

[The New York Times International, Feb. 25, 1996]

INDIAN PREMIER SHRUGS OFF SCANDAL

(By John F. Burns)

NEW DELHI.—After four resignations this week brought to seven the number of Indian Government ministers who have quit since the start of the year in a corruption scandal, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao told a rally of his governing Congress Party not to worry about the general election expected in April or May.

"The Congress is certain to lead the country," Mr. Rao said at a gathering on Friday of the party's youth wing in Guwahati, the capital of the northeastern state of Assam.

Indians were left to wonder whether Mr. Rao was engaging in bravado or displaying the canny political instincts for which he is renowned.

In the midst of a scandal that many Indian commentators have described as the worst since independence, few discount the possibility that Mr. Rao may yet turn the situation to his advantage.

Opinion surveys have suggested that the Congress Party, which has governed India for all but four years since 1947, has been heading for a drubbing at the polls. Political conjecture focused less on whether the Congress would lose its majority in the 535-seat Parliament than whether it would muster enough seats to lead a coalition.

Many analysts forecast a breakthrough for the main opposition group, the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose brand of Hindu nationalism has troubled many Indians attached to the country's secular political tradition.

The Congress Party's woes were frequently blamed on Mr. Rao, who is 74, an uninspiring stump campaigner and beset with what many Indians have said is a near-fatal liability in a Congress leader: a lack of the popular appeal associated with the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty.

Then came the corruption scandal, involving widespread bribes and kickbacks for Government contracts in a country where nearly half of all officially recorded economic activity is carried out by state-owned industries.

In addition to losing seven ministers, Mr. Rao has been faced with a welter of accusations that he was a beneficiary of some of the payoffs, including a transaction in 1991 in which the accuser says Mr. Rao took 30 million rupees, then the equivalent of \$1.7 million, in return for steel contracts.

Yet throughout the weeks that the scandal has been growing, Mr. Rao has remained publicly serene.

Aides say the Indian leader believes that the payoff disclosures could be the savings of the Congress Party at the polls because they have snared major figures in the opposition parties as well as his own, thus depriving the opposition of corruption as an election issue.

One aide, Vithal N. Gadgil, has even said that Mr. Rao will present himself in the election as "Mr. Clean."

What is certain is that the controversy has rocked the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, or B.J.P., at least as much as the Congress. The first wave of indictments last month included the B.J.P. president, L.K. Advani, who is regarded as the most ardent propagator within the party's upper ranks of the Hindu nationalist creed.

Broadly speaking, this holds that India should shift away from the secularism that has been a Congress principle toward an approach to government that gives primacy to the 700 million of India's 930 million people who are Hindus.

This week, the scandal claimed a new opposition victim in the resignation of Madan Lal Khurana, who as Chief Minister of the Delhi capital district was one of Bharatiya Janata's most prominent elected officials.

Like the 25 other politicians who have been indicted, Mr. Khurana's name appeared in what prosecutors have described as coded entries in diaries listing payoffs of more than \$35 million that were seized in 1991 from the New Delhi home of a prominent industrialist, Surendra K. Jain.

Press accounts say Mr. Jain confessed to investigators last year to having been, along with one of his brothers, the principal paymaster in a web of corruption that ensnared dozens of leading politicians and public officials.

In addition to cash bribes, Mr. Jain is said to have told of paying for expensive gifts that included Mercedes-Benz cars, Belgian crystal and foreign trips. Details of many of the payoffs were listed in the diaries, against the initials of the recipients or, in some cases, their telephone numbers.

Mr. Rao seems certain to face heavy criticism in the election campaign for what opponents have described as an attempted cover-up.

Nearly four years passed after the police seizure of the dairies before the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is under the Prime Minister's direct control, made a sustained attempt to question, Mr. Jain and others alleged to have been involved in the payoffs. Even then, the investigative agency delayed any indictments until the Supreme Court intervened in November and set deadlines.

When the director of the investigation bureau reported to the Supreme Court this week that his agency had no "reasonable basis" for charges to be brought against Mr. Rao, the court ordered the investigators not to close the probe of "any person," no matter how important, until all leads were explored.

A lower court in New Delhi followed up on Friday by ordering the bureau to investigate allegations that Mr. Jain, on Prime Minister Rao's orders, paid out nearly \$1 million in 1993 to bribe opposition members of Parliament into switching parties, thus saving the Rao Government from defeat on a non-confidence motion.

There has been widespread debate over whether Mr. Rao kept the lid on the scandal until shortly before the election so as to be able to use the indictments against opponents—and allies whose loyalty he doubted—or whether pressure from the Supreme Court forced his hand.

In any case, many Indians say the scandal has reached proportions that will lead to a far-reaching cleanup of Indian politics.

Previous scandals have subsided without a major shake-up in the political establishment. But this time, many commentators predict, the involvement of the Supreme Court will make it hard to contain the fallout.

"It will not fizzle out," said Rajinder Puri in *The Times of India*. "The process of destabilizing a rotten, corrupt, repressive and anti-people system will continue until reforms and a new system takes its place."

DETERIORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA

SPEECH OF

HON. STEPHEN HORN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 26, 1996

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, the recent appalling murder of Haing S. Ngor has refocused the world's attention on the horrors suffered by the Cambodian people at the hands of the

Khmer Rouge. Mr. Ngor worked tirelessly to remind us that human rights tragedies were still occurring in his native country. We must continue his work.

I strongly support House Resolution 345 expressing concern about the deterioration of human rights in Cambodia. Our Government must support efforts to establish a strong, free society there—and rally other nations to join us. Anything less would dishonor Mr. Ngor and the 1 million Cambodians who have died at the hands of tyranny over the last two decades.

ANSWERING AMERICA'S CALL

HON. PAT ROBERTS

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 27, 1996

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. Speaker, I submit the following script written by Mr. Bradley Areheart, State winner of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Ladies Auxiliary Voice of Democracy broadcast scriptwriting contest. Mr. Areheart is a junior at Emporia High School in Emporia, KS and plans a career in medicine or politics. He was sponsored by the VFW Post 180 in Emporia. The contest theme this year was "Answering America's Call." Bradley has done a wonderful job of capturing the sense of duty that each of us has toward our fellow Americans and toward our future generations. I encourage each one of my colleagues to read Bradley's message and take his suggestions to heart.

ANSWERING AMERICA'S CALL

It's 2:00 in the morning and a lady clutches her heart as if struck! A heart attack! She staggers to the phone and frantically dials the numbers 9-1-1. The police dispatcher's voice comes across clearly but in a lethargic sounding tone. The lady, gasping, screams, "Help me! Help me! I've had a heart attack! Get someone out here!" "Wait right there; I'm going to put you on hold," is the dispatcher's reply as she picks up another line. A frantic call, put on hold by an apathetic operator. Important? Yes, and that call is not unlike the call being made today. A call of far greater importance to everyone in the United States. That call is America's plea for the future; we have several options as we hear that call. We can answer immediately, ignore it, or just like the apathetic operator, put it on hold. However, in my mind, we have only one clear option. If we are to be responsible, caring citizens, we must answer America's call.

Former Secretary of State Cordell Hull said, "I am certain that however great the hardships and the trials which loom ahead, our America will endure and the cause of human freedom will triumph." How truly this reflects the time since the foundation of our nation. In the 1700's America sounded a call for freedom from oppression so 50 brave Americans answered this call and signed the Declaration of Independence. The early part of this century saw America facing the perils of the depression and Franklin Roosevelt rose to meet the call by instilling hope and providing employment. In 1941, when the Japanese bombed our ships in Pearl Harbor, courageous Americans answered the call to arms and continued to fight until the Japanese surrendered. Indeed, history is filled with stories of how Americans have always