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## India

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# Gandhi targets 'foreign hand'

by Susan Maitra

On May 16 Indian Prime Minister and Congress (I) Party President Rajiv Gandhi invoked the imperialist "foreign hand" in a broadside against opposition to his leadership that has surfaced inside and outside the ruling party. Mr. Gandhi's 50-minute speech was delivered to a crowd of 200,000 assembled on the central government mall to kick off a nationwide campaign against "destabilization."

The rally followed within days the closing of Parliament, whose February-May budget session had been all but paralyzed by a series of scandals that engulfed the government from the first of the year—from the President's calling into question his treatment by the prime minister, to the controversy surrounding Finance Ministry investigations into illegal foreign exchange dealings, and finally allegations that the government itself was protecting certain powerful business interests and taking kickbacks on major defense deals to boot.

The government is answerable only to the people and Parliament and to no individual, Mr. Gandhi declared on May 16. It would defeat all designs of vested interests within and outside its boundaries to destabilize the nation, he vowed. Efforts have been made to destroy the credibility of the government, with "baseless insinuations" about the "Fairfax affair" and the defense deals, he said. Vested interests were trying to create a controversy in regard to the Constitution, and attempts were being made to weaken Parliament and mislead the people, he said.

Mr. Gandhi said that in two and a half years, his government had reached new heights in the international arena, in economic self-sufficiency, and in defense preparedness, and that the country's stand on such issues as disarmament, non-alignment, and apartheid had been consistent. This, he said, had apparently not been to the liking of the superpowers.

In particular, Gandhi referred to the supply of AWACS to Pakistan, and the pressure on India to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while at the same time "a neighboring country" was being encouraged to proceed with its nuclear program. A dangerous climate has been created around the country, he said. In Punjab, efforts were on to balkanize the country, and the terrorists were getting help from across the border and from other countries.

But, said Mr. Gandhi, India would reply to all these threats in a manner unheard of before, teaching the country's

enemies the lesson of their lives. A special effort must be made to unmask the traitors—the "Mir Juffers"—who joined hands with the external forces.

It was a harsh speech, delivered, uncharacteristically for Gandhi, in the rough and rustic language of the illiterate Indian peasants. Whether the campaign he inaugurated will succeed in mobilizing the party and broader layers to implement the government program remains to be seen. Targeting the "Mir Juffers"—named for the man who betrayed Siraj-Uddaula, the Nawab of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa to the British in the Battle of Plassey in 1757—has its own ironies, since most historians have concluded that it was not betrayal but the Nawab's own vacillating and impulsive behavior that actually was his downfall.

In significant part, the destabilizing tumult of recent months reflects upheavals within the sprawling ruling party itself, where assorted greater and lesser barons and their benefactors, feeling threatened in one way or another by Rajiv Gandhi, concluded they must move to get control of him or defeat him outright. It was disgruntled party "loyalists" and the "left lobby" in the Congress (I), who had been jibing at the prime minister's shadow for months, who suddenly began beating the drums of "foreign destabilization" in early April.

Then, following V.P. Singh's resignation and amid calls for his expulsion from the party, the Congress Working Committee (I) passed a resolution on April 18 detailing the "conspiracy afoot" against their party's leader, Rajiv Gandhi, and, therefore, the nation. It was a "grand design of destabilization," executed with "careful preparation and a professional sense of timing" and with "vicious propaganda masterminded by external and internal forces of disruption, reactionary elements, and multinationals," the CWC(I) reported.

For the time being however, the question of whether Rajiv Gandhi himself would ultimately fall in with this campaign—rather than confronting the barons he had earlier put on notice by politicizing his economic and social nation-building program—remains moot. As the May 16 rally shows, he has declined to use the crisis to break out of the byzantine political geometry that has already taken such a toll on his administration's credibility.

Some sections of the New Delhi press gave the credit for Mr. Gandhi's May 16 performance to Gopi Aurora, an old lieutenant of British-Comintern agent M.N. Roy. The prime minister's "left-populist" posture is of one piece with his party's continued efforts to win the two Communist parties to its side. So far, in spite of alleged pressure from Moscow, neither the pro-Soviet Communist Party of India (CPI) nor the pro-Beijing Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) have shown the slightest interest. Instead, the CPI-M gave Congress (I) a drubbing in two major state elections, and the CPI has announced a campaign against corruption and black money.