

Eradicating Corruption — But How?

The Prime Minister delivered a no nonsense address during her first encounter with the senior officials of our administration. She quickly got down to the brass tacks and identified one thing which is uppermost in people's minds — how to stem the tide of corruption that seems to pervade every tier of our society? It needs to be said at the very outset that similar pledges were also made on previous occasions. But they were either forgotten or forsaken. Given the reputation for persistence and steadfastness, our new Prime Minister, we hope, will keep pursuing this issue and keep it among the top items of her agenda.

Driving out corruption is easier said than done. With her best of intentions and seriousness of purpose, Begum Zia will require all out support of the law enforcing bodies, of the bureaucracy, the political parties and the mass media. This paper pledges its support in this initiative of our new PM.

There is need for some hard thinking concerning our law enforcing bodies, including the Bureau of Anti-Corruption which is especially entrusted to prevent the type of crimes our PM is talking about.

The first question that needs to be asked concerns the role and efficiency of the police and the other investigating bodies. The police is itself a breeding ground for corruption, if the stories making the rounds at any moment in Dhaka are to be believed. If such be the case, the question that naturally follows is where do we place a body such as the Bureau of Anti-Corruption — under the police or the Home Ministry, as has been so far the practice?

Existing penal codes need also to be examined. Most of the existing laws originate from days when crimes were simpler and the society less complicated. Taking advantage of archaic laws clever lawyers are almost always able to get their clients freed, further eroding public faith in the system.

Considering our past experiences with anti-corruption drives this journal recommends that the Prime Minister should set up an independent body, like an Independent Commission to Suppress Corruption, reporting, not to the police or to the Home Ministry, but to the PM directly. The most successful examples of suppression of corruption in our region is perhaps Singapore. Hong Kong also has a reasonably good track record. In both these instances, the corruption fighting bodies report directly to the highest political authority.

As we all know, much of the corruption of the past originated in the highest of places and the biggest offenders were often protected by the same quarters. It is not unlikely that the same highly placed corrupt people of the past — in administration, police, private sector and political parties — will try to regain their influence.

Often these people are powerful enough to intimidate the law enforcing officials. But if these officials are made to report directly to the Prime Minister then they will feel protected enough to pursue those who in the popular parlance are called the "Raghab-Bowals" (the big fishes).

To make the anti-corruption drive more credible, the assets and liabilities of all the ministers and the MPs should be recorded and placed under appropriate authorities. In many countries the same is made public before they assume ministerial posts or seats in the parliament.

We can hope that the determination of our new Prime Minister to eradicate corruption will set the tone of the new administration and every member of the cabinet and of the parliament will prove to be models of public representatives. If they fail to live up to this expectation, the PM should not hesitate to adopt the toughest of measures against them.

Transforming the Jailed

While overcrowded jails in Bangladesh go on breeding dissatisfaction ending in violent protest, things have been looking up in many a one way in different countries. Before the Tamil-Sinhalese strife started destroying everything civilised in that beautiful little island with one of the most culturally refined peoples in the world, Sri Lanka was the world leader in the experiments with the open jail — jails that do not have walls. And where wives come to visit and can stay back for a change.

Years back Mother Teresa went on a visit to Alipore Jail in south Calcutta. She was so shocked by the squalor and misery pervading the whole thing that she offered to take away 500 of the prisoners under her wing.

That didn't materialise as the government balked at the idea. On her next visit there she was impressed with what had happened in the meantime. The jail has been transformed into something featuring a society of creative and responsible citizens — and not of criminal rejects of the larger society outside the walls. Two very famous men of contemporary Indian painting, Paritosh Sen and Bikash Bhattacharya, have opened an art school inside the jail. Every Sunday 300 out of a total of 1200 prisoners take up brushes and paints and sit at the great men's feet. This has exerted a very healthy influence on the whole of the inmate population. Drug use has gone down radically, violence and cases of sexual perversion are no more big problems.

Each of the prisoner-artists produces at least 15 works in oil and water-colour every month. And all their works are sold through different galleries in that great city. One of these, a painting by Arun Naskar, serving a 10-year sentence, fetched about a thousand dollars. Part of the sale proceeds go as donation to Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity organisation — help now flowing the other way round.

The men in that cage of a settlement, students of the first art school in the prison houses of India — why it may be the first for over a much bigger area if not the world — have awakened up to a new realisation best expressed by one of them: "We are not the write offs that society thinks we are."

The Alipore Jail is now truly reforming its prisoners, thanks to art and to the noble innovators Sen and Bhattacharya. The doyen of Indian painters M.F. Hussain is planning to join the effort.

We have already pleaded for a better deal to the prisoners. We have also pointed out that it is not for them to fight and win fairness. The society, the government, in fact all of us owe this to them. Let the Alipore achievement reinforce the case of a fair deal inside our jails.

Sanjay Gandhi used to tell how his teenage brother Rajiv could never make up his mind whether to drink tea or coffee at breakfast, often changing his mind more than once before the servant had left the room.

An unkind remark, says broadcaster Nicholas Nugent in a new biography of Rajiv Gandhi, which concludes that indecisiveness was largely his undoing when he was prime minister from 1984 to 1989. It was an unlikely trait in a man who had worked for years as an airline pilot, a job that demands quick and firm decisions.

Today, after 17 months of rickety government under two prime ministers, the resignation of Chandra Shekhar and pending general election Gandhi could find himself prime minister again.

His period in opposition—the most unsettled political chapter in India since independence in 1947—has again been marked by indecision. In the last four curious months Gandhi's Congress Party, with the biggest number of seats in the Lok Sabha, kept Chandra Shekhar in office, refusing to face a general election.

Then, in a squabble about the relatively minor matter of two constables being sent to "spy" on Gandhi's residence, the Congress support was withdrawn. With only 54 seats in a house of 542 Shekhar could not possibly continue. Gandhi was accused not for the first time of petulance.

In 1984 Gandhi was a reluctant prime minister. Yet when he was defeated five years later he remained congress leader, seeming to feel the need to bow to dynastic pressures and try again for the job.

In a well ordered and timely account of Gandhi's life, entitled Rajiv Gandhi: Son of a Dynasty, Nugent deals with his fits of temper as well as his indecisiveness—characteristics

Rajiv Gandhi—an Indecisive Pilot for India?

by Derek Ingram

As India wrestles with its most difficult crisis since independence Rajiv Gandhi, grandson of Nehru, son of Indira Gandhi and prime minister from 1984-9, is again at the centre of political controversy. He could return to power, but his handling of the situation is bringing new doubts in the Congress Party about the quality of his leadership.



which did not seem much in evidence when he so suddenly took over on the assassination of his mother, Indira.

For a man not groomed for leadership—that had been reserved by Mrs Gandhi for his brother Sanjay, who had been killed in an air accident four years earlier—Rajiv started off impeccably.

Within weeks he won for congress its biggest election majority. His youthfulness and charm carried him forward for the first two years. He seemed just what India had been looking for. Sanjay had been unpopular and in her second period in office Mrs Gandhi never fully recovered from the period of repression that marked her declaration of an emergency in 1975.

Rajiv began by trying to

solve long standing political problems within India and with neighbours—Punjab, Assam, Mizoram, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. He went for compromise solutions, but mostly his initial successes collapsed. A brave deal on the Punjab proved ill-worked out. The Indian force in Sri Lanka ended up doing more fighting than peacemaking.

Gandhi did have success in Mizoram, ending a 20-year insurgency and conferring full statehood. And he struck up a rapport with Pakistan when Benazir Bhutto took over there, though the relationship between the two countries deteriorated again after both had left the scene.

Gandhi's last year was bedeviled by the Bofors corruption scandal, much of which has still to be unraveled. A cloud hung over a man who had been seen as a Mr Clean,

although personal involvement remains unproven.

Nugent quotes former President Zail Singh, who had decided to put in Gandhi as prime minister on his mother's death rather than appoint an interim figure, as giving three reasons for his choice:

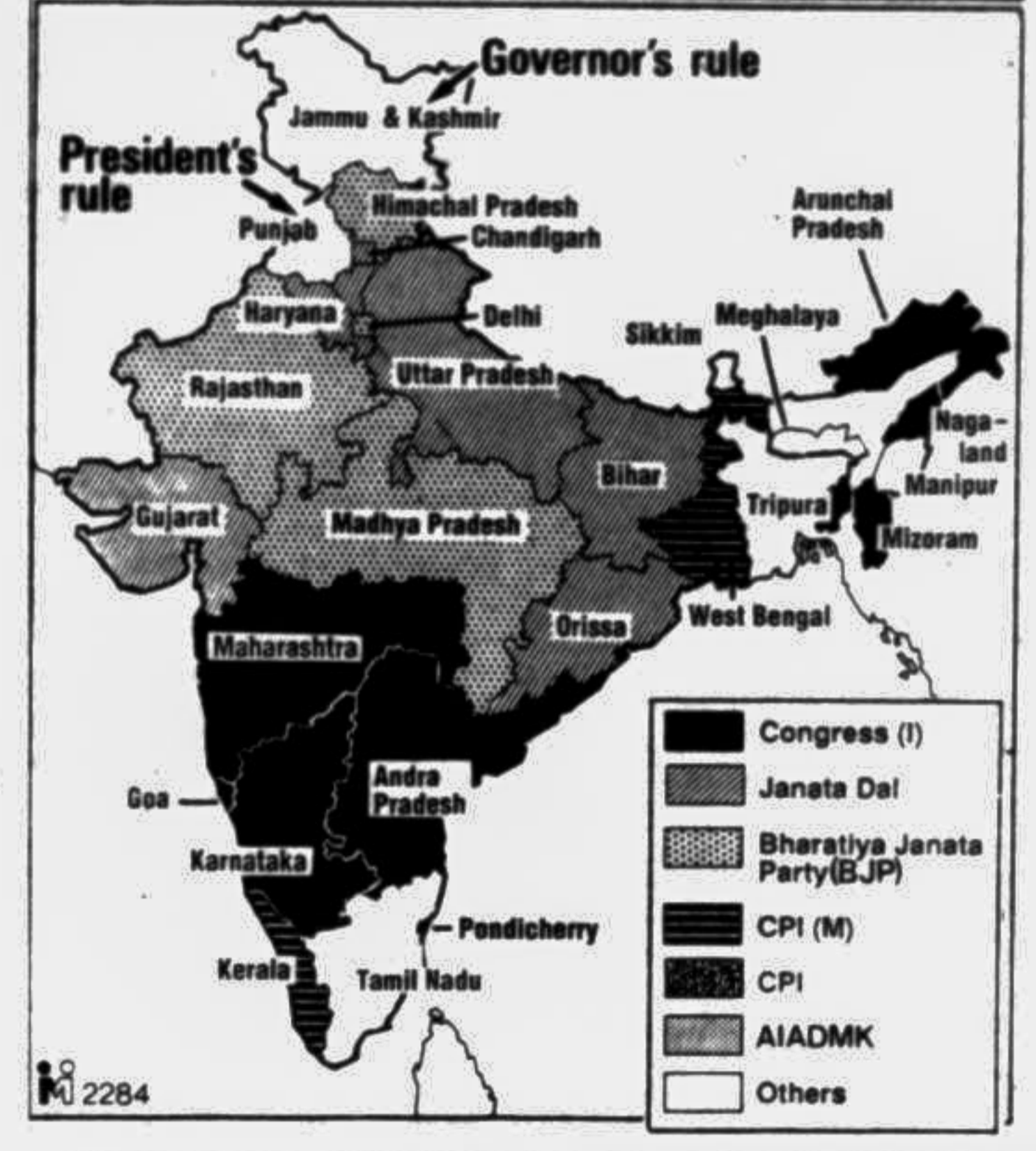
"He had always had a clean image, his age was in his favour, and I thought at the time he was intelligent...I think differently now."

When Gandhi became prime minister he set out to modernise the party and the country. On his own admission, he failed with the party and ended up depending on the old bosses he had begun by condemning.

On modernisation, says Nugent, Gandhi feels strongly that India missed out on the industrial revolution that gave Europe such a lead and that it must not miss out on the electronic and computer revolution. He hopes India can make a name as a producer of software. Nugent points out that the effects of computerisation are already to be seen in the major cities of India.

Gandhi had other achievements in such matters as education and pollution control—the cleaning of the Ganga, for instance, V. P. Singh, who took over briefly as Prime Minister, said generously of Gandhi's term: "I think India has never had the sort of development and progress and international standing that it has gained in these five years."

India: The political patchwork 1990



Prison Thrift Called Inhuman

Derek Round writes from Wellington

Prisoners in a New Zealand jail have come up with a cost-cutting plan they say could save taxpayers millions of dollars.

It includes an end to subsidised prison canteens, growing more food in prisons and cutting the prison population by reducing the reoffending rate.

The prisoners' cost-cutting plan comes in response to a controversial decision by Justice Department officials to lock prisoners in their cells from 5 pm to 8 am on weekends and public holidays.

This is aimed at cutting expenditure by reducing overtime wage payments to prison warders.

Justice officials originally proposed locking up prisoners in their cells from 5pm to 8am seven days a week.

But this brought a storm of protest from prison staff, inmates and penal reformers who branded the move as inhuman.

It also led to a spate of fires in several jails lit by prisoners as a protest.

An inmate at Auckland's maximum security Mount Eden Prison said in a letter to the Justice Department that plans to lock up prisoners for 15 hours a day would breed anger, resentment and tension leading to "very serious and tragic repercussions."

He predicted that jail suicides would double as a result. "It is madness and inhuman

to lock a human being up for long periods just to save money," he said. "Not even dogs are locked up for that long without some sort of company."

The fires lit by prisoners were a case of "desperate men doing desperate things."

The Justice Department also planned to cut out all recreational non-educational activities for prisoners as a cost-cutting measure aimed at stopping over-spending on its NZ\$110 million (US \$72.6 million) wages budget by lowering the amount of nightshift payments to staff.

But prison chaplain Father Jim Considine, a prominent campaigner for penal reform, condemned the Justice Department plan as "short-sighted, expedient and largely punitive for both inmates and staff."

It would not only increase trouble in prisons but would also lead to an increase in violent crime, he predicted.

"This situation will simply heat up the well-documented treadmill of crime and prison, with an increase in violent crime in the community as an-

gry people with hope extinguished emerge from prison," Father Considine said.

The original proposal — since modified — to lock prisoners up 15 hours a day seven days a week would mean the end to visits by community groups, including churches, who visited inmates in the evening.

'Not even dogs are locked up for that long without some sort of company'

"With them gone, men and women would be locked up two-thirds of each 24-hour period with their own thoughts and fears," Father Considine said.

In cells without toilet facilities there would be the added punishment for inmates of having to sleep with excrement and urine.

Prison officers joined inmates in condemning the proposals, saying they would lose up to NZ\$10,000 (US \$6,600) from their salaries in lost night shift payments.

They also expressed fears the move would result in more

prison violence, attacks on wardens and decline in morale.

"I think we have a duty to the public to return prisoners to the community in the best possible shape," the head of a women's prison said.

Now inmates at Wanganui Prison, a medium-security institution, have come up with their own cost-cutting plan.

More money could be saved by reducing the reoffending rate. This could be achieved by allowing prisoners to complete the last part of their sentences working in the community under the "periodic detention" system.

Already this is being done in some New Zealand jails where prisoners are freed each day to go to work and return at night. About 30 per cent of their wages goes towards the cost of keeping them in prison.

New Zealand has a high rate of reoffending compared with other countries, with 60 per cent of male jail inmates returning.

It also has a higher percentage of the population imprisoned, with close to 100

people jailed here for every 100,000 of population. This is higher than Australia or any European country including Britain.

The length of sentences has also increased in New Zealand by nearly 50 per cent — from 420 to 623 days over the last five years.

The problem of keeping costs down without dehumanising prisoners is symptomatic of a system which relies too heavily on incarceration as an answer to crime," Wellington's *Evening Post* newspaper said in an editorial.

Patrick Millen, National President of the Prisoners' Aid and Rehabilitation Society, said New Zealand's present average

prison population of 3,900 — out of a population of 3.4 million — could be expected to reach 5,300 by 1994, requiring millions of dollars spent on additional cells.

"A drastic reform of which offences justify prison sentences is overdue," he said.

The *Dominion* newspaper said the Justice Department's financial crisis should have provided an excuse for reform.

"It seems to have provoked a step backward," it commented.

— *Depthnews Asia*

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Whither trees

Sir, Dhaka was famous — and liked — for its trees, that made it so green. It is obviously not as green as it was 20 years ago. Of course back in 1971 Dhaka was not the same what it was in 1947, the partition year. It changed of necessity by phases, to meet the changing and growing requirements — of politics, administration, demography and above all — times. The latest factor gives us a cue to effective changes.

Has the metropolis changed or is changing effectively? The reply, in keeping with the time we are through, is obviously "not exactly." Of late the world is more concerned of the danger of denudation than ever before. Advances are heard and programmes undertaken more than ever before on afforestation and tree-plantation to "save the planet earth."

Usefulness of trees is multiple, beyond doubt. Trees not only enhance beauty of landscape, they protect the land. Trees save the environment from

pollution and maintain ecology. They provide cool shade in scorching summer, cover in winter and, food and employment to mankind if utilised carefully.

But we are not as much careful with trees as the time needs us to be. True, housing, to accommodate a growing population, must receive priority. But why the housing quarters or blocks mustn't have enough trees to facilitate the dwellers with a better breath? It's not hard if we plan things carefully. Was it necessary to remove all the trees that existed along the Dhaka thoroughfares prior to liberation or immediately afterwards, for development the city as capital of a sovereign state needed? However, some rows of new trees have been planted but that are not enough replenishment for what we have lost.

Can't we have rows of tall and shady trees — for instance, Silver Birches — along the Motijheel side-walks? Will it occupy much area in the carparking row?

The replies well can be 'yes' to the former and 'no' to the latter. Rather, such trees planted in a planned way will give a pleasant look to the area and provide badly needed shade both for the passersby and the cars.

WTC and EPB

Sir, I sincerely hoped that your paper will maintain journalistic integrity in content and publication of unbiased news items and not fall in the trap of publishing items motivated to benefit any special interest group. Your item on the planned World Trade Center and the EPB in March 13 issue appears to serve the interest of a certain section of the bureaucracy.

There is great doubt in the minds of the established businessmen and specifically amongst the exporters about the role, efficiency or even the need of the EPB — as they have proved to be a burdensome bureaucracy, more adept at creating impediments by self serving officials rather than of being any great help in the promotion of exports.

Whatever success there has been in the export trade of this country has been entirely because of the efforts of the individual

businessmen; and in the case of the garment industry, aside from the entrepreneurs, the main contribution has been by the back-breaking labour of teen and sub-teen-aged girls, who are paid starvation wages and work under the most difficult conditions.

In an impoverished country like ours, national priorities should be re-evaluated and projects whose value lie only in the enhancing of status or prestige of an organization or to line the pockets of its initiators should be abandoned forthwith.

In recent years, quite a few high-rise structures of long outmoded architectural styles have been constructed by state owned enterprises, who have not only failed to turn any profit in the decades of their existence, but have been a consistent drain and a great burden on the national exchequer and the tax payers. There is no justification for this and this practice of non-productive and non performing investment should not be encouraged.

Naz Shafiq
6 Motijheel C/A,
Dhaka 1000.

Disposable syringe

Sir, A recent news item said that in order to prevent use of disposable sy-

ringe for a second time, which is quite dangerous as it spreads diseases, a manufacturer in Britain has found an alternative.

This disposable syringe has been made in such a way that once it enters the body it will lose its effectiveness for a next time use. Thus it will become entirely useless.

Now this is a move in the right direction. Mainly because if a syringe, though called "disposable", is used time and again both by clinics as well as those who have become addicted to drugs, this turns into a dangerous practice. It causes harm not only to patients already suffering from a number of diseases, but also gives an easier chance to drug addicts to continue with their habit.

We would only expect arrival of such syringes in our country at the earliest.

Renu Talukdar
Khilgaon, Dhaka.

Donors' review

Sir, Bangladesh Aid Consortium (BAC), based in Paris, met in Dhaka recently for the mid-term review of the Government's economic management focusing on Govt expenditure priorities. Donors were informed of the impact of Gulf crisis on national economy and were re-

In his period in office nobody died from starvation, thanks to judicious use of food buffer stocks. Business expanded.

Nugent's most interesting chapters concern the way Rajiv built Indian military force and made sure neighbours saw India as "the lord and master of the region."

Under Rajiv, India became the world's major importer of defence equipment. The essence of the so-called "Rajiv doctrine" was to exclude other powers from the region. The navy was a priority.

When Gandhi ran into heavy political weather he said: "First there was nothing that I could do that was wrong—then there was nothing I could do that was right."

He began to get a reputation for inaccessibility and arrogance and he tended to humiliate publicly officials he thought had not carried out his instructions.

Nugent comments: "...far from it being proven that Rajiv was corrupt, in many ways his weakness was that he had too much integrity to be a good politician. It was not so much a matter of taking or not taking bribes as the business of dispensing patronage."

Now he could come back. But his performance out of office and particularly now in the downfall of the Shekhar government seems to indicate the same indecisiveness described long ago by brother Sanjay.

The indications are that his Congress Party is still in no shape to win a decisive victory at the next election and the fact that as prime minister he reshuffled his cabinet nearly 30 times in five years may say something worrying about the leadership qualities of Rajiv Gandhi — GEMINI NEWS

DEREK INGRAM is Editor of Gemini News Service and was formerly Deputy Editor of the London Daily Mail.