

An Exclusive Interview With India's Former Prime Minister

Indira Gandhi Calls For Defense Of Indian Science And Industry

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India, in an exclusive interview in New Delhi May 10, called for a defense of Indian science and industry to save her nation from destruction.

Mrs. Gandhi, who was a disgraced and defeated leader following the March 1977 elections which swept her Congress Party from power, is now holding the center of attention in Indian politics. While the currently ruling Janata Party is embroiled in factional warfare and losing the support in the population gained a year ago, Mrs. Gandhi, the president of her faction of the Congress Party—known as the Congress (I)—has gained tremendous ground. The Congress (I) is now the recognized leader of the opposition in India and has won significant electoral victories in recent months, including a nationally important parliamentary by-election from the key north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh two days ago.

Mrs. Gandhi, speaking at her home in New Delhi after that victory, displayed a determination to overcome the odds against her political comeback. Despite the continued strong antipathy to her among certain sections of the population, stemming from the disastrous State of Emergency period from 1975-1977, Mrs. Gandhi has managed to recapture a large degree of popular support. For months she has constantly been on the move, speaking around the country to huge rallies of peasants, workers, and the Indian middle class, where she has pounded away at the Janata government of Prime Minister Desai.

Her speeches have stressed the deteriorating conditions of the past year, marked by economic collapse, inflation, increasing domestic violence and disorder, and has scored the government's emphasis on "rural development" over industry, and its drift away from the non-aligned foreign policy of her rule and that of her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, before her.

Q: You have just won a great victory, that is, your party has, in the Azamgarh by-elections. What is your perspective or where do you go now in terms of what you see your interests are in the political situation?

A: Obviously, it's good to win an election, especially when we lost so badly in the last parliamentary elections, but we don't look at perspectives from the point of view of elections. We are concerned as to what direction the country takes and if this government were to give a good direction, we have said that we would support it.

Unfortunately, they are bent on undoing whatever has been done in 30 years, and there can be no doubt that in these 30 years this country has been built up, almost from nothing. It's not that I did more, but, somehow, the process does get accelerated as you go on. The very momentum that was created earlier, this is what helped us—helps us now.

The base that we did have in industry and in science and technology, this is *essential* to fight poverty. It is ridiculous to say that you can solve rural problems without science and without industry; you simply can't. You cannot ignore defense, for instance, especially a country like India which has experienced aggression so many times. In our scheme of things, there is no conflict between agriculture and industry; they complement one another. This is seen when there is a bad agricultural year; (at such times) industry has always suffered.

We feel this government is saying a lot of things without going into the depths of it. There is a general impression now, not only among us who are opposed to their policies but even to those who supported them, that the country is being ruined. No matter who comes afterwards, they will find it an almost impossible task to resurrect what has been broken up.

So, elections help but, with or without elections, the aim is to see how we can retrieve the situation, increase public consciousness about what is happening, and try and create public opinion which will not allow them to do these things.

Q: Since I've been here, there has been almost every day, a newspaper report of a riot, or communal clash or a caste clash of some kind, or police firing on striking workers. There seems to be a tremendous amount of violence and disintegration of the cohesiveness of Indian society built up over the past 30 years. What do you attribute that to and how can that problem be dealt with?

A: It is sort of complex, but, you remember that before the Emergency in 1974, the then-opposition parties encouraged violence of every kind. They encouraged students to leave studies and go out on the streets, they encouraged the police and army... not to obey orders.... There were strikes all over and the strikes were not on purely labor questions and on the demands of the workers; they always had a political aspect also, antigovernment and so on. But the major thing was this attitude toward violence and the encouragement of violence. This has come to the fore again today.

We do have parties that are actively encouraging this sort of situation. I think they believe that they will get the advantage out of it. Now, added to this are the frustrations of different sections ... I mean those people do not want to help these parties, but they are frustrated because prices are rising. Middle class people are saying that we have to cut down on milk consumption because we just can't afford it.... A very average family which lived very moderately is saying that their milk costs have gone up 50 rupees a month, which is quite a lot. It is the same with... essential articles such as salt, cooking oil, bus fares....

So, these two things have combined. I think there is a definite move for violence and instability, a conscious political move, combined with people that are frustrated.... Similar to the past, feelings are being very deliberately aroused.

And for everything, I'm being blamed.

Q: I've heard that...

A: Even though in the police report there's no question, our party is not there at all. Specifically in Benares—they named two members of the (paramilitary Hindu organization) RSS involved. And even in Agra, I believe something like that happened. But Jan Sangh (the RSS political arm—ed.) people and Janata party have gone out of their way to put the blame on us.

Q: I'm aware of that and I'm also aware of people who feel that the RSS and the Jan Sangh represent a serious threat of an *actual* fascist order in India which would be based on severe communalist theories and ideology, and that such a fascist order in India would be complemented by what seems to be the process towards installation of very reactionary Islamic regimes on either side of you (i.e., Pakistan and Bangladesh). Do you see that threat in India yourself?

A: There is a very great threat because in all the quarrels within the Janata party—and most places where there is trouble, the trouble is within the party; it is not the Janata and another party—in all of this the Jan Sangh seems to be gaining and coming up on top.

Q: You referred in the beginning to the government's policy of discouraging industrialization, downplaying the role of science and technology, in favor of this so-called rural emphasis. Taking off from what you said—that is, without industry, without science, there can be no development in any sector of the economy—it seems that this government has gone beyond the point of even simply putting forward those ideas which the World Bank has circulated for some time, to actually dismantling institutions which have existed for a long time. I refer to the Center for Scientific and Industrial Research and to the scientific establishment in general. What do you think can be done in defense of science and particularly in terms of questions like the necessity of development of nuclear energy in India?

A: We as a party can only educate the people and hope that they will make their voice felt. I don't think there's much else that can be done. Just this morning I heard that many of our doctors are trying to migrate...

Q: For lack of employment?

A: No. They just feel that the atmosphere is not one in which they can do any effective work. A lot of them were going previously, but, in my regime, we were bringing them back.... They were coming back and at lesser pay.... because they felt they could do something for the nation. That atmosphere is gone.

Q: On the question of nuclear energy: there is, as you know, an antinuclear movement throughout the world. There are also people who feel that the development of nuclear energy, of advanced fission technologies going into fusion, is essential to the survival of humanity itself. How do you feel about this?

A: Firstly, we are against any type of nuclear war, and of course we are against any type of war if it can possibly be avoided. We have worked for total disarmament and we are committed to total disarmament, but what we feel is, why should only the developing countries be discriminated against? Here the developed countries, the powerful countries, are accumulating nuclear arms, and refining them, making them more and more sophisticated whereas they don't want us to use it (nuclear devices—ed.) even for development purposes, which is all that we want. This is our attitude. If it can be clearly used for development purposes, then it should be used. Of course, there are dangers of radiation but our own experiment (in 1974—ed.) was a very clean one fortunately.

Q: The question of nuclear nonproliferation however seems to have been used as an instrumentality for blocking nuclear energy development?

A: Yes, it has. This is what we objected to and tremendous pressure has been brought to bear on us as you know.

Q: Let me ask one last question. You've spoken out about the threat to execute Mr. Bhutto (deposed Premier of Pakistan—ed.) and at previous times you've spoken about what you view as a connection between the assassination of Shiek Mujib, the President of Bangladesh, efforts to undermine your government, and now, we have the events in Pakistan and the overthrow of Mr. Bhutto. Could you amplify on your understanding of this and how you view the situation regarding Pakistan and India today?

A: Well, it's very difficult to amplify this. I am basically for good relations between all the countries in the neighborhood, especially on our subcontinent, but it seemed to me that what has happened in different countries, all more or less at the same time, is too neat to be a mere coincidence. This is all I can say about it.

Q: The result of that however, rather than an increase in good relations, has been an increase in tensions. Do you see that as being the intended result?

A: In some things relations have improved. I mean with Pakistan, for instance, there have been visits and so forth. I don't know whether this is a basic improvement or a superficial improvement, but I think one has to wait and see. I don't think one can say very much about it.

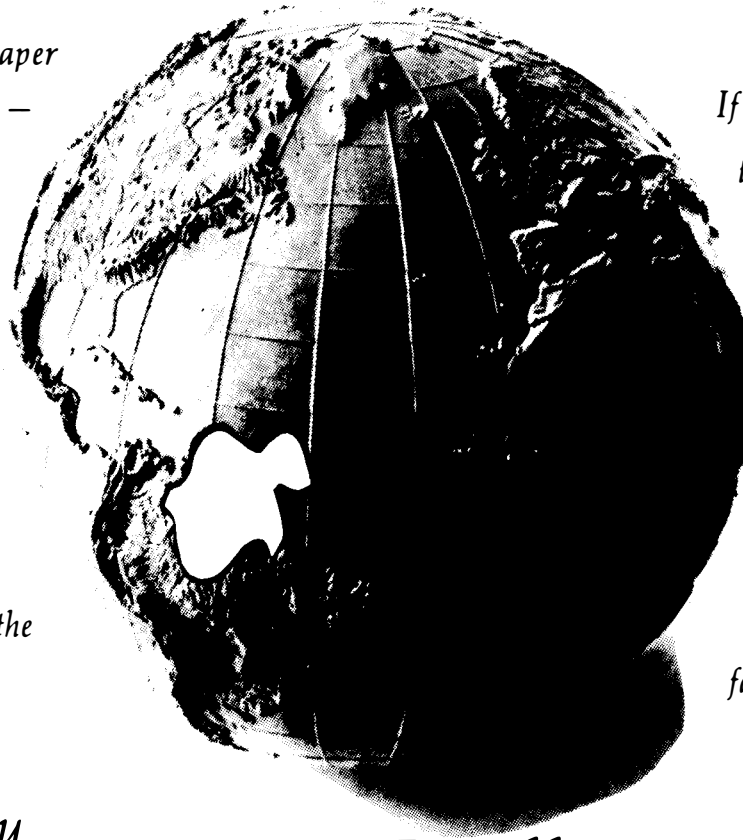
—Daniel Sneider, EIR Asia editor

Your newspaper gives you
only part of the picture...



It leaves you puzzled...

No matter what newspaper
you read, coast to coast —
from the Wall Street
Journal to the Los
Angeles Times —
at best you're only
getting parts of the
puzzle. And a lot of
those parts don't even
fit when you try to put the
whole puzzle together.



If you don't believe us,
thumb through a few
back issues of the
newspapers you
read, and then
compare with the
Executive Intelligence
Review...

Which gives you the
facts and analysis you
need to know?

Isn't it time you
subscribed to the *Executive Intelligence Review*?

PRICE CHART

Area	3 months	6 months	1 year
U.S., Canada, Mexico	\$125	\$225	\$400
Venezuela, Colombia, Caribbean	\$140	\$250	\$455
Europe, South America	\$115	\$265	\$495
Rest of World	\$150	\$280	\$520

Personal and bulk rates on request.

I am subscribing to the Executive Intelligence Review for the following:

3 months 6 months 1 year

Name

Address

City State Zip

Signature

amount enclosed

Make checks payable to:

New Solidarity International Press Service,
G.P.O. Box 1922, New York, N.Y. 10001

