

EIR Special Report

Gandhi's mandate to bring India into the 21st century

by Susan Maitra

The New Year opened in India in an atmosphere of optimism and great expectation. In the few months since the brutal assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on Oct. 31, the nation has taken the necessary steps to meet the challenge of the future with renewed determination. In a moment of tragedy and crisis, the Indian population tossed aside the traditional calculus of caste, section, religious, or other communal interest to rally behind a new leader who promised them unity and progress. "The voters were looking for a future for the country," said Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who had led his Indian National Congress party to an historic election victory on a program to take a sovereign and united India into the 21st century. "They have voted for the integrity and unity of India."

The vote was the population's act of faith in the leadership of one man—Rajiv Gandhi—whom they perceive to represent the combination of continuity and change required to move India forward at this critical juncture. It is perhaps this latter consideration which more than anything confounds the jaded commentators within India and abroad, and which defines the inner strength of the population of a nation these commentators have consigned to disintegration.

Rajiv Gandhi represents a new generation, the first generation born of independent India, shaped by the struggle to build the nation, and which now makes up the majority of the Indian electorate. The trust and hope that the Indian population has placed in him were evoked by the vision and program which he spelled out in speech after speech across the country. His determination to tackle the country's difficult problems and to root out inefficiency in government and industry has been visible since the moment he was thrust into the prime ministership, and his quiet and resolute actions in the two months before the elections, convinced many—even among the most bitter critics of the late prime minister—that here was a man who might be able to move India into a new era.

Moreover, the electorate realized that he is a young man with no political debts to anyone, either within the country or elsewhere, and is thus in a position to break new ground to put the country and its political institutions on a more dynamic, secure basis.



Photo: Indian Press Information Bureau

Election campaigning in Tamil Nadu, India in December 1984.

On the domestic political front, the problems in Punjab and Assam will receive priority attention for real solutions. A cabinet-level committee has already been set up to work on Punjab, and has begun consultations with officials there.

On the economic front, a multipronged program has been launched to remove the bottlenecks in streamlining industrial expansion, in infrastructure, industrial policy, trade, and—of topmost priority—in education. Prime Minister Gandhi has announced a reordering of the government's ministerial structure in order to facilitate this.

On foreign policy, the prime minister has reiterated India's commitment to non-alignment, emphasizing in particular the urgency of international economic reform. At the same time, a clear priority has been placed on improving and strengthening India's relations with its immediate neighbors and the Asian region more broadly.

But as the new prime minister himself has emphasized, the country is passing through a difficult phase and the challenge is enormous.

First and foremost, while those assassins who pulled the trigger and murdered Prime Minister Indira Gandhi are behind bars, their controllers are still at large. The international conspiracy to break up the country that was the motive for Mrs. Gandhi's murder received a set-back in the elections, in the population's vote for unity and stability, to which it can be expected to respond with new fury. The terrorist apparatus has made it known that Rajiv Gandhi and every member of his family are on the "hit list." Already a new round of assassination attempts against selected Sikh targets has been launched, in a bid to unleash new communal strife

and to make solution of the Punjab problem impossible.

The most immediate concern is, of course, the prime minister's own security. While he has recruited an entirely new personal staff and replaced the Delhi police with the Border Security Force, the essence of security is never physical protection. The murder of Mrs. Gandhi was first of all a failure of intelligence, and it is in this critical area where there is as yet no evidence of any fundamental change. The hands of the Sikh separatists who pulled the trigger were guided by an international conspiracy to use religious fundamentalism and other manifestations of cultural relativism to destroy nation-states for geopolitical gain. The plot was hatched in London, with the connivance of factions in the British oligarchy and the Soviet KGB. The dye to trace the terrorist conspiracy is the drug traffic, as it winds back and forth from East to West, through Bulgaria and Cuba, through Montreal and New York, to London and Amsterdam and Geneva.

To deal with this threat requires more than just practical determination and courage. It requires a special kind of intelligence that insists that the basic institutions of the nation conform to the requirements of natural law. It requires a cultural renaissance that will reconnect India's national identity with its scientific roots in the Vedic period, which we know today in the heritage of Sanskrit language, literature, astronomy, and the philosophical ideas that emerged from the subcontinent of India about 4000 B.C.

That is the real challenge before Rajiv Gandhi and the new generation of Indian leaders to bring India into the 21st century.