

**PART II**  
**THE INDIRA ERA: 1964-1984**

**14. INDIRA GANDHI: FIRST WOMAN  
PRIME MINISTER, 1966-1971**

*A woman ruler is under a social handicap until she has  
been able to consolidate her position.*

*- Economic and Political Weekly.*

**14.1 Shastri's Successor**

After the unexpected demise of Lal Bahadur Shastri, on 10 January 1966, the search for his successor was on. There were seven aspirants for the post of India's third Prime Minister – Desai, Indira, Nanda, Chavan, S.K. Patil, Sanjiva Reddy and Kamaraj. Kamaraj, for reasons better known to himself, withdrew from the contest. This time Desai insisted on a secret ballot. Finally, there was straight contest between Desai and Indira Gandhi. On 19 January 1966, secret ballot was held in the meeting of Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP), in which Indira Gandhi secured 355 votes as against 169 for Desai. She owed her triumph to Kamaraj.

The Congress President K. Kamaraj played a crucial role in clearing the way for Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, to succeed Shastri. Kamaraj, in his own characteristic way, justified his support to her: 1) She knew all the world leaders; 2) had traveled widely with her father; 3) grown up with almost all the great men of the freedom movement; 4) had a rational and modern mind; 5) totally free of parochialism, and 6) In 1967, she could win the election.<sup>1</sup> Besides, she had the experience of working as a member of the Congress Working Committee (1955), the highest policy making body of the party; elected President of the Congress Party (1959) an elected member of the CWC as well as a member of the Central Election Committee, which selected candidates for the 1962 election. Then she joined Shastri's Cabinet as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Though Indira Gandhi inherited the name and mantle from her father Nehru, she on her own right, was eminently qualified to become the first woman prime minister of India.<sup>2</sup> On 24 January 1966, the 49 year old Indira

Gandhi was sworn in as the third Prime Minister by the President Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.<sup>3</sup>

## 14.2 Indira Cabinet

Indira Gandhi was the choice of the Syndicate. K.Kamaraj, the President, insisted that she retained most ministers of Shastri's Cabinet. She had to drop the Home Minister, Gulzarilal Nanda, but she was constrained to retain him in her Cabinet. However, Indira Gandhi had her way in inducting Asoka Mehta (new Minister of Planning); G.S.Pathak (Minister of Law); Fakrudin Ali Mirza (Minister of Irrigation and Power); and Jagjiwan Ram (Minister of Labour). Morarji Desai was not invited to join her Cabinet! Soon she became the Prime Minister *inter pares*, with a mind and will of her own.

## 14.3 'Kitchen Cabinet'

Indira Gandhi's 'Kitchen Cabinet' was the expanded version of the 'Back-benchers Club', formed during the Shastri years.<sup>4</sup> Her Kitchen Cabinet was a wheel within the wheel, comprised of Dinesh Singh, I.K.Gujral, Nandini Prasad, Uma Shankar Dikshit, D.P.Mishra, C.Subramaniam, Asoka Mehta and Farooq Ali Ahmed. This 'nucleus of power' assisted and advised the Prime Minister. Indira Gandhi in crucial decision making. They "urged a leftist ideology on her".<sup>5</sup> She also relied heavily on the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), particularly on the services of her Principal Secretary L.K.Jha and later P.N. Haksar. The PMO "reached dizzy heights of power".<sup>6</sup>

## 14.4 1966: The year of Turmoil

### 14.4.1 Unrest in North-East

Within a couple of months after assuming office of Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, encountered a threat to national unity. There was unrest in the North-East. The Nagas were threatening cession from the Indian Union. There were periodic terrorist attacks, insurgency and guerrilla activity of Naga rebels, "trained in China, Pakistan and Burma".<sup>7</sup> In Mizoram, the Mizo National Front (MNF), headed by Laldenga declared independence from India (16th April 1966). The Mizo insurrection was crushed. In 1973, the Mizo district of Mizoram was separated and given the status of a Union Territory.<sup>8</sup> In Jharkhand, a Santhal leader Shibu Soren formed the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) which revived the demand for separate Jharkhand and growing as a radical movement. By nipping the insurrections in the bud Indira Gandhi proved that she was capable of taking tough decisions.

#### **14.4.2 Demand for Punjabi Suba, June 1966**

There had been demand for the creation of a separate Punjabi Suba by the Akalis for a pretty long time. Nehru refused to concede the demand and left the problem unresolved. Shastri had taken the first bold step in this regard. Indira Gandhi faced the problem as soon as she assumed power. The Dar Committee in its report dated 18 March 1966, recommended the creation of Punjabi Suba. The Boundary Commission Report dated 31 May 1966 favoured the inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab.

On 9 June 1966, the Government of India, after carefully considering the recommendation of the Dar Commission decided to 1) Make Chandigarh the Union Territory, 2) Chandigarh to be the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana and 3) Punjabi Suba and Haryana to be formed as separate states. Punjabi Suba retained its old name Punjab. While the Sikhs were happy, the Hindi-speaking people revolted and there were riots. The creation of these states carried the seeds of future troubles.

#### **14.4.3 The Food Crisis, 1966**

Insurrection in North-East, demand for Punjabi Suba, and agitations apart, the country was reeling and languishing under severe food crisis. Devastating droughts stalked the land. There were food shortages and famine conditions in several parts of the country. Inflation was on the rise and prices of commodities were spiraling. The economy was in recession. There was a shortage of foreign exchange. The cumulative effect of these frightening factors was the general popular unrest as was reflected in the rice riots in Kerala. The situation was gloomy and grim.

Indira Gandhi had to face the wrath of the AICC at Jaipur and was criticized in the Parliament. She, in late March 1966, turned to the U.S. for succor. She visited the U.S. on a mission to get both food and foreign exchange without appearing to ask for them.<sup>9</sup> President Lyndon Johnson promised three million tons of food and nine million dollars in aid. At home the system of procurement and distribution system were improved. The food crisis was tackled for the time being. The Prime Minister's U.S. visit was hailed as a spectacular success and was a major achievement for Indian democracy.<sup>10</sup>

#### **14.4.4 Devaluation of Rupee, June 1966**

The economy of the country had reached the rock bottom. A conspiracy of circumstances, aggravated by war and drought, had brought the economic growth to a grinding halt. There was scarcity staring straight on the face of

India. There was forex crisis and industrial capacity was rendered idle, leading to retrenchment. Exports had come to a halt. Small industry was hit hard. In short, the economy was in the brink of disaster. Since first-aid measures were ineffective, Indira Gandhi decided to administer stronger medicine in order to restore the nation to economic health".<sup>11</sup>

But there were difficulties. The US stipulated conditions for economic aid suspended during Indo-Pak war in 1965. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) stipulated that the rupee be devalued. Indira Gandhi appointed a committee to consider the issue.<sup>12</sup> The committee supported devaluation. On the night of 6 June 1966, Indira Gandhi announced on All-India Radio the devaluation of the rupee by a hefty 57.5%. The decision to devalue the rupee made her unpopular. She was criticized right and left. The CWC passed a resolution denouncing the decision. The Congress President Kamaraj was furious that he was not consulted and lamented over making her the Prime Minister. "A great man's daughter, a little man's great blunder".<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Indira Gandhi proved that she was capable of taking unpopular decisions.

#### 14.4.5 Popular Agitations, Nov. 1966

Monsoon failed again for the second consecutive year. The drought continued unabated. The promised U.S. economic aid was slow to come and when it came, food shipments were irregular. Drought coupled with devaluation ignited the volatile situation. There was a spate of agitations, demonstrations and strikes. Government servants, middle class professionals, teachers, students, farmers and others participated in these outbursts. Often the agitation turned violent, resulting in lathi charges and firings, damages and death. The popular agitations climaxed in 7 November 1966, when a trident-bearing mob of naked sadhus staged a demonstration in front of Parliament calling for an end to cow-slaughter. The anti-cow-slaughter demonstration degenerated into looting, arson and violence. Six sadhus were killed in police firing. The demonstration brought forth nothing except confounding confusion.<sup>14</sup>

### 14.5 General Elections 1967

#### 14.5.1 Fourth Election

1966 was the year of turmoil, and 1967 may be called the year of elections – general elections and the election of the President of India. India's fourth general elections were held when the combined effects of the India-China war of 1962, the Indo-Pak War 1965, the successive droughts of 1966 and 1967 and the extremely bad economic conditions were prevailing.

Congress Party. Surrounded by opposition hostility and adversity Indira Gandhi decided to directly appeal to the electorate. She chose Rae Bareilly, her husband Feroz Gandhi's constituency, instead of Phulpur, her father Nehru's constituency, to test her strength. At 50, she stood for Parliament for the first time in the elections held at the twentieth anniversary of Indian independence.

### 14.5.2 Divided Congress

The Congress Party was deeply divided by groupism and factionalism. The dissident groups had been the bane of Congress. The Syndicate had become the sanctuary of the senile leaders. The young were longing for leadership. The single point agenda of the divided opposition was to somehow defeat the Congress. Neither Indira Gandhi nor the opposition leaders raised ideological or basic socio-economic issues, the election being 'a means of political survival'. She presented populist solutions to India's pestering problems in all her campaigns.

### 14.5.3 A Watershed

India's fourth general election was held in February 1967. Indira Gandhi won by a comfortable majority but the syndicate stalwarts like Kamaraj, S.K. Patil, Atulya Ghosh and C. Subramaniam were defeated. Morarji Desai, "Indira's nemesis" had been returned. The Congress secured 284 out of 520 seats, though its majority was reduced from 228 in 1962 to 48. The Congress also lost its majority in eight states – Kerala, Madras, Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab. At the national level the CPI and CPI(M), the Swatantra Party and the Jan Sangh had improved their position. In the states, the parties – national and regional – entered into incompatible alliances. "The election of 1967 forms a watershed in India because the voters for the first time showed concern for governmental performance".<sup>15</sup> In a way, the elections were "a bad result for the Congress, but a good one for Indira Gandhi".<sup>16</sup> Derisively referred to as 'this girl', 'dumb doll', 'this mere *chokri*', 'this little woman', Indira Gandhi came to be called 'Mother Indira' since this election. The majority in the party was behind her.

### 14.6 Second Term Prime Minister

On 15 March 1967, Indira Gandhi was sworn in as the Prime Minister for a second time. Now her position in the party and the government was much stronger as the Syndicate was truncated in size and status. Her freedom to choose her Cabinet was curtailed since she had to accommodate Morarji Desai as the Deputy Prime Minister with Finance Portfolio, thanks to the wafer thin

majority in the Parliament. However, she made it clear that the Deputy PM did not imply 'any duality of authority'. She dispensed with the system of ranking cabinet ministers, instead they were alphabetically ordered "rendering cabinet positions meaningless as indicators of future power line-ups".<sup>17</sup>

### 14.7 Assertion of Authority

#### 14.7.1 Election of Zakir Hussain

After Indira Gandhi was reappointed as Prime Minister she was self-assertive. When the Syndicate wanted the President Dr.S.Radhakrishnan to continue in office for the second time, the Prime Minister preferred the Vice-President Zakir Hussain for the post. The opposition put up Justice Subba Rao, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who had resigned his post shortly before nomination day, as its candidate. Supported by Indira Gandhi, Zakir Hussain won with comfortable majority. V.V.Giri, a south Indian trade union leader, was elected Vice-President. Their victory strengthened the hands of Indira Gandhi, weakened the Syndicate and sabotaged the opposition unity. Zakir Hussain was the first Muslim President of the Indian Republic.

#### 14.7.2 Election of Party President

In the elections for the party presidency, Indira Gandhi was not favouring Kamaraj continuing in the post but the Syndicate got its candidate Nijalingappa elected to the post. Indira Gandhi was offended. When the 'Young Turks'<sup>18</sup> within the party accused Desai of conniving in the corruption of his son Kantibai, she did not defend her Finance Minister in Parliament. She ignored the directive of the CWC to rebuke the Young Turks either. The gulf between the Old Guard and Indira Gandhi widened.

#### 14.7.3 Election of V.V.Giri

On 3 May 1969, President Zakir Hussain died of cardiac failure. Indira Gandhi suggested Jagjivan Ram for the post, but the Congress President Nijalingappa, supported by the Syndicate, proposed Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, as the official candidate. Indira Gandhi signed Reddy's nomination papers, but she allowed her supporters to vote according to their conscience! She tacitly extended support to V.V.Giri, the unofficial candidate. On 20 August 1969, V.V.Giri was elected President of India. The 'conscience vote' was "a superb tactical maneuver".<sup>19</sup>

#### 14.7.4 Bank Nationalisation 20 July 1969

From the beginning of 1968, the Syndicate, still headed by Kamaraj, strongly supported by the new Congress...

Desai "wanted to oust Indira".<sup>20</sup> Her opponents in one voice unequivocally condemned the dismissal of non-Congress governments and the imposition of President's rule in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the Punjab, following the example of Kerala in 1959. Influenced by the 'kitchen cabinet' and egged on by the Young Turks, Indira Gandhi had taken a leftist ideological line.

In July 1967 in pursuance of Indira Gandhi's leftist stance her statement on the 'stray thoughts' on economic policy was read out at the meeting of the AICC. These thoughts were based on her *10 point programme* formulated in May 1967, which included social control of banking, a check on monopolies, the nationalization of general insurance, curbs on property, rapid implementation of land reforms, state control of food grains and exports, provision of house-sites to the rural poor, and the abolition of the former privileges and privy purses. On 16 July she relieved Desai of the finance portfolio since he was opposed to bank nationalization. Four days later, fourteen commercial banks were nationalized by presidential ordinance.

Bank nationalization was a bold, deft and shrewd political move. It was lustily greeted by public euphoria. The farmers, traders, small businessmen, low paid government and other employees, taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers, the unemployed and others welcomed the radical measure. The CPP endorsed the progressive programme. But the Government decision was criticized as "a political move designed to isolate, out flank, and defeat her inner party opponents".<sup>21</sup> By nationalizing the private banks "the Government controlled monopolizable savings and assisted the capitalist class to diversify their investments and products".<sup>22</sup> Bank nationalization was "a populist move... clearly motivated by her drive for self-preservation as Prime Minister".<sup>23</sup> "Never had the people applauded any economic step as much as they did this one".<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.7.5 The 'Great Split' of Congress, 1969

##### Rival Groups

The year 1969 was the year of the Great Divide in the Congress. The nearly a century old Congress suffered a serious and irreparable split in 1969. The 'unity' talks between the Syndicate and the 'Indicate' – the followers of Indira Gandhi – failed. On 1 November 1969, two separate CWC meetings were convened by the respective rival groups, one at the AICC head quarters at Antar Mandar Road and the other at Indira Gandhi's residence at 1 Sabdarjang Road. The parallel meetings were represented by those who stood for status quo and those who were for radical socialism and change – a

## The Split

On 12 November 1969, the Syndicate found Indira Gandhi guilty of creating a 'personality cult'. 2) indiscipline and defiance of party leadership and 3) her intention of selling India to the Soviet Union and expelled her from the party (13 Nov). The infuriated Indira blamed the 'undemocratic and factional persons' for the fiasco. A total of 297 MPs, of whom 220 from the Lok Sabha supported Indira Gandhi. Besides 446 out of 705 members of the AICC stood solidly with her. The Congress Party was split. Thereafter, Indira Congress came to be called *Congress (R)* – for Requisitionist and the Syndicate called it *Congress (O)* for Organization.<sup>25</sup> The split "has launched a new unprincipled era in Indian politics".<sup>26</sup> The eighty year old Congress tottered and faltered.

## The Impact

As a result of the split 1) Indira Gandhi lost her majority in both houses of Parliament. 2) She had become a Prime Minister in her own right. 3) transformed the Congress party into a radical organization. 4) heralded the triumph of the Parliamentary over the organizational wing of the party. 5) emboldened her to extend her control to the states beyond New Delhi, and 6) the party "degenerated into an unaudited company for winning elections".<sup>27</sup>

### 14.7.6 Abolition of Privy Purses, 1970

The year 1970 witnessed dramatic developments. After the nationalization of banks, Indira Gandhi introduced a strong dose of radical reforms. The most dramatic and highly controversial of them was the abolition of the purses and privileges of the former princes. Their purses, pensions and privileges were guaranteed by the Constitution. Indira Gandhi sought to derecognize the princes through a constitutional amendment. In August 1970 the Amendment Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha by 339 to 154 votes, but it was defeated in the Rajya Sabha by one vote. Undeterred Indira Gandhi proceeded to abolish the privily purses of the princes through a presidential proclamation (6 September 1969). In December 1970, however, the Supreme Court invalidated both the ordinances and the bank nationalization law.<sup>28</sup> However, Indira Gandhi's sweeping popular programmes of radical social change excited a mass response and public acclaim, though the rival Congress (O) and the Jan Sangh joined together to oppose the move.

### 14.7.7 Fourth Plan Performance, 1966-1971

The Indo-Pak War (1965), two successive years of drought (1965-66 and 1966-67), devaluation of currency (1966), rise in prices of essential



ities, and erosion of resources available for plan implementation derailed the plan. Instead, three annual plans were formulated within the frame of the draft outline of the fourth plan in between 1966-69. Efforts were made to restore normalcy in the economy. Emphasis was laid on High Yielding Variety Programme (HYVP), minor irrigation projects, better seeds etc. Focus was on the farm sector. Industrial capacity was better utilized. Consumer goods and services received better attention. As a result, the supply position with regard to grains and other non-agricultural commodities improved. Prices declined. The national economy was stable.

## **The 1971 Elections**

### **1.1 Dissolution of Lok Sabha**

Though Indira Gandhi wielded "far greater power over both party and government than had been enjoyed by Jawaharlal Nehru", her party was in a minority in Parliament depending on the outside support of the CPI, CPI(M), the K, Akali Dal, few socialists and some independents. The way out of this stalemate was to call for a mid term poll. So, on 27 December 1970, Indira Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha and called for elections in February 1971, a year in advance. She sought a fresh mandate from the people for her progressive programmes. The Supreme Court judgements on the bank nationalization case as well as the abolition of Privy Purses were said to be the reasons responsible for the mid-term elections.

### **1.2 'A Referendum'**

Indira Gandhi made the most of the 1971 election. Throughout January and February she campaigned with conviction and courage. Unlike the previous elections, she had no strong party organization, nor had the support of stalwart colleagues. Since the early mid-term poll separated the parliamentary from the state assembly elections, the focus was on the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her government's performance. In other words, the election would be a referendum on herself and her performance "Never had attention been so focused on one individual candidate".<sup>29</sup>

### **1.4.8.3 Garibi Hatao Rhetoric**

Virtually, the election was between Indira Gandhi and the so-called Grand Alliance, consisting of Congress (O) Jan Sangh, Swatantra and the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). The grand alliance targeted Indira Gandhi. Its single point election agenda was to defeat her at the hustings. It was a personalized campaign.

Grand Alliance. As a counter attack, Indira Gandhi came out with a more catchy blistering slogan 'Garibi Hatao' (remove poverty). Indira Gandhi's populist rhetoric clicked well with the people. The new slogan reverberated throughout the country. During the eight weeks campaign, she shrewdly avoided personal attacks on the opposition and highlighted national issues. In effect, Indira Gandhi successfully converted the election campaign into a people's movement. Her carefully calibrated campaigns attracted the peasants, workers, women, middle classes and the youth as never before.

#### 14.8.4 The Mandate

The election results were on expected lines. Indira Gandhi's party won 352 out of a total of 518 Lok Sabha seats. The rival Congress (O) was humiliated with a paltry 16 seats. The Swatantra was reduced from 44 to just 8 and the Jan Sangh from 35 to 22 seats. The grand alliance suffered a demeaning defeat. Among the opposition parties CPI (M), CPI and DMK fared well. The election was a personal triumph for Indira Gandhi.<sup>30</sup>

The 1971 election restored the Congress party to its dominant position in Indian politics, conferred the mandate she sought, endorsed the radical agenda for change and stability, proved that people would rally round national issues, and dashed the hopes of the status – quoists and raised the expectations of the poor. But the Bangladesh war shifted the attention of the nation from Garibi Hatao to Simla Summit in 1972.

#### 14.9 Assessment

After Sultana Razia, Indira Gandhi was the second woman ruler of India in 700 years; the latter had ruled so vast, heterogeneous and complicated a country like India, especially as the elected ruler of the people. Started haltingly as the consensus candidate of the Syndicate, she soon asserted herself as the master of the Congress and the Government. She had shown a spine too hard for her detractors to bend. Indira Gandhi inherited a throne of thorns and wrestled with it with rare candour, courage and confidence. She dealt with the unrest in the North-East with an iron hand and ensured the unity of the country. Devaluation of rupee and nationalization of private banks demonstrated beyond doubt that she was capable of taking decisive decisions, albeit unpopular. Garibi Hato was not merely a rhetoric but a recipe for poverty eradication; she brought the problem of poverty to the centre stage of national discourse. The 1971 election mandated Indira Gandhi to introduce radical reforms.

However, Indira Gandhi's Kitchen Cabinet functioned as an extra-constitutional authority undermining the constitutional position of the Cabinet and collective responsibility of ministers. Similarly, her association with young Turks and the Communist Parties had given her the leftist ideological image; consequently, she became suspect in the eyes of the public. She recreated the Congress and used it as an instrument of populist and personalistic politics; this had created a veritable institutional vacuum in the country. She used the popular mandate to concentrate power in her hands; this had weakened democratic institutions. Nonetheless, Indira Gandhi steered the 'Chariot of State' with deftness and dexterity. Even her worst critics never hesitated to praise her decisive and determined leadership. In fine, the first five years of Indira Era constitute a watershed in the history of contemporary India.

## 15. INDO-PAK WAR, 1971

*In the history of India, this was perhaps as righteous a war as any fought by her, a war in which right triumphed over wrong.*

*- Kushwant Singh*

### 15.1 Indo-Pak Relations

The mantle of implementing the Tashkent Agreement fell on Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She initiated several steps to normalize relations with Pakistan. On 15 August 1968, she offered to sign a no-war pact with Pakistan. She also proposed the creation of a joint-machinery for going into the outstanding issues between the two countries. General Yahya Khan succeeded Ayub Khan on 3 March 1969. The march of events in 1970 overshadowed the significant steps taken by her to normalize relations between the two neighbours.

### 15.2 Events and Circumstances Leading to War

#### 15.2.1 Geographical Aberration

The creation of Pakistan, a nation in two separate parts – West Pakistan and East Pakistan – separated by 1,200 miles of Himalayan peaks and Indian territories was “a geographical aberration”.<sup>1</sup> Since 1947, West Pakistan had subjected and dominated East Pakistan, politically and economically. Though West Pakistan geographically bigger in size, East Pakistan had larger population. Yet the latter was treated as a colony by the former. The West developed at the cost of the East.<sup>2</sup> The geographical anachronism, deliberate discrimination and wanton neglect carried seeds of secession.

#### 15.2.2 Birth of Awami League

When India was partitioned in 1947, the basis for separation was religion. But the common religion, Islam, could not cement the Urdu speaking West Pakistan with the Bengali speaking East Pakistan. In 1949, Pakistan adopted Urdu as the national language and the people of East Pakistan resisted the move without success. The result was the birth of Awami League. In 1956, the League demanded due share in the political and economic life of Pakistan. Next year, the East Pakistan Assembly adopted a resolution demanding autonomy. Thirteen years of military rule kindled in East Pakistan a desire and demand for democracy.

### 15.2.3 Military Regime in Pak, 1969

In 1969, Field Marshall Ayub Khan was ousted from power, the military dictatorship in Pakistan. A military coup led by General Yahya Khan replaced the opposition and demanded establishment of democracy in West Pakistan. Such a demand gained momentum. Simultaneously, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman launched a campaign for democracy with autonomy in East Pakistan. Mujibur Rehman was accused of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. He was implicated in the Agarthala case. agent of the Government of India. He was accused of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. He was implicated in the Agarthala case.

### 15.2.4 Pak Elections, 1970

Sandwiched between the democratic demand of Bhutto in West Pakistan and autonomy agitation by Mujibur Rehman in East Pakistan, General Yahya Khan announced general elections in Pakistan on 5 October 1970. India welcomed the announcement. When Chittagong was worst hit by cyclones in November 1970, India offered air-force relief to East Pakistan. But the Yahya regime spurned India's humanitarian offer and postponed the elections. December to the disappointment of the East Pakistanis. Eventually elections were held as announced in December 1970. Mujibur Rehman's Awami League won a landslide victory in both the Provincial Assembly and in the National Assembly of Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

### 15.2.5 Indian Plane Hijacked, Jan. 1971

Soon after the elections, protracted negotiations were held in Dhaka between General Yahya Khan, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to settle the future political arrangements. As negotiations were in progress, an Airlines aircraft was hijacked to Lahore and destroyed by Pak agents and Kashmiri militants (Jan. 1971).<sup>4</sup> In retaliation, India suspended over flights of all Pakistani aircrafts – both civilian and military – from 3 January 1971. Tension between two countries escalated.

### 15.2.6 Liberation Movement in East Pakistan, March, 1971

Following the breakdown of the tripartite negotiations, Mujibur Rehman's Awami League launched a massive mass civil disobedience movement on 8 March 1971 in East Pakistan. The peaceful protest was ruthlessly repressed. The army was let loose on the unarmed people. The Martial Law Administration

of East Pakistan suppressed the popular uprising by imposing curfew and use of force. On 15 March Mujibur Rehman declared independence of Bangladesh. He was promptly arrested in the midnight of 21-22 March and flown to West Pakistan. However, his senior colleagues managed to escape, went underground, and constituted the Provincial Government of Bangladesh on 28 March 1971.

### 15.2.7 Reign of Terror

A reign of terror was let loose in East Pakistan. The Pak military oppression of its own citizens in East Pakistan continued unabated. Villages were destroyed, crops burnt and innocent people were killed. The indiscriminate slaughter degenerated to genocide. The army indulged in barbaric brutalities.

### 15.2.8 Armed Struggle

As military crackdown escalated the peaceful protest turned to armed struggle. The youth wing of the Awami League spear-headed the armed insurrection. The situation became volatile when Mujibur Rehman was given death sentence in a trial for high treason, though the sentence was not executed. The freedom fighters constituted themselves into a guerrilla liberation army and fought against the Pakistan armed forces. Bengali defectors from the Pak army joined hands with the youth wing of the Awami League. The secessionist movement spread like wild fire. There was civil war in East Pakistan.

### 15.2.9 India's Support, April 1971

India was supportive of the struggle for democracy in Pakistan. When the birth of the Republic was announced on 17 April 1971 by the Awami League Government in exile, India welcomed it. General President Yahya Khan gave a call to his people to be prepared for a war against India. For the next eight months, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi followed a four-pronged strategy to meet the situation: 1) to give sanctuary to the Bangladesh Government in exile; 2) to provide food, clothing, shelter and medical aid to refugees; 3) to keep the army in red alert to meet any eventuality; and 4) to complete the military operation, if necessary, before the big powers intervene.<sup>5</sup>

### 15.2.10 Indo-Soviet Treaty, Aug. 1971

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi established contacts with all major powers of the world, visited the USSR, USA and Germany to persuade these countries to pressurize Pakistan to stop massacre of East Pakistanis and restore normalcy. When the Western response was negative, Indira Gandhi signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation on 7 August 1971. The

Treaty, in essence, provided for defence co-operation and mutual assistance in case either party being subjected to threats to their security. "It was one of the best kept secrets in Indo-Soviet relations".

### 15.2.11 U.N. Resolution, October 1971

The US President, Richard Nixon, supported the Pak regime. The Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, visited India, met Indira Gandhi and dissuaded her from supporting the secession struggle. But she refused to do so as she considered the US attitude "normally justifiable and politically unacceptable". Indo-Soviet Treaty added fuel to fire. The US and its European supporters, therefore, brought before the UN General Assembly a resolution on the East Pakistan crisis. The Assembly in October 1971 voted against the liberation struggle and against India. Stung by the unsupportive stance of the West, Indira Gandhi supported the struggle with redoubled resolve, courage and determination.

### 15.2.12 Influx of Refugees

The refugee factor loomed large and was real. In order to escape the 'reign of terror' millions of refugees crossed the border and poured into India. All of them were accommodated on the border districts of Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar, Bengal and Tripura. They were provided with food, clothing, shelter and medical aid.<sup>7</sup> The refugees had been housed and fed by India for nearly a year.

## 15.3 The War

On 3 December 1971, General Yahya Khan ordered a preemptive attack on Indian Air Force bases in Indian Punjab and in Jammu and Kashmir. Several military air fields in Western India were attacked. Next day Pakistan announced that she was in a state of war with India. Indian army led by the Chief of Army Staff, General Manekshaw launched counter-attack on Pakistani air bases. "The liberation struggle of East Pakistan freedom fighters metamorphosed into a full-scale war between India and Pakistan".<sup>8</sup>

Emergency was declared in India. Indian army swung into action in East Pakistan. Aply led by Lt.General J.S.Aurora, the army joined by the 14th Bahini, pushed through East Bengal, reached the capital Dacca and surrounded the Pakistani garrison. On the Western Front, the Pakistani army attempted to cross across Kashmir was frustrated. The US tried to avert the defeat of India through the UN Security Council resolutions, but they were vetoed.

the Soviet Union. China did not intervene as expected by Pakistan. Western powers stopped short of diplomatic support to Pakistan. On 9 December US President Nixon ordered the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet into the Bay of Bengal, led by the aircraft carrier Enterprise, under the pretext of evacuating American and European citizens from East Pakistan! Indira Gandhi resolutely stood her stand. On her request, Soviet Union dispatched its fleet from Vladivostok to the Bay of Bengal.

On 13 November, General Manekshaw issued an ultimatum to his Pakistani counterpart. On 16 December, the Pak Army was in East Pakistan. Lt. General Aurora, surrounded Dacca and defeated the Pak army. About 93 thousand pak troops were then brought to India as Prisoners of War (POWs). Dacca surrendered on 17 December. India declared unilateral cease fire in the Western Sector. Pakistan agreed to the cease fire and released unconditionally Mujibur Rehman on 8 January 1972. Four days later, Mujibur Rehman assumed power in Bangladesh. Indira Gandhi with humility heartily thanked the defence forces for diligently discharging their duty, pledged the nation's help to the people of Bangladesh, and extended a hand of friendship to the neighbour Pakistan.<sup>9</sup>

#### 15.4 Impact of the War

The war of 1971 produced far-reaching impact in the South Asian subcontinent, India and Pakistan: 1) The war radically altered the sub-continental structure. In the place of two countries, there emerged three independent sovereign states – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. 2) The war was a personal triumph for Indira Gandhi. Gender barrier was broken and she was hailed as heroine, Durga, Shakti, Liberator of Bangladesh, and Empress of India.<sup>10</sup> 3) The war wiped out the sad memory of 1962 defeat in the India-China war and restored India's self-respect and pride. 4) The war had an indelible impact on India's muslim minority. "For the first time since 1947, there was virtually no sympathy for Pakistan".<sup>11</sup> 5) It delivered a death-blow to the Two-Nation theory and the underlying principle of religion as the basic factor of a nation. 6) It demonstrated the inherent strength of Indian secularism. 7) The war had strengthened India to assert its independence in international relations. 8) It also imposed a heavy burden on the Indian economy. 9) A new-state Bangladesh – had been created as the result of a popular mandate. 10) Pakistan came under a civilian rule under A. Bhutto after a lapse of nearly fourteen years. 11) The refugee problem was promptly solved, all the ten million refugees were sent back home. 12) As a fall-out of the war, the Congress won a majority in all the states in the elections held in March 1972.



## 15.5 Simla Agreement, 1972

### 15.5.1 Indo-Pak Talks

The Indo-Pak war ended but peace had to be restored. Pakistan was not reconciled to the humiliating defeat it suffered in the war. Pakistan did not accord recognition to Bangladesh. The problem of Prisoners of War (POW) remained to be solved. On 31 December 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called for negotiations with Pakistan. In January 1972, the new Prime Minister of Pakistan Z.A. Bhutto expressed his willingness for talks with his Indian counterpart. The emissary level talks were held in April 1972 at Mushri. The Simla Summit was held at the hill station of Simla from 28 June to 3 July 1972.

### 15.5.2 The Issues

From the beginning of the Simla Summit, Indira Gandhi was keen on finding a solution to the seemingly irresolvable Kashmir problem. She insisted on a full settlement of all problems between India and Pakistan. But Bhutto was equally insistent that the Kashmir issue be kept out of the settlement.<sup>12</sup> Several draft treaty proposals were prepared calling for bilateral settlement, the exclusion of third parties, the renunciation of force, the conversion of the Kashmir cease fire line into an international boundary and the resolution of the Kashmir issue. "In return Bhutto and his party amended or flatly rejected the proposed draft treaty that the Indian delegation presented to them".<sup>13</sup> After five days of hiccups, wranglings and mutual concessions, on 3 July 1972, Bhutto and Indira Gandhi signed the historic Simla Agreement.

### 15.5.3 The Agreement

The crucial clauses of the Simla Agreement are: 1) India had agreed to return 5,000 square miles of occupied Pakistani territory, sans some strategic points in Kashmir, mainly in the Kargil sector. 2) India had also agreed to return the 93,000 Pakistani Prisoners of War with the approval of the Bangladesh government. 3) India and Pakistan would restrain in future from use of force. All outstanding issues between the two countries would be resolved bilaterally. 4) Indian and Pakistani forces shall be withdrawn to their respective sides of the international border, and 6) In Jammu and Kashmir, the line of control resulting from the cease fire date of 17 December 1971 shall be respected by both sides. Mutual recognition of the sovereignty of each country over its territory shall be maintained.

#### 15.5.4 Pros and Cons

The Simla Agreement was praised as well as blamed. It was praised because 1) It proposed for peaceful settlement of all Indo-Pak issues and disputes through bilateral negotiations. 2) The repudiation of the use of force for settlement of disputes amounted to a no war pact. 3) The provision for troops withdrawal and exchange of territories won in war was designed to secure military disengagement on the borders. 4) The agreement over the line of actual control and ceasefire rendered the presence of U.N. Observers in Kashmir redundant. 5) The clause for ratification of the Agreement by both sides gave it a legal base, and 6) The Simla Agreement was made without any outside help.

The Agreement was blamed because 1) It failed to resolve the immediate repatriation of the Prisoners of War (POWs). 2) It mentioned Kashmir but failed to find a final settlement of Kashmir issue. 3) It had not clinched a direct no war pact. 4) It had not made any provision for a joint machinery for effectively handling the Indo-Pak relations. 5) The Agreement was at best a piecemeal hotch-potch arrangement for it failed to secure a package deal to solve pending issues, and 6) It envisaged no guarantee that Pakistan would reduce its military expenditure. However, it must be pointed out that the Simla Agreement provided the basis for all subsequent talks, dialogues and negotiations between India and Pakistan. In this sense, the year 1972 may be called a Year of Triumph.

#### 15.6 "Greatest Leader"

After the Indo-Pak war of 1971, Indira Gandhi's position seemed unassailable. Her war victory won the admiration of all. She was the undisputed leader of her party, government and the nation. Congress was solidly behind her. Her Government was stable with a two thirds majority in the Lok Shaba and the country hailed her as its heroine. She was at the pinnacle of power and eulogised as "The greatest leader India had ever had".<sup>14</sup>

#### References

## 17. THE EMERGENCY REGIME, 1975-1977

*I feel as though I have been left in a jungle blind folded. I cannot visualize the consequences of the Emergency.*  
- K.Kamaraj

### 17.1 1974: The Year of Unrest and Agitations

#### 17.1.1 Intoxication of Victory

Intoxicated by the unprecedented victory of the Bangladesh War in 1971, Indira Gandhi indulged in using her popularity and power in pursuit of personalized objectives.<sup>1</sup> In 1973, she became imperious. The controversial appointment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, A.N.Ray, was only a tip of the iceberg. She rendered the Cabinet ineffective. Congress became subservient to her whims and fancies. She brook no criticism and dismissed dissent. She never trusted anyone completely. "She lost her balance after the Bangladesh war. Sanjay Gandhi was in complete control."<sup>2</sup>

#### 17.1.2 Discontent and Unrest

The popularity of Indira Gandhi and her Government started waning by the end of 1972. The unbearable cost of the Bangladesh War and consequent sheltering of millions of milling refugees upset the apple cart of Indian economy. Successive failures of monsoons in 1972 and 1973 offset the achievements of the Green Revolution. The result was food scarcity, rising prices and rampant inflation escalated by 20%. The oil-shock in October 1973 sky rocketed the price of crude oil and resultant price rise of petroleum. Rigid regulation of the private sector prevented private investment from pouring into manufacturing industries. Large scale industrial unrest spread through the country. Corruption and scandals particularly the Maruti Car Project and Nagarwala episode undermined the credibility of Indira Gandhi. Wholesale state trade in food grains was a disaster. India was facing growing 'social turbulence'. Indira Gandhi was haunted by her slogan Garibi Hatao.

#### 17.1.3 Gujarat Agitation, Jan. 1974

Chimanbai Patel, the Congress Chief Minister of Gujarat mismanaged the state. He was hand in gloves with the mill magnets of edible oil so that he could get election funding for the forthcoming state elections in U.P.<sup>3</sup>

Public distribution system was deplorable. There was perennial shortage of food supplies. Restriction of inter-state movement of food grains made matters worse. The farmers were offered unremunerative prices. The Government was corrupt to the core. The Chief Minister was making lot of money by running private colleges. His nagging interference with the functioning of the Gujarat University was resented by the teachers and the students alike. All these factors contributed to social unrest in the state.

The students started and spearheaded the protest movement in the state. Trouble started at the Government Engineering College in the first week of January 1974. Soon the agitation spread to other parts of the state. Students were joined by workers and opposition leaders. The *Nav Nirman Yuvak Samiti*,<sup>4</sup> composed of students and youth leaders, demanded that 1) the Chief Minister resign; 2) the state assembly to be dissolved and 3) fresh elections held. The agitation turned violent. The Central Reserve Police and the border security force were summoned to control the law and order situation. The Chief Minister resigned on 9 February and President's rule imposed on 15 March. The Gujarat assembly was dissolved.<sup>5</sup>

#### 7.1.4 Bihar Agitation, March 1974

In 1974 Bihar one of the most backward states of the Indian Union, was the citadel of corruption, callousness, poverty and in-efficiency. Bihar politics was murky and its administration was in shambles. Only 20% of its people were literate. There was widespread discontent against the government. Trouble started on 18 March 1974, when the Students' Action Committee, representing several Patna college students and youth groups, held demonstrations in front of the State Assembly, protesting against maladministration, corruption and spiraling of prices. They were backed by the Jan Sangh, the Socialist Party, the Samyukta Socialist Party and Congress dissidents. The strong arm methods of the police had driven the agitators to violence, which raged for four days. Government offices, Legislative Assembly, Municipal Corporation and educational institutions were paralysed.

Jayaprakesh Narayan (JP), re-entered politics, assumed leadership and converted the violent agitation into a mini-movement and gave the clarion call for, what he called, *Total Revolution*. All the political parties including the Marxalites rallied round the JP movement. He brought students, farmers, landless labourers and other deprived sections of the society under the umbrella of the movement. JP branded Indira Gandhi as the 'worlds' greatest 'dictator' and

called for the ouster of the Congress Chief Minister, dissolution of the assembly and holding of fresh elections. He led several silent, peaceful processions and addressed mammoth meetings. The agitation continued unabated throughout the year. The agitators were subjected to repression. But the Narora Congress dismissed the agitation as a fascist move to destroy democracy and to unleash a reign of terror.<sup>6</sup> Indira Gandhi refused to dissolve the Assembly and challenged JP to face the general elections, February-March 1976. JP accepted the challenge.<sup>7</sup>

### 17.1.5 The Railway Strike, April-May 1974

On 23 April 1974, the socialist trade union leader, George Fernandes representing railway workers, announced a nation-wide strike from 8 May on a charter of demands. The concessions offered by the railway minister in April were rejected by the unionists. On 2 May 1974, George Fernandes and other union leaders were arrested. In the Lok Sabha, the opposition leaders moved a motion of no-confidence motion against Indira Gandhi's Government (9-10 May 1974). The Prime Minister vigorously defended the government stand. Since the government proposals were rejected, the strike continued.

Invoking the Defence of India Rules, Indira Gandhi declared the strike illegal. But thousands of workers continued the strike. George Fernandes vowed to "change the whole history of India and bring down the Indira Gandhi government".<sup>8</sup> Railway transport was paralysed. Movement of food grains stopped. Food shortage became acute. The Maintenance of Security Act (MISA) was invoked to break the backbone of the strike. Thousands of railway workers were arrested and their families were asked to vacate the Railway Quarters. The strike was crushed with iron hand. The Government was condemned for its ruthless repression and authoritarian approach. The railway strike besides bringing the various political parties together against the government left a lasting bitterness. "Indira may have won this round, but the brutal suppression of the railway strike was uniting and galvanizing the opposition".<sup>9</sup>

### 17.1.6 The Pokharan Test, May 1974

On 18 May 1974, in the midst of Railway Strike, an underground nuclear test was conducted at Pokharan in Rajasthan. The Pokharan Test eclipsed the railway strike. India became the sixth nuclear power in the world. The nuclear test was acclaimed the nuclear detonation but countries like the US., Canada, Britain,

Pakistan and few other countries criticized India. The Pokharan explosion demonstrated the high level of scientific expertise attained by Indian scientists. Indira Gandhi maintained that India had the right to harness the atom for peaceful purposes and ascertained its right to conduct peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) for nuclear research and for the development of nuclear technology.<sup>10</sup>

### 17.1.7 Scheme of Compulsory Deposits, July 1974

To mitigate the rigour of mounting inflation, the government drastically cut expenditure and imposed programmes of compulsory savings on salaries and incomes. The salaried employees were asked to deposit all wage increases and half of the additional dearness allowance received into compulsory deposits with the government. The deferred payment adversely affected the government servants, particularly the low-income group. Further, ceiling was fixed on all dividends paid by private companies. Tax payers whose income exceeded Rs.15,000 were directed to put an additional 4% to 8% of their income into compulsory deposits. These measures coupled with soaring prices, rampant inflation and increasing unemployment, alienated urban middle classes – government servants, teachers, lawyers, professionals, officers in the armed forces, shop keepers and petty traders. “This hostility of the middle classes was a major political blow to the Congress and Mrs. Gandhi.”<sup>11</sup>

### 17.1.8 MISA, Sep.1974

The Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was passed in 1971. According to the Act, a detenu had to be supplied the grounds of his confinement within five days of his arrest and he can be detained up to six months. Then on 17 September 1974, the MISA was amended to enable smugglers of gold, drugs and durable consumer goods, hoarders and evaders of foreign exchange controls to be booked under preventive detention. The amended Act increased the duration of the detention to one year in the first instance and then to two years. The grounds of detention will not be disclosed to the detenues. Since the MISA was non-justiciable, the courts can not enquire into the grounds of detention. As a result, the citizen was left defenceless at the mercy of malicious officials. The Democles Sword of MISA was hanging over the heads of people. “India was on the way to becoming a police state”.<sup>12</sup> MISA was a repressive reform with enormous potential for misuse and abuse.

## 17.2 Circumstances Leading to Emergency

### 17.2.1 Murder of L.N. Mishra, Jan. 1975

The year 1975 opened with an ominous note. On 2 January 1975 Narayan Mishra, the Railway Minister and a notorious party fundraiser, was killed in a bomb explosion in the Samastipur railway station, Bihar. It was alleged that the assassination was the handiwork of the trade unionists in the crushing of the railway workers strike in May 1974. Indira Gandhi stated in her broadcast on 7 January that Mishra's murder was a rehearsal for which she herself was 'the real target'. The killers were never traced. Mishra's death remained a mystery. It indicated which way the wind was blowing.

### 17.2.2 J.P.'s Provocation, Feb. 1975

Encouraged and enthused by the agitational success in Gujarat and Bihar, JP on 15 February 1975, exhorted government servants, the army and police "not to obey orders that are illegal or unjust".<sup>14</sup> He argued that government servants, soldiers and police officers were all obliged only to abide by the Constitution, and not the will and whim of the government and its leaders, including the Prime Minister. He also asked the forces of authority and law to order to join a coup d'état by paralyzing the government and administration. He cautioned the people against the one-party dictatorship and be prepared to participate in dharnas, gheraos and demonstrations.

### 17.2.3 Marathon March, March 1975

On 6 March 1975 Jayaprakash Narayan led an 8 kilometer marathon procession through Delhi to Parliament. Several thousand people participated in the march. He presented a Charter of Demands to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.<sup>15</sup> Later at a public rally he called for Indira Gandhi's resignation. He compared the largest demonstration in the capital city had ever witnessed to the Dandi March led by Gandhi in 1930 against the British imperialism.

### 17.2.4 Electoral Reverses, June 1975

Indira Gandhi was becoming unpopular. The elections reflected the mood of the people. The opposition won a spectacular victory in the by-election contested by-election to the Lok Sabha from Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh (June 1975). The opposition Janta candidate won at the Govindpura by-election in Madhya Pradesh. The Congress lost in two out of the three by-elections in Haryana State Assembly. (Feb. 75). On 6 April 1975, Morarji Desai started

indefinite fast demanding elections to be held for Gujarat State Assembly. Election was conceded. Congress campaigned for stability. JP campaigned for the Janata front. There was strong anti-Congress feeling in Gujarat. On 12 June 1975, the election results were announced. The assembly strength of the Congress was reduced from 140 to 75. The Janata Front secured 87 seats and formed the ministry with Babubhai Patel as Chief Minister.

### **17.2.5 Allahabad Judgement, 12 June 1975**

On 12 June 1975 *Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha* of the Allahabad High Court delivered the historic judgement in the election petition of Raj Narayan against the election of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi from Rae Bareilly in 1971. The bolt of the court verdict came on the same day the Gujarat Assembly election results were announced. Of the several charges against the Prime Minister, the Judge held her guilty on two counts: 1) Yash Pal Kapoor who assisted her in the election was still in Government service when he was appointed her election agent, and 2) She had been helped by the State Government in providing facilities for her election meetings. On these counts, the election of Indira Gandhi as MP of Lok Sabha was set aside and she was disqualified for six years.<sup>16</sup> Indira Gandhi refused to resign and appealed against the verdict to the Supreme Court.

On 24 June 1975, Supreme Court Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer granted a conditional stay till the Supreme Court gave its final judgement. During the interim period Indira Gandhi could continue as Prime Minister, speak in both houses of Parliament but not to take part in their proceedings, nor vote or draw her salary as a member of Parliament. Both the Congress and the opposition hailed the stay order as having vindicated their respective stand.

### **17.2.6 Pro-Indira Demonstrations**

Ever since the Supreme Court judgement was delivered on 12 June 1975, both the Congress and the opposition geared their belts and orchestrated a series of pro-Indira and anti-Indira demonstrations and marches. On 12 and 13 June, Sanjay Gandhi and his followers organised massive rallies in support of Indira Gandhi. The Congress Parliamentary party in its meeting on 18 June reiterated its fullest faith and confidence in her and firmly believed in her continued leadership as Prime Minister was indispensable. On 20 June the Delhi Boat Club rally, 'the greatest event in history' to demonstrate the strength and solidarity of the supporters of Indira Gandhi was a stunning success. It was at this rally the over enthusiastic Congress President D.K. Barooah floated the slogan '*Indira is India and India is Indira*'.



### 17.2.7 Coalition of Opposition

Following the Allahabad judgement, Jayaprakash Narayan and a coalition of opposition parties called for a country-wide campaign. JP questioned the legitimacy of Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister, considered her the 'foundational head of corruption', accused her as the destroyer of democratic institutions with the survival of democracy in India".<sup>18</sup> On 16 June 1975 the opposition leaders met the President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad and presented a memorandum on the constitutional crisis due to Indira Gandhi's continuance in office, and urged her removal from office.

### 17.2.8 Ramlila Grounds Meeting

On 25 June 1975, JP addressed a historic mammoth mass meeting at the Ramlila Grounds, Delhi. In the course of his speech, he announced a programme of civil disobedience movement in the capital and other cities, appealed to the police and the army to disobey illegal orders, asked the students to boycott class rooms, and challenged Indira Gandhi to level charges of treason against him and try him, if she felt that he was preaching treason against her. JP's Ramlila Grounds speech was the proverbial last straw on the camels' back. By threatening to reduce the government and state to chaos JP "handed to Indira the justification she required to suspend Parliament and impose a state of emergency".<sup>20</sup>

## 17.3 Imposition of Emergency, 26 June 1975

### 17.3.1 Retaliation

Stung by the extra-constitutional challenge of the JP movement, Indira Gandhi retaliated by imposing internal emergency on the country. She consulted the Chief Minister of West Bengal Siddhartha Shankar Ray, a legal expert on the Constitution, not her Minister of Law, H.R. Gokhale, on the situation. He drew a distinction between external and internal threat and since the external emergency declared at the time of Indo-Pak war over Bangladesh in 1971 was inadequate for the present crisis, he advised Indira Gandhi that "the President could impose internal emergency, which the cabinet could then endorse retroactively".<sup>21</sup> The Prime Minister recommended the proclamation of emergency and the President signed the declaration at 11.45 p.m. on 25 June 1975. The President's proclamation of Emergency declared that "a grave emergency exists, the security of India is threatened by internal disturbances".<sup>22</sup> On the morning of 26 June 1975, the Cabinet approved of her action. Cabinet consent was obtained prior to the declaration of Emergency.

### **17.3.2 Pre-Dawn Arrests**

Before the dawn of 26 June, prominent political leaders like JP, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, Asoka Metha, Chandrashekar, Raj Narayan, Pilloo Mody were arrested.<sup>22</sup> K.R.Malkani, Editor of the English weekly Mother Land, was not spared. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K.Advani were arrested at Bangalore. Forewarned, Subramaniam Swamy and his friends escaped arrest. Nanaji Desh Muth and George Fernandes went underground. Electricity supplies were suddenly stopped to the Delhi based newspaper presses, so that the imposition of the Emergency and the pre-planned mid-night arrests of leaders were not known the next morning. On 26 June 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in her broadcast over the AIR, defended the emergency.<sup>24</sup>

### **17.3.3 Pliable Parliament, July 1975**

On 21 July 1975 the Parliament was convened to discuss the proclamation of Emergency. Question Hour was abolished. Members were not allowed to submit motions or move private member bills. The proceedings were censored. Speeches were not allowed to be reported in the press. The Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection) Act (1976) banned the publication of Parliamentary proceedings. In January 1976, the Parliament passed a resolution postponing elections to the Lok Sabha scheduled in February-March 1976. The elections were again postponed to November 1976. Thus, the Parliament was emasculated and rendered ineffective.

### **17.3.4 Press Censorships**

Free press was a priority causality during the emergency. Due to preemptive power-cut, most of the news papers in Delhi could not appear on the morning of 16 June 1975. The Government issued stringent press guidelines and banned publication of 'objectionable matter'. Major newspaper owners were cowed down by coercive tactics. Four national news agencies were restructured into one monolithic Samachar, which was used as a propaganda machine.<sup>25</sup> Independent news magazines like Mainstream and Seminar chose to close down their publication, rather than submitting to censorship. The Press Censor ruled the roost.<sup>26</sup> The Indian Express group of papers bore the brunt of the Government malafide methods. The draconian Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act of 1975 was effectively used to muffle the press.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the press was tamed and crippled. To cap it all, on 31 December 1975, the Press Council of India, established in July 1966, for the purpose of preserving of the freedom of the press, was abolished. Several Indian journalists were jailed and the foreign correspondents were asked to quit India.

### 17.3.5 Draconian Measures

A Presidential Order suspended the right to move any court for enforcement of fundamental rights. The Maintenance of Internal Security (Amendment) Act (MISA) provided that the revocation of a detention order shall not bar the making of another detention order against the same person. The Immunity Bill guaranteed life-long criminal immunity to the President, Governors and the Prime Minister for all acts done before assumption of office and during the tenure of office! A number of legislature and regulatory measures were taken to impose strict censorship on the press. In short, the Government of India was authorized to arrest people without warrant, to suspend civil liberties, to limit the rights of courts to interfere, and to impose press censorship.

### 17.3.6 20 Point Programme

On 1 July 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in her broadcast to the nation, announced her programme of economic reforms which contained the following 20 point programme:

- 1) Steps to bring down the prices of essential commodities, streamlining of procurement and distribution of essential commodities, and strict economy in government expenditure.
- 2) Implementation of agricultural land ceilings and speedier distribution of surplus land and compilation of land records.
- 3) Stepping up of provision of house sites for the landless and weaker sections.
- 4) Abolition of bonded labour.
- 5) Liquidation of rural indebtedness.
- 6) Review of laws on minimum agricultural wages and their increase.
- 7) More water for irrigation.
- 8) An accelerated power programme.
- 9) Production of more *Khadhi* and development of handloom sector.
- 10) Improvement in quality and supply of people's cloth.
- 11) Socialisation of urban and urbanisable land. Ceiling on ownership and possession of vacant land.
- 12) Prevention of tax evasion.
- 13) Special legislation for confiscation of properties of smugglers.
- 14) Liberalisation of investment procedures.
- 15) New schemes for the association of workers with industry.
- 16) Better road transport.
- 17) Income tax relief.
- 18) Cheaper goods for students.
- 19) Books and stationary at control prices.
- 20) New apprenticeship schemes to enlarge employment and training, especially of weaker sections.

To the 20 point programme, Indira Gandhi added five more items of national priority, 1) National fitness; 2) Family Planning; 3) Afforestation; 4) Child welfare and 5) Urban development. Sanjay Gandhi, the Youth Congress

leader, for his part, added a four point programme: 1) Plant a tree; 2) Teach at least one to read and write; 3) Review India's culture and 4) Take active part in family planning.

The 20 point programme was claimed to be an attempt to reach out towards long cherished ideals and to mobilize India's vast reservoir of human and material resources for national reconstruction and development. It was a call for collective action to create a new India free from want and exploitation. The programme was expected to be a turning point in the country's history, heralding a big leap forward in pursuit of the national objective of a dynamic, self-reliant socialist society. The 20 point programme was Indira Gandhi's pledge to the nation and she was determined to implement it.<sup>29</sup>

### **17.3.7 Ban of Organisations, July 1975**

Opposition leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Voices of protest against the Emergency were effectively stifled. Suspected academics, trade unionists, newspaper men and student leaders were not spared. Arrests continued through out the period of the emergency. News papers were severely censored. On 4 July 1975, the Government banned the activities of 26 extreme communal and ultra-left organizations including the RSS, the Jamiat-e-Islami, Anand Marg, Forward Block and Naxalite factions. The CPI was spared because it endorsed the emergency.

### **17.3.8 Amendment Spree**

#### **Amazing Amendments**

During the Emergency Era, several constitutional amendments were pushed through the Parliament. The 38<sup>th</sup> Amendment decreed that the Emergency proclamation could not be challenged in the courts. The 39<sup>th</sup> Amendment laid down that the election of the Prime Minister, the Speaker, President or Vice-President could not be challenged before the courts and could be decided by a Parliament Committee. The 40<sup>th</sup> Amendment struck down the clause 4 of the 30<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which had placed the Prime Minister's election beyond the scrutiny of the courts. The 41<sup>st</sup> Amendment gave complete immunity from criminal proceedings to President, Prime Minister or Governor.

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment sought to change the structure of the Constitution. It is under this Amendment the description of India in the Preamble to the Constitution was changed to "a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic". This landmark Amendment strengthened the Executive at the cost

of the Judiciary; put an end to the Judicial Review of Constitutional amendments; subordinated Fundamental Rights to the expanded version of Directive Principles of State Policy; transferred the final power to decide the cases of disqualification of MPs from the Election Commission to the President and of MLAs to the Governor; abridged the powers of the States in favour of the Central Government; and raised the terms of the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies from 5 to 6 years. In short, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment upheld the supremacy of the Parliament.

### **Swaran Singh Committee**

As the Amendments were hurried through, a concerted attempt had been made to re-examine the Constitution and change it from the Parliamentary to the Presidential form of democracy.<sup>30</sup> Swaran Singh Committee was appointed in February 1976 to go into this question. The Committee rejected the proposal for a Presidential form of government and asserted that the Parliamentary system was best suited to the country.

### **17.3.9 Emergency Excesses**

During the Emergency period, Sanjay Gandhi, second son of Indira Gandhi, holding no official position in the Congress Party, or the Government or any elected body, emerged as an extra-constitutional authority. He wielded enormous power, authority, clout and influence. He was projected as Indira Gandhi's successor. His 5 point programme gained national importance.<sup>31</sup> Two of his measures roused the wrath of the people:

1) **Forced sterilization campaign.** Men and women were forcefully sterilized. The vasectomy tents in cities, the sterilization vans roaming the countryside, the army of family planning 'motivators', the rewards and the quota system, the controversial 'task force', 'family planning workers' contributed to sterilization excesses. There was lot of rumours, resistance and repression. The programme undermined Indira Gandhi's credibility among her strongest supporters such as Muslims, Harijans and other oppressed castes.

2) **Forced Slum-Clearance.** In the name of city beautification 'Sanjay Action Brigade', and the obliging Delhi Development Authority, on 13 April 1976, demolished by bulldozers hundreds of houses, shacks, and stalls in the old city Turkman Gate, a Muslim dominated area displacing thousands of people. On 19 April there was police firing to quell the resistance to the demolition squads. A twenty-four-hour curfew was imposed on the entire area. In six days the demolition was completed. The suddenness and the ruthlessness of the

'operation demolition', antagonised the affected people. Turkman Gate became a symbol of Emergency excesses. The demolition was "as if an earthquake had struck, people covered in fear". Indra Gandhi had a creeping feeling that "the situation was out of control".

### 17.3.10 Resistance to Emergency

The public was paralysed when the emergency was imposed as a bolt from the blue. It stunned the people. The leaders arrested left no plan of resistance nor any strategy to counter the emergency. It was left to those leaders who were not arrested and those who had gone underground to organize the public resistance against the authoritarianism of the Government. They used several clandestine methods to mobilize public opinion. The resistance movement gathered momentum slowly but steadily.

On 27 June 1975, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam (DMK) passed a resolution demanding the revocation of the Emergency and the release of the leaders arrested. On 6 July, the party president and the Chief Minister K.Karunanidhi, administered an oath, in an mammoth Marina meeting, requesting the Prime Minister to fulfil its demands that those who were detained be set at liberty and the legitimate rights of the press restored. On 5 December, a biggest ever public meeting was held at Coimbatore. The DMK ministry was dissolved for misrule and disobeying the emergency laws and brought under the President's rule. Similarly, on 12 March 1976, another non-Congress Babubhai Patel ministry in Gujarat was dismissed.

Citizens for Democracy, formed in 1974, under the Presidentship of JP, organised an All-India Civil Liberties conference at Ahmedabad on 12 October 1975, and another meeting on 19-20 June 1975 at Bombay, resisting Emergency and working for freedom. The RSS, though banned, was the backbone of the resistance movement. The Akalis were against the emergency. Sheikh Abdullah, the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir was not enthusiastic about the Emergency. The Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case (September 1976), in which George Fernandes was implicated, was about the alleged criminal conspiracy against the Government of India.

### Revolution

Prakash Narain and Total Revolution are the two sides of the same coin. The Siamese twins they are inseparable. JP indicated his mind about it when he visited Gandhinagar (Gujarat). He advised students to give up studies and work for Youth

Revolution. When he was at Jabalpur (Bihar), he spoke about launching Total Revolution by building Janata Sarkars in Bihar villages. During the march to the Parliament the focus of Total Revolution was against the 'party dictatorship' of Indira Gandhi.

JP's concept and advocacy of Total Revolution was the driving force behind the JP movement. JP defined Total Revolution as "a comprehensive revolution affecting all aspects of social life including individual life". It embraced the caste system, customs and manners, marriage, education etc. Revolutionary change could be brought about by education, civil disobedience, persuasion, non-cooperation and partyless democracy. JP explained that total revolution was a combination of seven resolutions – social, economic, political, cultural, ideological, educational and spiritual.

In practical terms, Total Revolution had three objectives: 1) Social change through peaceful peoples power, 2) Social change through legal and administrative action, and 3) Changing the entire social frame work from within and also from outside, individuals as well as institutions. JP movement began with four objectives, 1) eradication of corruption, 2) high prices, 3) unemployment and 4) radical changes in education. Then it was expanded to achieve broader and all inclusive objectives of Total Revolution. JP was accepted as an unquestioned leader of the second independence movement because he was known for his impeccable integrity, transparent honesty and selfless sacrifice.

JP's ideals of grass-root democracy, partyless democracy, youth power, people's revolution, parallel government, humane society etc are romantic, rhetorical and Utopian. JP movement based on Total Revolution was undemocratic, unconstitutional and unethical. Its weaknesses were: 1) lack of ideology; 2) absence of well-knit organization; 3) want of line of leadership; 4) intellectual backing; 5) constructive programme of social change; 6) alternative model of government. Nonetheless, JP's Total Revolution served as an effective instrument of mass mobilization against the authoritarian regime of Indira Gandhi.<sup>32</sup>

### 17.6 Assessment

The declaration of Emergency was the authoritarian response to an anti-democratic and unconstitutional challenge to the duly elected Government and authority of Indira Gandhi. It was a desperate attempt to cope with the rising tide of populist attempt made by a fractured and frustrated opposition. Those who got rid of an elected government in Gujarat and those who miserably

failed to re-enact the same episode in Bihar were determined on dislodging Indira Gandhi from power. Deteriorating economic situation, industrial unrest, misuse of MISA and DIR, corruption and scandals, campaign of calumny, divided Congress and lack of resolute, determined and imaginative leadership provided necessary background for popular protests.

The mishandling of the Allahabad High Court verdict against Indira Gandhi and the singular failure to find electoral solution to cumulative crisis was a turning point in the struggle against Indira rule. The twice postponed elections in 1976 and the anti-institutional Constitutional Amendments had confirmed the worst fears of the opposition leaders. Both the recalcitrant ruling regime and the unprincipled coalition of unscrupulous opposition parties refused to abide by the rules of democratic game. The 20-Point Programme was a desperate attempt to uplifting the poor and social change. Emergency demonstrated that social and institutional discipline and orderly behaviour was possible only under duress and threat of punishment! The emergence of extra-constitutional Sanjay factor in the later phase of Emergency, emergency excesses and subservient acquiescence of the press and the public ushered in a gloomy chapter in the history of contemporary India. The announcement of election was a silver lining in the otherwise dark sky. To sum up, Emergency is a historical episode which "like the partition riots of 1947 and the army's retreat in 1962... leave a permanent scar on the national psyche".<sup>33</sup>



## 19. THE JANATA RULE: 1977-79

*The lionized heroes of Janata morcha became the petty villains of the Janata Government.*

*- John Keay.*

### 19.1 Elections of March 1977

#### 19.1.1 The Announcement

On 18 January 1977, Indira Gandhi announced her decision to hold elections on 21 March and not in November as announced earlier. On the same day the leaders of the opposition were released. Later, others detained under the 1975 Emergency were also set free. The announcement came as a bolt from the blue. Even her close confidants were "dumbfounded when she called for elections".<sup>1</sup> The announcement and the simultaneous release of leaders and others left the opposition "anxious and bewildered".<sup>2</sup>

#### 19.1.2 Rise of Janata Party

Two decades of Congress in power (1947-1967) had corrupted and eroded the credibility of the national movement-turned-political party. In 1967, Congress suffered a serious set back at the hustings and in 1969 it suffered a split. Taking advantage of the split, few opposition parties attempted twice to offer an alternative to the decadent Congress. In 1970, six political parties met in order to confront the Congress in Parliament with a common strategy.<sup>3</sup> In 1971, Congress (O), Jan Sangh and SSP with the support of Swatantra Party formed a Front, but the electorate rejected it. Then seven parties, big and small,<sup>4</sup> formed the Bhartiya Lok Dal (BLD). Finally, the imposition of Emergency in 1975 and the pre-dawn arrest and incarceration of leaders propelled them to form a common front against the authoritarian Congress. The result was the formation of Janata Party. On 25 March 1976, Jaiprakash Narayan launched the Janata Party in which were merged Congress (O), Socialist Party, BLD and Jan Sangh. The new party was formally inaugurated on 1 May 1977 with S.Chandrashekar Varma elected President.<sup>5</sup>

### 19.1.3 Sixth General Election, March 1977

#### The Janata Manifesto

The Janata Party Manifesto was the Charter of Promises. The party promised to end the state of emergency; restore to the people the Fundamental

Rights; repeal MISA, review unjust laws and set right distortions; ensure Art.352 and 356 were not misused; promised to reduce election costs and lower voting age from 21 to 18; enforce rule of law; abolish press censorship and free the press from governmental interference; delete right to property as a Fundamental Right; legislate for Right to Work and free public servants from political pressure.

On the economic front, the Manifesto promised to work for decentralised economy; end destitution and unemployment within a decade; introduce appropriate technology to achieve self-reliance; accord primacy to agriculture and rural sector; narrow down rural-urban disparities; increase production of mass consumption goods; ensure due place for small-scale and cottage industries; exempt small holdings from land revenues and purify the environment.

In the social sphere, the Manifesto promised reforms in education, eradication of illiteracy; safe drinking water and group health; mass public housing; scheme of social insurance; non-violent family planning; safeguard the rights and interests of SCs and weaker sections; a Civil Rights Commission; machinery to check corruption; protection of rights of women; schemes for youth welfare and legal aid to the poor.

Regarding foreign policy, the Manifesto promised to oppose colonialism and racism; develop friendship with all; follow 'genuine non-alignment'; work for peaceful settlement of international disputes; improve relations with neighbouring countries; promote regional cooperation; and strengthen national forces. The plethora of promises outsmarted and outwitted Indira Gandhi in her own electoral game.

## 2. The Election

On 18 January 1977, Indira Gandhi announced the sixth general election which was to be held on 16 March 1977. In the early weeks of 1977, Indira Gandhi commenced her campaign with vigour, courage and confidence. The election turned out to be a 'mortal combat' between the Congress and the Janata Party. The Janata Manifesto captured the imagination of the people and inaugurated an Era of Expectations. Apparently, "The Janata Party was a united Front, under a common leader, a common platform, a common symbol, a common list of candidates and a common campaign".<sup>7</sup> The election commenced on 16 March 1977.

In the sixth largest democratic electoral exercise about 194 million voters exercised their franchise. Janata Party captured 298 seats, receiving 30% of the vote. Congress, on the other hand, could get only 154 seats, with 29% vote. The CPM won 22 seats and the CPI -7. Indira Gandhi was swept away by the Janata storm; she was defeated in the Rae Bareilly constituency by her erstwhile opponent, Raj Narain. Sanjai Gandhi lost in Amethi. In Uttar Pradesh, it could not win even a single seat out of 84! Most of Indira Gandhi's cabinet colleagues and MPs were routed. It was the disastrous debacle the Congress had ever faced. The jubilant Janata parivar celebrated the downfall of the imperious Indira Gandhi.<sup>8</sup> India witnessed a new dawn.

## 19.2 First Non-Congress Government

### P.M. Morarji Desai

The Janata Party was confronted with the daunting task of choosing the Prime Minister from among the three aspirants for the post: Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram. JP and JB Kripalani favoured Desai though Ram had the largest support! The 'consensus candidate' Morarji Desai was sworn in, on 23 March 1977, as the Fourth Prime Minister of India. He had the distinction of being the first non-Congress premier. Earlier, in the morning, all members of the Janata Party assembled at the Rajghat, paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi and took oath solemnly administered by JP to endeavour earnestly to fulfil the task of the Father of the Nation.

## 19.3 Janata Government

The formation of the Janata Government was an exercise in accommodative politics. The constituent groups of the Janata Party had agreed that the major partners of the ruling alliance would have two members each in the cabinet. The Akalis and allies were also to be represented. Accordingly, a 64 member Council of Ministers was formed.<sup>9</sup> "The composition of the Janata Government at the centre was a model of government through consultation".<sup>10</sup>

## 19.4 Work of Janata Government

### 19.4.1 Restoration of Democracy

The first and foremost priority of the Janata Government was dismantling the much-hated Emergency regime. As a first step, on 27 March 1977, hardly four days after assuming office, the external emergency proclaimed

in 1971 was revoked. Then the Government proceeded to undo the harm done to the civil servants during the Emergency.

True to its Election Manifesto, the Janata Government, on 4 April 1977, introduced two Bills seeking to restore and safeguard the freedom of the press. One Bill sought to repeal the prevention of the publication of the press (Prohibition of Reports of Proceedings of the Parliament) Act, 1976; and the other was to restore the protection to the publication of the reports of the proceedings of the parliament. The Press Councils Act, 1978, restored the Press Council. On 17 August 1977, the Government appointed the Verghese Committee to go into the working of the AIR and Doordarshan and to suggest ways and means of imparting autonomy to them. On the basis of the Varghese Committee Report the **Prasar Bharati Bill** was presented in the Parliament on 16 May 1976.

#### 19.4.2 Dissolution of State Assemblies

On 18 April 1977, Home Minister Charan Singh addressed letters to the Chief Ministers of Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal to dissolve their State Assemblies and seek a fresh mandate from the people. Arguing that the Congress Governments of these States had been totally discredited by the popular vote in the Parliamentary elections, the Janata Government dismissed them! The contention that the states that had lost in the Lok Sabha elections had also lost the mandate to rule at the State level, had set a *dangerous precedence*.

Elections for the dissolved Assemblies were held between 10 and 15 June 1977. The Janata Party won two-thirds majority in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Delhi. The Akali-Janata combine won an absolute majority in Punjab. However, the AIADMK secured a majority in Tamil Nadu and the CPI(M) and its allies got two-thirds majority in West Bengal.

#### 19.4.3 The Shah Commission Inquiry

The Janata Government was concerned more about punishing Indira Gandhi for all her sins of commission and omission during the dark days of the Emergency, than governing the country. The Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry under J.C. Shah, retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, through a notification dated 28 May 1977. The purpose of the commission was to inquire into excesses, malpractices and misdeeds committed during the Emergency. Hundreds of people testified.

The Shah Commission hearings began at Patiala House, Delhi, on 2 September 1977. Within days of the commencement of the commission

hearings, on 3 October, Indira Gandhi was arrested, handcuffed, and locked up in Delhi's Police Lanes. But the Magistrate released her unconditionally. After three months, on 9 January 1978, she was forced by a summon to face J.C. Shah at Patiala House. The Shah Commission hearings were closed on 20 February 1978.

The three volume Shah Commission Report was an indictment of Indira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi and emergency excesses. The prolonged Shah Commission inquiry, perceived by the public as a vindictive act of a hostile government, served only to increase the popularity of Indira Gandhi. The inquiry was counter-productive. The entire effort was an exercise in futility. "In the end, the Shah Commission proved largely pointless exercise".<sup>11</sup>

#### 19.4.4 Asoka Mehta Committee, December 1977

The Janata Party, committed to the decentralization of power, appointed in December 1977, the Committee on Panchayat Raj Institutions, under the chairmanship of Asoka Mehta, to suggest measures to strengthen the local bodies. The Committee submitted its Report in August 1978, making nearly a hundred recommendations. The committee made out a case for decentralization of administration. The most momentous recommendation was for the creation of a two-tier system of Panchayat Raj instead of the three-tiered one, which was in vogue, as recommended by the Balwantrai Mehta Report (1957).

The Committee regarded the revenue district as the first point of decentralization below the State level. The Committee had also made specific recommendations about the composition of the various tiers of Panchayat Raj. The Committee wanted these institutions to have '*compulsory powers of taxation*' to mobilize the necessary resources on their own. Another significant feature of the Mehta Report was its recommendation favouring '*open participation*' of political parties in Panchayat Raj affairs. The Report also dealt with the election to these bodies, institutional safeguards for weaker sections and state control over Panchayat Raj. The Asoka Mehta Committee recommendations were faulted on several grounds, particularly its recommendation "in favour of the two-tier pattern of Panchayat Raj is of a retrograde nature".<sup>12</sup>

#### 19.4.5 Time Capsule

The Janata leaders unleashed uninterrupted campaign of calumny, mixing facts with fantasy, against Indira Gandhi. They then exploited the murky atmosphere of rumour and innuendo, to gain political and

personal leverage. One such vicious and vindictive propaganda was about the *Time Capsule*. They charged Indira Gandhi with falsification of history to magnify Nehru and her own roles as leaders of India's Independence, at the expense of others! It was alleged that she did this through 3 capsules in Delhi: 1) a Gandhi capsule in Birla House; 2) the Nehru capsule near Shamli and 3) a time capsule near the Red Fort, on 15 August 1973, the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nehru's death. It was the Time Capsule which gave the Janata the big stick to attack Indira Gandhi.

Earlier, an attempt was made by 22 MPs, including A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, to unearth the Time Capsule. When the Janata came to power, E. Seshian of DMK, now in Janata camp, raised the issue in Parliament. The Time Capsule was dug up on 8 December 1977 and was placed in the custody of a Parliamentary sub-committee. On examination it was found that the capsule contained copies of the constitution, in different languages, two coins, miniature models of Vijayanta tanks and a 10,000 word mini history. The history was written by Dr. S. Krishnaswamy, Prof. of History at the Madras Christian College at the behest of the Indian Council of Historical Research. It was nothing but a chronological sequence of events and did not in any way eulogied Nehru or Indira Gandhi as alleged by the Janata leaders. Their irresponsible allegations were exposed; and their prejudiced anti-Indira propaganda balloon was badly punctured. The mountain brought forth not even a mountain rat!

## 19.5 Economic Policy, Plan and Programmes

### 19.5.1 Economic Policy

Morarji Desai Government was committed to 'Gandhian Socialism'. The Janata Government attempted to take a quantum leap from the 'commanding height' industrial progress to decentralized rural development. The new Congress Prime Minister was determined to set new standards in political morality and economic welfare. It was with this end in view, the Asoka Mehta Committee was appointed. Instead of industry oriented growth, labour intensive small scale village industries were encouraged. Similarly, centralized planning was replaced by decentralized economy. Agricultural development was subsidized. Land revenue was reduced. Employment was provided to the unemployed through 'Food for Work' schemes. Funds were allocated to rural areas.

### 5.2 Rolling Plan

The Janata Government wanted to be different from its Congress predecessors. It attempted to introduce the new concept of Rolling Plan. The plan was put into practice with effect from 1 April 1978. Under this Janata system of planning, Five Year Plan will be continued to be formulated on five year basis, but plan targets, resource allocation etc., will be revised every year, in the light of performance of various sectors. The Rolling Plan was time bound. The Rolling Plan could not take off because the Janata Government was ousted from power in 1980. "The Janata Government wasted a unique opportunity to build a truly federal and decentralized structure of power and authority, bolstered by necessary policy correctives to fulfil people's expectations and channelize them towards a new pattern of development".<sup>13</sup>

### 19.5.3 Demonitisation, January 1978

The New Year witnessed the demonitisation of higher value notes. On 16 January 1978, an ordinance was issued, demonitising the bank notes of Rs. 1000, 5,000 and 10,000 issued by the Reserve Bank of India. This measure was intended to serve the limited purpose of checking illegal transactions. It was pointed out that high denomination notes could be used for smuggling, or back-marketing or for political purposes. Demonitisation was welcomed by all political parties and the public as a step in the right direction. It was expected that this measure will raise the value of money and thereby lower the prices of commodities.

### 19.5.4 Alexander Committee

The Janata Government was keen on improving and strengthening foreign trade. It wanted to bring about comprehensive changes in import-export policies, procedures and programmes. A committee of eminent economic experts and administrators, headed by P.C. Alexander was appointed. Known as the Alexander Committee, it recommended that 1) all items for which no specific policy had been laid down in the Red Book should be imported under the Open General Licence; 2) a shift from controls to development in the import regime; and 3) the Chief Controller of Imports and Exports be redesignated as Director General of Foreign Trade. Most of the recommendations were implemented. This led to a new policy of trade liberalization and laid the foundation for a new import-export regime later.

Lok Sabha. The Congress ruled the country for 28 years; the Janata Party managed to survive for 28 months; but the Charan Singh Government tumbled down in 23 wasted days.

## 19.10 Janata Foreign Policy, 1977-79

### 19.10.1 'Genuine Non-Alignment'

When the first non-Congress Janata Government came to power in March 1977, a sea-change in foreign policy was expected. The Janata Party manifesto proclaimed the policy of 'genuine non-alignment'. Both the Janata Prime Minister Morarji Desai and his Foreign Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, were sharp critics of Nehru's foreign policy of non-alignment, were expected to make course correction and restore balance. They were concerned about the 'tilt' towards the Soviet Union. But once in power, they realized the inevitable importance of special relations with the USSR, which was a key supplier of sophisticated military hardware to India and helped Indian economy and industry in a big way. In effect, they followed the foot-steps of Nehru, Shastri and Indira Gandhi in implementing the policy of non-alignment.

### 19.10.2 Relations with Foreign Countries

#### Indo-US Relations

The US President Jimmy Carter visited India in January 1978 and Prime Minister Morarji Desai reciprocated the visit to the US in June the same year. Though cordiality continued, India's consistent resistance to sign NPT and US supply of nuclear fuel to Tarapore became increasingly controversial and stood in the way of close and cordial relations between the two countries. Three factors deepened the differences on nuclear and non-proliferation issues between India and the United States: 1) India's refusal to accept 'full scope safeguards'; 2) the negative response of the US Administration to India's acquisition of nuclear weapons capacity; and 3) India's compulsions to keep its nuclear options open. During his four-day visit to the US, Foreign Minister A.B. Vajpayee discussed with the US authorities the issues relating to the supply of uranium, the problem of Pakistan's attempt to develop nuclear bomb and the need to declare Indian Ocean a zone of peace. Both Desai and Vajpayee failed to break ice with the US. "During Desai's term in office, the two governments did not



India's foreign policy, especially its relations with USSR. Desai was critical of communist ideology and authoritarian system of the Soviet Union. On 2 March 1977, Morarji Desai said that his government would follow a policy of 'proper non-alignment' and went a step further and remarked that India would not honour the one-sided Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971. Similarly, Brezhnev was skeptical and suspicious of Desai's anti-Soviet Union and pro-western views. But when the Soviet Foreign Minister A.A.Gromyko visited India on 25 April 1977 both countries concluded new agreements and reaffirmed faith in the spirit of the 1971 Treaty. Desai paid a visit to Russia in October 1977 and signed agreements of economic co-operation. But his Moscow visit in 1978 was a 'non-event'.<sup>20</sup> Once in power, Morarji Desai realized the imperative importance of maintaining healthy relations with the Soviet Union.

### 19.10.3 Relations with Neighbouring Countries

#### Indo-Sino Relations

Prime Minister Morarji Desai was decidedly in favour of carrying forward the process of normalization with China, though he made it clear that the border issue was of central concern for his government. He reiterated that the normalization could be achieved only after border issue was settled. After a lapse of 30 years Foreign Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, visited China in February / March 1979. During this visit, Chinese leaders, particularly, Deng Xiaoping first conveyed the view that China was willing to normalize relations with India without pre-conditions. On his part, Vajpayee suggested that Indo-Sino dialogue on non-controversial issues must be renewed. Both the leaders set aside the boundary question for the time being. "This exchange marked a crucial positive shift in Sino-Indian relations".<sup>21</sup>

#### Indo-Pak Relations

The Morarji Desai Government tried its best to improve India's relations with Pakistan. Though Desai and Vajpayee were vociferous in their condemnation of the foreign policy of the Congress era, they, in power, started talking about improving relations with the next-door neighbour Pakistan. There was an incremental increase in official level exchanges between India and Pakistan. There was marginally expanded cooperation in the fields of commerce, culture and sports. On 14 April 1978, India and Pakistan signed a bilateral agreement with regard to the Salal Dam – a significant step towards normalization. However, Pakistan persisted in articulating its demands for the withdrawal of Indian troops from

acquired charge in August 1979, Indo-Pakistan relations were generally square one, linked to abiding controversies which affected them as a

### **Nepal Relationship**

Nepal was cautious about the triumph of democracy over authoritarianism in India, lest it fan the fire of democracy in the Kingdom. It felt an increasing pressure from India for the rehabilitation of Koirala and the restoration of democracy. When King Birendra visited India on 2 April 1977 he assured that India would in no way interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal. Prime Minister Desai's visit to Nepal resulted in two trade agreements. The relations between the two countries remained cordial.

### **India-Bangladesh Relations**

When the Janata Party captured power in India, General Zia-Ur-Rehman, Chief of Army Staff and Chief Martial Law Administrator was the head of Bangladesh. The non-Congress Janata Government dared not to change the policy laid down by Indira Gandhi in the Simla Agreement. In November 1977, a five-year bilateral agreement was signed. It offered partial solution to the problem of sharing the Ganga waters at Farakka. The 1977 Agreement was claimed to be an achievement of Indian diplomacy. It served an example to developing countries that bilateral disputes could be resolved through negotiations. Thus, the Janata foreign policy provided stability and continuity to the policy pursued by Nehru, Shastri and Indira Gandhi with minor modifications to suit the time and circumstance.

### **19.11 Assessment**

The greatest achievement and noblest contribution of the Janata regime to Indian democracy was the restoration of calm after a storm of Emergency. The emergency was dismantled; civil liberties were fully restored; press censorship was removed; the independence of the press from government interference was re-established; all remaining political prisoners were released; the authoritarian measures which had distorted the constitution were repealed; the authoritarian powers of the Supreme Court and High Courts to enforce the Rule of Law and Judicial Review were restored. In short, "The Janata government restored the main features of parliamentary democracy in India and made the future imposition of emergency less likely. It could leave its impact on the country's development to be decided by the people who went

The biggest failure of the Janata Government was its non-optimism. It did everything except governing the country. It wasted the well-known opportunity on unimportant issues like prohibition which caused huge loss to the exchequer. The Janata Government could do nothing to avert deficit financing. The budget for 1978-79 presented by H.M. Patel was unable to bridge the budget gap nor control inflation. The rise in prices proved the hardest. The benefits of massive investments were reaped by businessman, industrial giants and rural rich. Rolling Plan paraded plan. Rural reconstruction, including land reforms, remained a cropper. The distribution system was not widened and improved as promised; staples were not available at reasonable prices to the poor as assured. Practically nothing was done to tackle the unemployment problem.

The Government's industrial policy was counter productive. The Government and the leaders were pre-occupied more with prosecuting Indira Gandhi than on ameliorating the miseries of hewers of wood and drawers of water. The cumulative result was the wide prevalence of caste tensions, violent attacks on the scheduled castes in North India and "the recurrence of large-scale communal violence".<sup>28</sup> The Janata Manifesto promised "freedom with Freedom". It gave freedom but not bread.

The Janata Government was the first non-Congress, non-Dussehra coalition experiment after Independence. But power struggle, ego-clashes, temperamental incompatibility of leaders, irreconcilable inner contradictions, 'legit of raw power' and anti-Indira antagonism proved to be self-destructive and forced the way for the breakup of the government. The coalition experiment revealed that "desperate groups and individuals enter into a marriage of convenience for the sake of power, and their desire to maximize the benefits of power creates schisms and conflicts among themselves, and these arrangements for governance ultimately collapse".<sup>29</sup> The collapse of the Janata Government offers an invaluable lesson. Politics of coalition would succeed only if 1) all parties in the government do not compete to establish hegemonic position as against to one another, 2) when leaders of constituents accept a position of responsibility and 3) if minimum programmes are accepted by members.<sup>30</sup>

**Janata Party** was the creature of circumstances. It was an uneasy combination of incompatible political outfits. Even after merger, they retained their identity. Jan Sangh, for instance, remained a thorn in the flesh of the Janata Party. Leaders like Bahuguna, Patnaik and Madu Limaye tried to

the Janata Government by throwing out the Jan Sangh! Above all, the Parivar was Indira Gandhi centric. The persecution of Indira constituted a reverse and pernicious chapter in the brief history of Janata Regime. She was harassed and hounded and was literally driven from pillar to post. She was given due respect she deserved as the former Prime Minister of India for previous eleven years. Janata leaders, without exception, persecuted and treated her; thereby set a sad example of ill-treating a fallen foe. The Janata Government discarded itself by discrediting Indira Gandhi. The Janata leaders tried to 'consign Indira Gandhi to the dust-bin of history'; instead they landed themselves to the limbo of history!

*Morarji Desai* pledged, at the Samadhi of the Father of the Nation, to work earnestly to fulfil the task that Mahatma began; but the realization of Gandhian bloodless revolution of 1977, like Tantalus cup, eluded him. He took the stunning victory and massive mandate as his triumph over his rival Indira Gandhi. The former Congress stalwart became the country's non-Congress Prime Minister! His unsolicited messages, advices and suggestions went unheeded. The 'man of principles' and the 'instrument of God's will' pleaded ignorance of his son Kantibhai Desai's ignominious extra-parliamentary dealings; his son was his Achilles, heel. When all his colleagues abandoned him at the time of troubles, his Prime Ministerial ship sank.

Charan Singh, the Messiah of the Farmers, was an Indira hater. He treated Desai and other cabinet colleagues as 'a collection of impotent men' and failed to bring Indira Gandhi to justice. He, the Home Minister, pulled the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, and replaced him. Charan Singh, who called Indira Gandhi 'Wicked as Cleopatra', stooped down to seek her support to remain in power and to survive a vote of confidence. As caretaker Prime Minister of Interim Government,<sup>28</sup> he brazenly exploited the government-owned AIR and Doordarshan and misused the media to feather his political nest and to fight impending elections. He hardly sat in the Prime Minister's seat in Parliament, through he held the post for 171 days!