

Prison reform Gov. Wilson's adamant refusal to consider budget cuts for the state's prisons won't buy a safer California or a better prison system.

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# Perspective 

# Can India avoid chaos? 

 Gandhi assassination compelsnation to invent new approach By Nirmal Mitra

1HOUSANDS of miles away from my horme in India, I am nervous about what the brutal murder of Rajiv Gandhi mlight drive my countrymen to do.

As one who has witnessed and reported sectarlan rioting for the past 13 years 1 refise to delude mysell that we were ever a non-violeat nation Murder has become the language of political dissent in our Westrninster-model parliamentary dernocracy. Mahauma Gandh was lelled by an assamen who meant to puristh him for allowing the country to be divided, Indira Gandhi was cut down by ber Silth bodyguarde for not allowing the country to be divided and Rajiv Gandhi was blown apart for threatening to who an election that would probably prevent the country from being divided
Indla's clasacic challenge has been to create a sense of unity in a bewildering diversity of cultures and commundites. The British did this by impoaing Enf:

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## only money

ig a house yy if you break rocess down into a few e-ta-follow steps. it is.)

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Pacific overtures
The growing community of Pacific Islanders is intent on educating its youth and is making political inroads in East Palo Alto.

# Can India prevent 

 slide into chaos?INDIA. from Page IC
lish, offering liberal education and building an intricate railway detFork After they ket, the Congress Party ran the coumtry for all but five years by trying to stitch to gether diverse interest groups in party and sovermaent.

Unill recently, the coontry was convinced that to would be rudderless without one of the Gandhis in power. The Gandbia, who have ruled intia for all but three years, had become a plll the country swallowed every five year for coconomic and political bealth and stability. The assassination deprived the country of the last creatible adult is the family.

## Iodia's options

Rajiv's Lnerperienced Italian wife, Sonia, has refused an offer to beoome prevident of the Congress Party. It wis offered to ber in the hope that the could steer the party to victory in the Jube 12-15 national election Many believe all she needed to do to be elected was to be seen in a Findu widow's clothea Bat it mulgh have bactfired. Moat people would have stopped to think why a mation of 800 million needed to elect a forefgaer es party prowt dent. It would be stretching the dynasty principle too far.

This is why the assassination be gina a dew phase in our politice: It compels is to tovent an alternative to the Congress Party and the Car dhas We will have to abetain from the drug But wll we survive the withdrawal symptomas? Or will we merely switch from one drug to another - say, relligion?

The vertict is the ou-gotng naHoonl elections is certain to be confued One round of poilling was over before Rafiv's munder. The Deat two rounk will fotlow three weeks trusn Dow. In part, the results are likely to rellect a restatement of falth in the Congreses, after moatha of unstable rule Bot it in part will also mart a stift toward Findu fundamentalis.m.

The vote will moat likely revalt In an trococluatve mandate. if the Hindus ecore major gains, the vote -Ill produce a stable fundamental-
mmall towns who see Finduism as the only way to restore peace and profil

The swing to the rught began when Rajlv Gandhi was prime minister five jears ago. The urban middle clarseas were disillusioned with the Congress Party. They were disappolnted in his talled necordi in Punjab and Srt Lanks and his failure to check terrorist violeace and eveatually began to doube his hooesty after he was romored to bave recelved huge kjckbectes from an artillery deal with a Swedish firm, yet onproven charge

Turoughout the period, the People's Party reacthed out from its base in the north to the Marxistcombinated states of the east and south. Its leader, LR. Advani, was umsparing in ins criticism of the Coogrese and lts leaders, whom he described as disthonest and LDeficlent. The only exception be made was the Congress rebel defense minister, V.P. Singh, who wal removed for daring to start an tinqurf treo the artillery deal.

Rajly was voted out of power in 1989 and was replaced by Singh at the bead of a minority goverument becked by the Hindu, who wona large number of seats. But once in power. Singh moved away from his broed middle-clam buen and thok the side of the bectword castex, a powerful rural force. During his brief spell as perme minister, be steararolied an affirmathe action plan to belp the backward castea, infuriating the middle class voters and Findu allies because it placed them at a avere disadrantige in jobe and college admisesiona Liter he came into confroatation with the Hindu People's Party over the moceruedemple disporte in Apodhya, which led to the withdrawal of Hindu support from his weak coalttion and trought about fits collepe.

## Unity vote certatu

When the people go to the polls in June they are certain to vote for unity again Only, without a true-blue Gandihi at its helmo (and Sonia Gandhl cannor be counted as one), I do not see the panic trans-
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stability. The assassination deprived the country of the last credthe edult to the family.

## India's options

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The verdict in the oo-gotng national elections is certain to be confosed Ope roumd po polling was over before Rafiva murder. The nert two rounds will follow three weeks from now. In part, the results are likely to reflect a reatatement of faith in the Congrem, after month of unstabie rule. Bout it in part will aleo mark a shift toward Hindu fundarmentalisen.

The vote will moat likety resalt In an inconclusive mandate. If the Hindus score major palms, we vote Fill produce a atable fundamentalbt flinda government that will lose no thme in putting down Murlims and Sikhe with the trishul (trident the meapon of Shive, the flindu god a dearruction) do away fith the country's secular credentila and coovert it into a Hidu rashera (组ce) with lascat attributces

To meabers of the Indias midt die clase who are tronocent of bibtoT. the last of these appear to be the mont attractive choice in a time of uncertainty. I cousder it bortific that it stould be discussed at all, after what the world has seen

India la 80 percemt Rindu, 12 pencent Muslim and 8 percent sith and other relligions and has a powarful middie clam of 150 mulilom. The growing appeal of the Indian People's Party amoug the educatod Rindu middle clase is a sign of thelr convection that anly by as serting lat Hindu deotity can india hope to survive. Thus view has become as fashionable among the goung educated members of Ircia's big cities as among traders in

SFedish itrm, a get upproved charge.

Throughout the period, the People's Party reached out trom its base to the north to the Mariststdominated states of the east and wouth. It leader, LK Advani, was unsparing in his critictam of the Congress and its leaders, whom be described as dishoneat and inefircient The aoly exceptlon be mede wat the Congress rebel defense minister, V.P. Singh who was removed for daring to start an Inquiry tinto the arillery deal

Rafiv wes voted out of power in 1989 and was replaced by Singh at the bead of a minority government becked by the Hindu, who won a large number of seati But ance in power, Singt moved away from this broad middle-class base and took the adde of the backward castes, a powerful rural force. During his Grief spell as prime minister, be steamrolled an affirmative action plan to belp the bactward cartas, infuriating the middle clase voteri and Hindu allies becquse it pisced them at a severe dissdvactage in jobe and college admissions. Later be came into confrontation with the Rlindu People's Party over the mosque-temple dispote in Apodiya, which led to the withdrawal of Hindu support from his weak coalltion and brought aboot its collapee.

## Unity vote certatn

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- The perik of a aving to the right Dotwithatanding India's political syriem haia a proven resibence to strocts and criser. Despite the fract that 55 perceat of the country is Шiterate, the electorate - which a more than twice the popalation of the United States - is exrraordiparity mature.

The constitution has beld the inthon together. We may be a young nation at 43, but we have 5,000 yeurs of recorded history and a political culture of our own. India ha dot a benina republic. The army mprolessoanal, steeped in Briush tradition. All parties place the country's unity and integrity uppermost There la consensua among them on moat preasing natooal inven. And if driven to the wall, they would not beadtate to put thelr beads togetber to prevent a bacteslide into chaca.


[^0]:    Nirmal Mitra is a special correspondent for "Surn day." India's leading weekdy mapozine. He is currently enrolled in Stanford University's John S. Kright Fellowship program. He wrote this article for Perspective.

