

# No danger to Cong on Bihar: PM

In course of a recent interview at Patna, the Prime Minister told Alok Mishra, Resident Editor, Nav Bharat Times, that the Bihar chief minister has been asked to continue the fight against the co-operative mafia and other such groups. Mr. Gandhi also stressed that the Congress was in no danger either in Bihar or in Uttar Pradesh. Following are the excerpts from the interview:

**Q: Your attitude towards the opposition has recently acquired a new note of aggression. Is this because you see new dangers or is it because the election is around the corner?**

A: To tell you the truth, I am a little disappointed with the opposition. You know I have always tried to take the opposition along with me, but there are some basic positions which cannot be changed. If you recall I had started consulting the opposition on almost every national issue and used to call meetings. But I soon found that they stopped attending the meetings. They used to make all kinds of excuses. I tried to find out and was informed that whenever they attended such a meeting they found themselves without an issue to fight which is why they were reluctant to attend them. We wanted to entrust them on Sri Lanka, where we took a very important step, but they never attended. They similarly ignored Maldives. I felt that the opposition parties are not interested in a national consensus on national and international issues. You know there are many subjects of national importance where an individual is expected to rise above his party or personal interests. The opposition has not been able to do this.

The opposition's stance is also not very clear on various questions like communalism or the Anandpur Sahib resolution. Some people believe that these issues will fade out by themselves but we do not think so. The issues are likely to be discussed till they are alive. For example the Muslim League's proposition came in 1940 and India was divided in 1947. Anandpur Sahib resolution came in 1978. Maybe we will see its destructive effect 20 years later. For the Congress party, and as the Prime Minister this is a big responsibility and we do not keep such issues open ended. Strangely enough the opposition has remained completely silent on this.

Even in case of panchayati raj it is the same thing, while I am trying my best to emphasize that this is not something which concerns individual political parties (they seem to think otherwise).

For example CPM has done excellent work in West Bengal, so has the Congress in Maharashtra and Gujarat. But the same marxists have failed in Kerala and Tripura. Similarly Congress has not been so successful

in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

**Q: You have started whirlwind tours of these states immediately after the parliament session was over? Do you see any special dangers for the Congress in these states?**

A: No. I don't think there is any threat of that nature in these two states.

**Q: Another worry seems to be the Congress' internal squabbles which seem to pose a greater danger to it than the opposition. Is this fight mainly for posts within the party?**

A: I do not think this is a very serious matter. Such instability is normal before the elections. Those who have not worked well in their constituencies are unsure of their future and tend to employ other means for success. This has been the trend and will continue to be so. Tickets will be distributed only on the basis of performance. Some people feel that ticket distribution is linked to people. If certain people are in charge of distributing tickets they assume they would not get it, which is why they start creating problems to protect themselves. We will distribute tickets purely on merit.

**Q: On the one hand issues are raised of removing power brokers and those who are corrupt and on the other the removal of Mr. Bhagwat Jha Azad is being viewed as a victory of the cooperative mafia?**

A: I don't think this is true. I would not like to name but the fight against those who are considered mafia was started long before Mr. Bhagwat Jha Azad came to Bihar. Some of the instructions came from my office, some were given directly by me. We did not publicise this openly but the work went on. There is no doubt that Azad speeded up this work and also publicised it which gave him a certain image. But I do not think he alone was responsible for whatever that happened. Delhi, Chandrashekharji, Dubeyji all had a share in it.

Even now we have given clear instructions to the chief minister, Mr. S.N. Sinha, that there should be no let up in the action against the mafia. But there is a big problem here. Unless you strengthen the grass root organisations in a democracy, it is meaningless to fight such mafia and all steps taken tend to become cosmetic. You never know who really is behind the various moves. Which is why we want to strengthen the panchayats and the urban self rule bodies. Only if we do these two things will we be able to fight the mafia.

**Q: Are you ready to fight the criminal and destabilising elements within the party at any cost?**

A: Yes that is clear. When we removed a lot of such people in 1985 we suffered some losses. We won a major victory in 1984, but when we became strict in 1985, we had some setbacks. But we did not deviate from our principles

knowing fully well about the losses. And we will maintain this attitude.

**Q: The caste equation is a very important factor in Bihar. You have time and again stated that you want to break this equation and also initiate some rethinking on the reservation issue. Are you still of the same opinion or would you be willing to compromise?**

A: There are two sides to it. Casteism and religion have broken up the country once. We will have to see that these tendencies are not allowed to prosper. On the other hand we will also have to see that the weaker sections of the society get all opportunities to improve their lot and move ahead. Fading this, communalism and casteism will increase. Those who have remained weak for thousands of years cannot gain strength by themselves and just making laws will not help them. We will have to help them rise on their feet. The situation will have to be viewed in a very balanced way.

**Q: Will there be rethinking on the reservation issue?**

A: No, I do not think we will be touching that at this moment. We do not want to change the existing system of reserved constituencies. Yes, the rules regarding employment do keep changing from time to time and will.

**Q: You came in 1984 with a "Mr. Clean" image. But in the last two years this image has suffered due to some people around you. Will you be removing them to revive that image?**

A: Wherever we have found evidence of bungling we have changed those. I can give you some examples without naming those concerned. We have changed three Congress chief ministers, at least two governors, a number of ministers, even Union ministers. But you can't remove someone just on allegations. We will probably end up denouncing everyone if we rely only on allegations. In fact where ever we have found something prima-facie we have asked people to resign and promised to honourably reinstate them if they are cleared after inquiry.

**Q: Like Arjun Singh.....**

A: There are many like that. It is clear that we take such things seriously. But the opposition with all its big talk about being clean never takes any steps against any leader even after the Supreme Court, high court and various inquiry commissions prove serious charges against them. Mr. Hegde was forced to resign after the telephone tapping scandal. He did not do it voluntarily, the circumstances forced him. There are allegations against senior leaders of the opposition not only of corruption but also torturing women belonging to their own families, but nothing happens to them.

**Q: A lot of old Congress men are rejoining the party. Recently Mr.**

Shyama Charan Shukla and Mrs. Kamla Bahuguna rejoined. Is there any possibility of accepting leaders like Mr. V.P. Singh and Mr. Arun Nehru if they wish to join the party?

A: Well after all this talk of corruption with you, how do you think this would be possible.

**Q: Why is it that after all the programmes and plans that you have initiated for the poor you have not yet been able to acquire the image of a poor man's messiah which Mrs. Gandhi had?**

A: The reality is that we have probably done much more. We have taken many things, which Mrs. Gandhi initiated, much ahead. Perhaps we have not been able to publicise these properly. That has been a weakness and we are trying to rectify it now.

**Q: Many foreign powers do not seem to be happy with India's increasing strength and have suddenly become active in trying to weaken and destabilise it?**

A: They are certainly active, but they also realise that they cannot take the same liberties that they took yesterday. They also realise that they cannot stop India from progressing or prospering even if they don't like it.

**Q: But then why are so many separatist movements spreading in the country. Do you think foreign agencies are behind these?**

A: Maybe some are active. But I don't think this is a big danger. We have been successful in Darjeeling, Tripura, Assam and Punjab and managed to convince the people that separatism is not the answer.

**Q: What are you doing to solve the Jharkhand problem?**

A: Jharkhand is a different sort of problem. Tribal problems will have to be looked at differently. I am sure that the government of Bihar will be able to find a solution.

**Q: Do you think that the Muslims are slowly getting alienated from the Congress?**

A: I do not think they are getting alienated, but they certainly seem to be worried because communalism is perhaps increasing. Especially some parties like the BJP, which earlier took a softer line, have now become hardcore communalists. This certainly worries the minorities. We feel any kind of communalism is bad. Majority or minority both cannot afford to think on communal lines as it harms the country. We have spoken to the opposition about this and have received cooperation from the progressive nationalist parties.

**Q: Would you consider electoral adjustment with progressive left parties?**

A: We have not thought about this as yet, but we can always rise above party politics to fight communal forces.