

From New Delhi by Paul Zykofsky

India counters Singapore at summit

Mrs. Gandhi averted a Commonwealth contribution to cold-war tensions.

New Delhi played host city to the largest summit meeting ever held in India from Sept. 3 to Sept. 8 as 16 heads of state assembled for the Commonwealth summit regional conference. The summit was the brainstorm of Australia, where the first such conference was held two years ago. It involved an unusual assortment of countries from Asia and the Pacific—not only India, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and Bangladesh, but other states of the Pacific archipelago with populations of less than 100,000.

The only thing the assembled countries had in common was the dubious distinction of all having once been a part of the British Empire. Anglophile attitudes dominated the environment of the summit; yet the occasion provided a good opportunity to understand the way various countries in the area are viewing international economic and political developments. The five-day meeting was polarized between the worldviews of the Indian host and those of the allies of the Anglo-American camp such as Singapore and Australia, who seemed intent on turning the summit into a cold war offensive.

When it was all over, notwithstanding the reports put out by the majority of Western correspondents in New Delhi, the perspective of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi prevailed. In the closed-door meetings, it is clear that Mrs. Gandhi

was unyielding in her determination that the summit would not be converted into a unanimous condemnation of the Soviet Union or Vietnam on their respective involvement in Afghanistan or Kampuchea. As she pointedly told one Australian journalist, "India is not pro-Soviet or anti-American. We are solely pro-India."

While most Southeast Asian countries chose to keep a low profile here on the complex Kampuchea issue, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew fired the first shots with a hysterical denunciation of Vietnam. His speech was received with dead silence. Lee, himself of Chinese descent, is viewed here as a front man for Peking's policies.

Sources say that Mrs. Gandhi responded at length and in an uncompromising manner in the subsequent two-day closed meetings. As the head of the only country that has recognized the Vietnamese-supported Heng Samrin government in Kampuchea, and has come under tremendous criticism from many quarters for this action, Mrs. Gandhi dealt at length with the international political situation. She recalled that India was the target of similar criticism after it recognized the People's Republic of China in 1949. Today the same critics were defending China and attacking the Vietnamese. After reminding her counterparts of the crimes committed by the Chinese-backed Pol Pot

regime, particularly the genocide against the Cambodian people, she concluded that "Vietnam must not be ostracized."

Mrs. Gandhi proceeded to develop the need for a balanced statesmanlike approach to "reduce tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union and set the world on the path of peace and progress." In closed meetings, she outlined the signs of intensified cold war, and the political and economic implications it would have to the world and the region. Citing the developments in the Indian Ocean and the planned deployment of medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe, Mrs. Gandhi warned that the cold war is being brought to India's doorstep.

She also referred to the independent stance countries such as France and West Germany are trying to take in Europe. "Even the allies related to each power felt concerned over the evaporation of détente," she stated. Recent moves by the United States and the Soviet Union often exacerbated problems rather than solving them, Mrs. Gandhi asserted, particularly citing the Camp David devolution in the Middle East. While Lee Kuan Yew and Australia's Fraser tried to explain international developments from the standpoint of the emergence of a "Soviet Empire," Gandhi explained the regional developments, particularly the Soviet action in Afghanistan, as rooted in the general aggravation of tensions in the world plane. India's plan for the Afghanistan situation, she reiterated, was to create stable conditions, and to procure the withdrawal of Soviet troops and an end to outside intervention through Pakistan by the U.S. and China.