

# India tries to recoup Gulf policy

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan B. Maitra

Under growing domestic pressure to reestablish India's non-aligned credentials, the Chandra Shekhar government has begun to make noises that may signal a shift in the country's stated pro-Anglo-American stance on the Gulf war. On Feb. 16, at a closed-door session of the 15-member U.N. Security Council, Indian Ambassador to the United Nations C.R. Gharekhan called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in the Gulf. India is the first country to call formally for an end to the Gulf war.

In stating the new Indian position, Gharekhan, in effect, endorsed the Iraqi conditional peace proposal rejected by Washington. Referring to the Iraqi proposal, he asked his fellow members not to "close what appears to be a window of opportunity." Said Gharekhan: "Too much is at stake, in terms of human lives, the safeguard of international law, the foundation of peaceful ties among sovereign states, and the promotion of tranquil and mutually beneficial relations amongst the countries of the Gulf, to let slip from our grasp any opportunity for peace no matter how small."

The same day, Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar was served notice by the single-largest parliamentary party, the Congress (I), that its continued support for the minority government was conditional on a change in Gulf policy. "If the government fails to take any concrete measures, meaning stoppage of refueling [of U.S. Air Force planes], it might be difficult for our party to support this government," the Congress spokesman stated. Served up as an ultimatum, although the Congress (I) took pains to deny it, the notice worked. Shekhar, aware that his 60-odd man party needs the support of the 215 Congress (I) and allied parliamentarians to stay in power, announced the next day that the refueling facilities provided to USAF non-military planes have been discontinued.

The Congress (I)'s notice was the outcome of a growing political row over the refueling of USAF planes at civilian airports at Bombay, Madras, and Agra that are shuttling between the Gulf and the Philippines. Opposition groups targeted the Shekhar government for allowing the United States to continue to enjoy the facilities when it is waging war against another Non-Aligned member-nation and a trusted friend of India.

The strongest criticism came from Congress (I) president

and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Addressing a rally in Delhi recently, Gandhi alleged that the U.S. was making a show of refueling its planes in India to demonstrate to the world that India supported the Anglo-American alliance in the Gulf war. "The U.S. made the request to tell the world that India supported that country in the Gulf war," said Gandhi. But, he said, "India should tell the world that it is a Non-Aligned nation and that it will remain Non-Aligned in the future."

Despite such criticism, the Indian stance on the Gulf issue remains cautiously pro-U.S. Rajiv Gandhi's allegations that the liberation of Kuwait is not the only objective of the U.S., have so far not been echoed officially. India's support to U.N. Security Council Resolution 678, and subsequent plea to the Security Council members not to "let slip from our grasp any opportunity for peace," do not reflect the concern expressed by Gandhi, among others.

## India pressured on finances

It is widely acknowledged that India's lack of foreign exchange reserves, chronic trade imbalances, and mounting foreign debts have made it a pawn of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and crippled its freedom in foreign policy matters. In January, the government was notified that the IMF would provide a loan of \$1.8 billion to help India over present difficulties exacerbated by the Gulf crisis. The IMF has withheld approval of a second, larger loan pending government action to curb the burgeoning budget deficit by cuts in farm and other subsidies, reduction of government expenditures, and increases in revenue.

Despite the stranglehold in which India finds itself, the recent visit by Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev may be an indication that India is reluctant to jump onto the new world order bandwagon *in toto* and is still trying to preserve some options. According to one report, India has asked the Soviet Union to extend the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty, which expires in August, for another 20 years. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov is expected to visit India later this year when the extension of the treaty will be formally announced. Before that, Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh will pay a visit to Delhi.

If Rogachev's recent visit was indeed related to extension of the Indo-Soviet treaty, it is a fair indication that India's expectations as a result of supporting the Western powers in the Gulf crisis are not very high. There are some in India who realize that President Bush's new world order may not be healthy for India. In a recent commentary in the Delhi-based *Economic Times* daily, analyst M.K. Kothari quoted an unnamed senior Indian official who said that the current mood in the West suggests that the existing controls on technologies are likely to be tightened further. Voices are calling for harsh and even punitive regimes, he said, demanding that the only technologies that ought to be exported to the Third World are in the area of agriculture and health.