

Rajiv Gandhi shakes up ministries for new streamlined government

Within three days of the last ballots being cast in India's Dec. 24-27 election, the vote was counted, the old parliament was dissolved, and the new government was formed, including selection and swearing in of a new cabinet. To the delight and amazement of the population, Rajiv Gandhi put the new 40-member council of ministers on notice that their performance would be continuously monitored for results.

In the days since the new government was formed, the prime minister has been conducting a thorough review of ministries. Ministers and their subordinates have been asked to submit reports on the status and plans of the ministry. An extensive administrative reorganization has been simultaneously set into motion, with the streamlining of ministries, the creation of new ministries, and the movement of personnel.

In this process, and in several speeches and interviews by the prime minister, the outlines of the new government's priorities have become clear.

Education and culture

Education is the highest of these priorities, as the prime minister emphasized in his Jan. 5 speech to the nation (see *Documentation*). For the first time in India's history, education has been elevated to full cabinet status, and the portfolio has been put in the hands of K.C. Pant, a former industry minister who is known for his competence and professionalism. The prime minister has called for a new national education policy, and has made clear that by education he is not simply referring to schools and colleges, but to industry and administration as well—a comprehensive program to foster national cohesion and the work ethic. The lack of a fully developed educational system, with the consequent inability to bring the level of literacy higher than 35-40%, has been a serious drag on industrialization and modernization.

Just as significant, culture, previously grouped with education, has been constituted as a ministerial portfolio in its own right, which the prime minister has kept in his own hands for the time being. Mrs. Indira Gandhi had moved to breathe new life into the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, the focus of early Sanskrit studies and the repository of many rare manuscripts, and had launched an Indology project to bring the country's magnificent cultural heritage into new focus. It is likely that Rajiv Gandhi will pursue this initiative. The ren-

aissance urgently needed to motivate and guide India's leap into the 21st century must be centered on a revival of the scientific potential of the Vedic period, the high point in the emergence of world civilization centered in India of about 4000 B.C., which we know today in the heritage of the Sanskrit language and literature.

Punjab a priority

A cabinet committee consisting of the ministers of education, home, and defense has already been set up to review the Punjab crisis and propose measures to resolve the issues that forced the central government to declare a state of emergency—"President's Rule"—more than one year ago. In Punjab, Sikh fundamentalists and separatists, with extensive international terrorist connections and support, hatched the campaign of destabilization that led to the brutal assassination of Indira Gandhi in October. During the election campaign and since, the prime minister has reiterated that there will be no quarter given to demands for separation or "national" status for any group, state, or region of the country. At the same time he has clearly stated his responsibility and commitment to defend the personal security of every Indian citizen, the Sikhs included.

The cabinet committee has initiated consultations with the various political forces in Punjab. Home Minister S.B. Chavan has dispatched the chief ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi to Punjab to encourage Sikhs who have fled from their homes to return. But as the prime minister stated in a recent interview, he views economic development as the touchstone for resolving communal issues.

"If you look at the castes, the religious groups, the various regional linguistic groupings, each is a prospective danger," Gandhi stated. "But the real danger is economic stagnation. Whenever we have had a problem with minorities, it has been when there has been an economic problem. I don't think there is a problem [of internal differences] as long as we politicians don't try to build on them."

The economy

The priorities for economic development can best be seen in the administrative reforms and reorganization now under-

way, as well as in key ministerial appointments. A new Ministry of Science and Technology has been established which will incorporate the Department of Science and Technology, a new Department of Industrial and Scientific Research, and the Department of Nonconventional Energy Sources. The aim is to strengthen the infrastructure for scientific and technological development and to establish a real link between R&D and industry.

The Energy Ministry, which had become an unwieldy cluster of fiefdoms, has been broken up. The Petroleum Ministry has been set up in its own right to facilitate the country's dynamic program in exploration, production, and refining, a program which has already contributed significantly to reducing foreign exchange outlays for oil. The Department of Coal has been joined with Steel and Mines in a new ministry. The former Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizer Vasant Sathe is in charge, and the dynamic diplomat-turned-politician Nataraj Singh has been appointed minister of state for steel. The

steel industry, where, incredibly, so-called demand projections have been systematically reduced since 1975, is a major bottleneck in the country's industrialization drive. Low capacity utilization and outdated technology present a real challenge. Power, perhaps the single most decisive choke point in the Indian economy and a major focus of the upcoming Seventh Five Year Plan, has been joined with an Irrigation Ministry under the direction of B. Shankaranand and Arun Nehru, the tough-minded member of Rajiv Gandhi's "inner circle."

The railways, a critical element of India's industrial infrastructure in need of determined attention, have been placed in the hands of Cabinet Minister Bansi Lal and Minister of State Madhavrao Scindia. Bansi Lal, a former minister of defense and chief minister of Haryana, is known for his ability to get things done. Madhavrao Scindia, the scion of a princely family who trounced Opposition leader Atal Behari Vajpayee in Gwalior, is among the young "no-nonsense"

The Indian cabinet

Finance: Vishwanath Pratap Singh

Home: S.B. Chavan

Defense: P. V. Narasimha Rao

Planning: P. V. Narasimha Rao (temporary)

Education: K. C. Pant

Steel, Mines, and Coal: Vasant Sathe

Chemicals and Fertilizers: Veerendra Patil

Food and Civil Supplies: Rao Birendra Singh

Health and Family Welfare: Mohsina Kidwai

Parliamentary Affairs: H.K.L. Bhagat

Agriculture and Rural Development: Buta Singh

Railways: Bansi Lal

Irrigation and Power: B. Shankaranand

Law and Justice: Asoke Sen

Works and Housing: Abdul Gafoor

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has retained personal control over the ministries of Commerce and Supply, Environment and Forest, External Affairs, Industry and Company Affairs, Science and Technology, Atomic Energy, Culture, Electronics, Ocean Development, Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Space, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Youth Affairs, and Sports.

Top members of the new cabinet include:

Defense Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, a senior Congress (I) leader who was a member of the late Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi's cabinet from 1980-84. Rao held the critical Home Ministry portfolio and played a role in negotiations to resolve the Punjab problem. He also served as minister of external affairs, and has held a number of leadership positions over the years, both within the party and as a government official.

Finance Minister V. P. Singh, a Congress (I) leader who was a prominent member of Mrs. Gandhi's cabinet from 1982-84. As minister of commerce, he represented India in international forums discussing international monetary reform. During the past year, Singh had been sent to Uttar Pradesh to prepare the party for elections in that crucial state.

Home Minister S.B. Chavan, a respected administrator and Congress (I) figure who was a member of Mrs. Gandhi's cabinet from 1980-84. Known for seriousness and efficiency, Chavan held the critical planning and defense portfolios. Like P. V. Narasimha Rao and V. P. Singh, Chavan has been nominated to the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, the most important grouping within the cabinet.

Education Minister K. C. Pant, a member of the Union Council of Ministers from 1967-77, holding finance, economic, and science portfolios. He joined the Union Cabinet as Minister of Energy in 1979 in the caretaker government of Charan Singh. He has been chairman of the Advisory Board on Energy since 1983. Pant is the son of the late Gobind Ballabh Pant, an independence leader and member of the Nehru cabinet. He was educated in chemistry in India and West Germany.

associates of Gandhi.

Closely related to the prime minister's commitment to move the economy forward is his determination to whip the governmental bureaucracy, including the large public-sector corporations in heavy industry, into an efficient and productive mode of operation. In addition to the science, space and atomic energy portfolios, Gandhi has kept Commerce and Industry and the new Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms in his own hands. The latter is the primary instrument for implementing and enforcing the kind of administrative transformation implied in the prime minister's dedication to "results, not procedures."

While there is no doubt that putting a premium on efficiency will yield important results, the real gains in the Indian economy can only come from a long-term plan of focused investment which concentrates initially on infrastructure, which is to say a new orientation to planning. While another dynamic diplomat-turned-politician, the former Indian Ambassador to the United States, K.R. Narayanan, has been named minister of state for planning, with the portfolio temporarily in the charge of Defense Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, there is as yet no indication that a scientific approach to economic development will find institutional expression.

Foreign policy requirements

On foreign policy, the prime minister has underlined his commitment to the tradition of non-alignment established by Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, emphasizing in particular the urgency of international monetary reform. In the face of frantic maneuvering on both sides of the superpower divide, Gandhi has made it clear that he will seek good relations with both the Soviet Union and the United States based on India's sovereign requirements.

The need for certain types of advanced technologies and related inputs has drawn Indian attention toward the United States to be sure, but the conclusion which some U.S. observers have drawn from this—that Gandhi is preparing to adopt a "free enterprise" program—is hardly warranted. In a recent interview with a Western reporter, he explained that India's approach to foreign investment was cautious. "We have felt uneasy because India was taken over by the East India Company," Gandhi observed, "maybe it is a hangover from that."

Gandhi has made it a point to stress that India's relations with its neighbors will get special attention, and startled the pundits, especially those of the left, with overtures to both Pakistan and China. He would visit both countries in the interest of improving relations if invited, Gandhi stated during the election campaign, and has since reiterated his interest to "finish off this confrontation that has been there for years" with Pakistan. "President Zia ul-Haq spoke very positively when he was here in November," Gandhi said, pointedly leaving the door open, "but that has not been translated into action by his officials."

Documentation

Rajiv Gandhi's program for India

The following is an abridged text of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's broadcast to the nation on Jan. 5:

Fellow citizens,

You have given my party and me your confidence in overflowing measure. Who could ask for more? And how can we prove worthy of it? Only by working for you with unremitting faith and humility, summoning all our reserves of strength and energy, being as unsparing with ourselves as you have been generous with your trust.

I do not regard it as my victory, or even the victory of my party, which commences its hundredth year of service; it is the victory of the people of India.

You have spoken clearly and unmistakably. You have given a mandate for unity, for strength, for harmony.

The whole world sees once again the vitality of India's democratic tradition. The political system built up by our great leaders has marched to new strength. The election has been a great celebration of democracy. India's ancient heritage going back to the dawn of mankind, stands renewed in freedom.

The dust and din of the elections are behind us. The passions they generated must now make way for reconciliation. Great tasks await us and we should approach them in the spirit of togetherness; united, there is no challenge that we cannot meet.

Secularism is the basis of our unity. Communalism and all other narrow loyalties are incompatible with unity. These elections have shown that our people always rise above these artificial barriers. We have to fight communalism and the suspicion and insecurity it breeds. It is my first duty to safeguard the life, property and legitimate rights of citizens belonging to every faith.

Campaign for unity

We must go beyond the prevention and suppression of violence. We must cure the minds where hatred and prejudice

arise and grow. We must take the campaign for unity to every village and every street of every town. An ideological battle against communalism, fanaticism must be waged in our schools and universities, in our work place and in our media.

My government will give top priority to the problem of Punjab. A cabinet committee has been formed to study various aspects of the problem and to look at alternatives for a peaceful settlement with a specified time frame. In ending the said chapter of discord, all should cooperate. The Sikhs are as much a part of India as any other community. They have played a heroic role in winning the defending our freedom. I wish to assure them that their life and property will be protected in every part of the country. In Punjab and elsewhere, all patriotic forces must repudiate those who preach separatism and practice violence. There cannot, and will not, be any concession to separatist ideologies and to the cult of violence. India's unity is paramount; Everything else comes after that.

The public sector

The public sector will continue to be a major tool of development; deficiencies in performance, wherever they exist, will be quickly overcome. Far-reaching proposals for change have been formulated and are under consideration.

Improvement in productivity, absorption of modern technology and fuller utilization of capacity must acquire the status of a national campaign. I have asked the ministries of science and technology and industries to prepare specific proposals to achieve these objectives.

Administrative reform

Administrative reform is crucial for social and economic transformation. It is for this reason that I decided to take under my own charge the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms. A full-scale review of administrative organization, policies, and procedures is in progress.

I have asked that the decision-making processes should be decentralized along with enforcement of accountability. Rules and procedures will be drastically simplified to speed up decision making. Results will take precedence over procedures.

I have directed all concerned agencies to ensure that citizens get prompt and courteous service from government departments and agencies. An effective machinery for redressal of public grievances will be set up in offices and departments with large public dealings.

Action will be taken to raise the morale of public services. We shall prevent extraneous interference in the normal functioning of public services. We must create a new administrative culture for service of the masses. Training of civil servants of all categories will be restructured to develop competence and commitment to the basic values of our society.

New national education policy

Education must promote national cohesion and the work ethic. The grandeur of our freedom struggle and its significance for national integration have to be brought home to every student. Our schools and colleges should acquaint the younger generations with India's ancient heritage and culture. The curricula and textbooks should curb parochial and communal interpretations of our composite culture.

I have looked at some of the policies and programs in this field. I have asked that a new national education policy be drafted.

We are formulating programs to use on a large scale the new communication technology in our school system. De-linking of degrees from jobs under government is under active consideration. Steps are being taken to establish an open university to bring higher education within easy reach of all. The Central Schools Organization will be expanded. These schools will function as centers of excellence in every district of our country.

I would strongly emphasize education's organic link with the productive forces of society. We shall reorganize vocational education to align it with industry, agriculture, communications, and other productive sectors of our country.

Foreign policy

We have inherited a well-tested and consistent foreign policy which serves our national interest. We have always believed in working for peace. Our policy is to be friends with all countries on the basis of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Our commitment to Non-Alignment and a new world economic order based on justice, equality, and mutual cooperation is unshakable. This means a total dedication to the twin causes of peace and development. We also believe in safeguarding the independence of states and upholding the principles of non-interference and non-intervention.

One aspect of our foreign policy needs special attention. We have deep historical and cultural links with our immediate neighbors in South Asia. We share the same memories of foreign rule and look forward to the same prospects of development and a better future for our peoples. I believe firmly that we can work together to realize these common aims. We do have some problems, but we are determined to resolve them on the basis of mutual respect, sovereign equality, and friendship.

We are passing through a difficult phase. Our burdens are immense, our road long and arduous. Your cooperation is vital for achieving the national goals.

I give you my greetings for the New Year. May it bring happiness to everyone.

From time to time I shall share with you my ideas, my hopes, my struggles. But, even more, I want to listen to you, to your difficulties, your ideas, your hopes. Together we shall share the burden and the ecstasy of building our India.