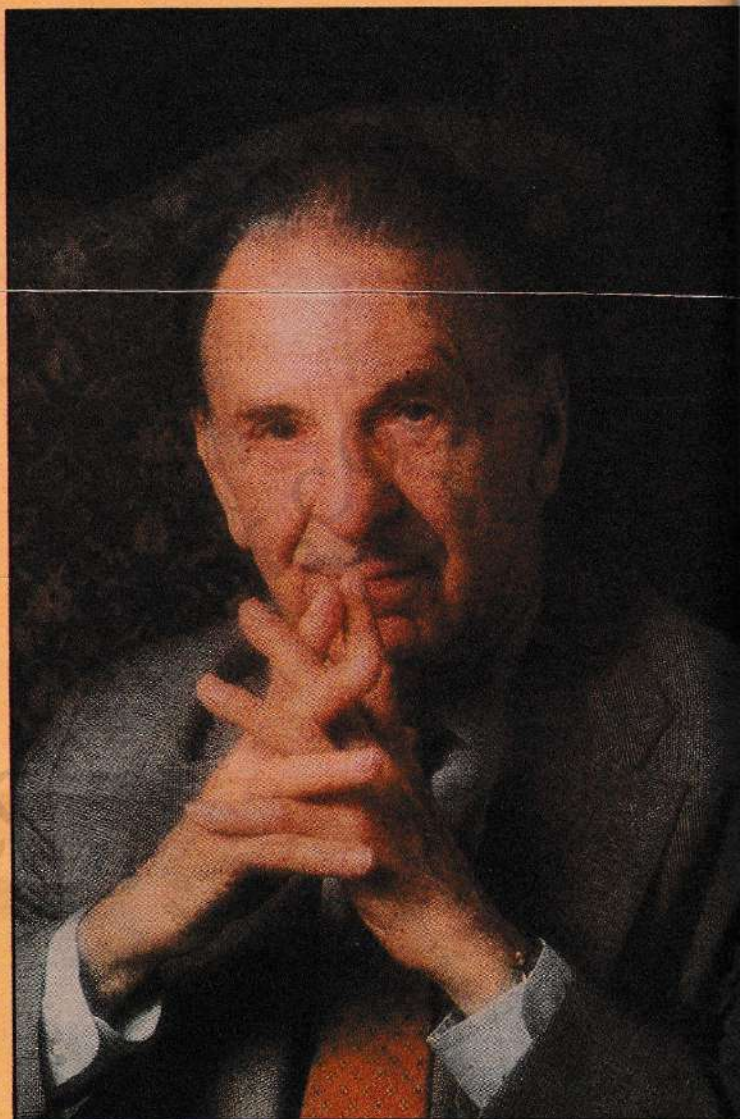
Mr J R D Tata is Jeh to his close associates. His colleagues reveal the many facets of the persona of a very private person

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Mr Tata used to take the counsel of many people and from all sides before he made up his mind. But if he took a decision and new facts were subsequently brought in, he would never hesitate to reconsider his decision. If he heard somebody press a point, he would argue against it. He would ask the person searching questions to get to the very root of the person's point of view. And sometimes, if he was convinced, he would not hesitate to revert his original decision.

— **Jamshed Bhabha**, director, *Tata Sons*

Mr Tata was always a man of today with a vision of tomorrow. Whatever may be the age he was in, whether it was the sixties or seventies or eighties, he was always au fait. He has never been confined to any era, be it in terms of understanding new technology, atomic energy or the quest for space. For example, ecology is the buzzword today and he is very conversant with it. And that is the great advantage for a man providing leadership to a busi-



ness house, and for us too since you don't have to educate the man at the apex.

His knowledge is so vast that it continually amazes me. The most unforgettable occasion, where I was present, was the time we visited the design facilities of NASA in the US in the late seventies. That was where they were doing the advanced aerodynamic testing of their space probes. We spent about three hours there. I expected Mr Tata to come out of the process more educated about space technology and impressed with the state of the art gadgetry he had been exposed to. He certainly was impressed but more than him, it was the NASA technicians who were impressed with his knowledge.

There were several aerodynamic phenomena which were mentioned, I forget them now, and they were usually named after the person who had discovered them. Like we have Bernoulli's theorem or Newton's law. And more often than not, whenever these phenomena were mentioned, Mr Tata would say, "Oh, I know him" or "I had met him in Paris

in 1954" or something like that. The NASA technicians were simply bowled over.

— **Ratan Tata, chairman, Tata Sons**

In my assessment of Mr Tata, I see three facets of his personality. The first is as an industrial statesman in which he freely gave his views and set certain standards and values in corporate life. His contribution here has been outstanding whatever may have been the cause he was espousing, be it population control or aviation. The second facet is as head of the House of Tata and as an administrator I cannot use any superlatives to describe him. His management style was unique, though not a style I would have adopted. The way he has guided us all these years is simply amazing. Finally, as a human being, I love him because he is a very decent person, very generous and kind, especially for people less fortunate than himself. Basically, Jeh is a very humble fellow

— **Russi Mody, chairman, Tisco**

Mr Tata is a true democrat in the sense that he practised democracy even within his organisation. I can attest at least two instances when he allowed my point of view to prevail, even though the other directors were all opposed to it. The first was over my traditional post-budget speech where I would criticise the government ceaselessly year after year. Some of my colleagues felt that it was adversely affecting the interests of the group and that I should clear my speech with the board first. I refused as I said I will speak out my mind on what I think is right. Jeh agreed with my point of view and the matter was dropped.

The second instance was when I wanted to return Mrs Gandhi's brief after she imposed the emergency. I was her lawyer and had appeared in the Supreme Court to appeal against the historic decision of the Allahabad High Court unseating her in 1975. I won the case for her in the Supreme Court and she was allowed to function as prime minister. That was on June 24, 1975. Within 48 hours, Mrs Gandhi declared emergency. I knew nothing about it.

I therefore decided to return the brief, a move which caused panic among the directors as they felt it would invite the wrath of Mrs Gandhi on the House of Tata. Jeh was brought into the picture and he said that though he felt it would be an insult to return the prime minister's brief, whatever the circumstances, he would not interfere with my decision. That is why I say he is a true democrat.

— **Nani Palkhivala, jurist and director, Tata Sons**

Mr Tata was not a metallurgist or an engineer but he knew more about steelmaking and details about Tisco's operations than most of us. At meetings, no one could bluff him as he would come up with details which only a person closely associated with the company would know. If we would say there was something we required, he would res-

pond, "But wasn't it installed 20 years ago near the smelter," or something quite similar.

Mr Tata is a demigod to the employees in Jamshedpur. Whenever he takes a round of the plant, people come from as far as two kilometres just to see him. There is always a crowd around, which is why he always believes we are overstaffed. In fact, I often have to take him around the plant at night just to convince him that we are not!

— **Jamshed Irani, managing director, Tisco**

Jeh is an extremely analytical person who is fond of mechanical things and loves to see how things work. Few people know that he has a very fine workshop at his home. His mind has a healthy curiosity and he has a remarkable vision of the world at large. He is also a person who feels comfortable with all types of people and in all surroundings.

I shared a warm relationship with him, which was unusual since my husband Naval was not particularly close to Jeh. They were different types of people altogether. Perhaps the bond between Jeh and me was a common language, French, and a common European background.

— **Mrs Simone Tata, chairman, Lakme**

I can talk about Mr Tata for hours and tell you what a fine person he is, and that is the truth. He is absolutely fair and honest in his dealings and he is very supportive of his senior executives. Most importantly, he gives you the freedom to do what you want provided you can justify your actions. When Tata Chemicals wanted to acquire an interest in ACC, he was not particularly convinced we should get into the business. But after I explained to him the advantages, he gave his consent.

Every meeting with Mr Tata stimulates me. I don't think anyone has come out after meeting Jeh without being energised and acquiring an expanded perspective. As a manager, one facet which has always continued to fascinate me has been the man-management style of Mr Tata who has been able to harness a team of individualistic executives, capitalising upon their strengths, downplaying their differences and deficiencies; all by the sheer weight of his leadership. I think that is a great achievement.

— **Darbari Seth, chairman, Tata Chemicals**

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JRD TATA - A CHRONICLE

1904, July 29	Birth in Paris
1909	The Tatas purchase a house on the beach of Hadelot in France where a young JRD is enthralled by the aviator Louis Bleriot who becomes his neighbour
1909-17	The family alternates between Bombay and Paris and Tata attends Cathedral School when in Bombay.
1917-18	The family resides at Yokohama to be with Ratanji Tata. At the end of the First World War, the family moves to France
1923	Loses his mother Sooni and spends a year in a crammer in England prior to seeking admission in Cambridge
1924	Drafted into the French Army for a year as a new conscription law comes into force in France
1925	Ratanji Tata calls his son to India and JRD joins Tatas as an unpaid apprentice
1926	Spends a year at Jamshedpur and his father passes away in France. He inherits his father's directorship in Tata Sons
1929	Renounces French citizenship
1929, February 10	Secures a pilot's license, the first in India
1930 May	Stood second in the Aga Khan aviation race for flying between India and UK
1930 December	Marries Thelma Vicaji
1932, October 15	Tata Aviation Service inaugurated with JRD flying between Karachi and Bombay
1938, July 26	Appointed chairman of Tata Sons
1942 August	Attends the Congress session in Bombay where Quit India resolution was passed
1944	JRD turns down proposal of knighthood, draws up the Bombay Plan and sets up the JRD Tata Trust
1945	Initiates the setting up of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research which pioneers India's nuclear programme, leads the first delegation of industrialists to UK and US
1948, March 8	Air India incorporated as a joint sector venture
1953, August 1	Air India nationalised, Tata appointed chairman
1955, January 26	Awarded Padma Vibhushan
1958-59	Elected president of IATA
1962, October 15	Re-enacted solo flight Karachi-Bombay to commemorate 30th anniversary of Air India
1966 January	Made honorary Air Commodore, IAF
1974 January	Made honorary Air Vice-Marshal, IAF
1978, February 1	Chairmanship of Air India abruptly terminated by Morarji Desai
1979 March	Presented the Tony Jannus Award
1982, October 15	Re-enacted Karachi-Bombay flight to mark golden jubilee of Indian civil aviation
1983 January	Bestowed with the rank of Commander of the French Legion of Honour
1986	Awarded the Bessemer Medal of the Institute of Metals, London
1988	Awarded the Daniel Guggenheim Medal
1991, March 25	Steps down from chairmanship of Tata Sons in favour of Ratan Tata
1992, January 26	Awarded Bharat Ratna
1992, September 17	Awarded the UN Population Award

