CHAPTER FIVE

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY IN

INDIA: THE GULF WAR OF 1991

This chapter analyses when, how and why the Chandra Shekhar government granted and a few weeks later withdrew as well, permission to the US Air Force transport planes en route to the Gulf region to refuel at various airports in India during Operation Desert Storm. This operation was part of the US-led international coalition’s campaign through the United Nations to liberate Kuwait from illegal Iraqi occupation. It is pertinent to mention that India is also a member of the United Nations. The political controversy generated in India over the issue of providing refuelling facilities to the US military planes at different Indian airports represents one of the earliest ups and downs in India-US relations during the post-Cold War decade of the 1990s.

The territorial dispute between Iraq and Kuwait first came before the UN Security Council in 1961 when Kuwait became free from the British rule. Iraq asserted its claim that Kuwait was historically and legally an integral part of the Basrah province of Iraq. Iraq deployed its troops on the border with Kuwait. The
Security Council could not take any action due to a lack of unanimity among its five permanent members. Subsequently the dispute moved to the Arab League. Like the UN, Arab League was also committed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Arab League through its efforts lessened the threat of military confrontation. Iraq-Kuwait relations were relatively peaceful until 1990.

**Roots of the Iraq-Kuwait Controversy:**

The territorial dispute between Iraq and Kuwait has its genesis in the history of the two entities in the Ottoman Empire. Today's Iraq was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1535 and was ruled, except for an interval of Persian rule in the seventeenth century. In 1914, the Ottoman Empire declared itself to be a belligerent power in the First World War as one of the Central powers. All the central powers were defeated in 1918.

The Allied powers who emerged victorious in the First World War demanded at the Conference of San Remno on 25 October, 1920 that Iraq be administered by the United Kingdom as a Mandate Territory under the League of Nations.

Later on Iraq got a degree of self-government in respect of its domestic affairs. But it remained a Mandate Territory until it attained independence on 3 October, 1932. Subsequently Iraq
joined the League of Nations. And Iraq became a founder member of the United Nations on 21 December, 1945.\textsuperscript{1}

Kuwait was a Sheikdom during the time of the Ottoman Empire. There were linkages between the Ottoman imperial authorities in the city of Basrah, (which is part of the present Iraq) and Kuwait. But in 1899 the Sheikh of Kuwait signed a secret defence treaty with United Kingdom to protect Kuwait from the threats of nomadic warlords and growing Ottoman domination. The secret treaty with Britain transferred the control over foreign affairs of Kuwait to Britain but it did not set up a formal British protectorate.\textsuperscript{2}

In 1913, Britain and the Ottoman Empire signed an agreement granting a semi-autonomous status to Kuwait within the Empire. As per this agreement Kuwait had its boundary as well. But the agreement could not be ratified by either side thanks to the outbreak of the First World War. Following the end of the war and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire the United Kingdom administered Kuwait as a self-governing protectorate. Britain redefined boundaries between Iraq and Najd, the predecessor kingdom to Saudi Arabia and between Najd and Kuwait in the early 1920s. This resulted in a heavy loss of territory for Kuwait. Najd got

control over two-thirds of the territory from Kuwait. In 1923, the British government recognised the border with Iraq claimed by Kuwait, which was identical to that stipulated in the unratified Anglo-Ottoman treaty of 1913.

Around the time of granting independence to Iraq in 1932, the British government initiated an exchange of letters from Iraq, dated 21 July, 1932, and from Kuwait, dated 10 August, 1932, addressed to the British authorities in Baghdad and Kuwait respectively. These letters confirmed Iraq-Kuwait border as defined in 1913 and 1923 and subsequently became a major reference point for any discussion of the boundary between the two states. But Iraq ever since its independence in 1932 claimed that Kuwait was a part of its territory.³

**Iraq-Kuwait Dispute Reaches the UN:**

Britain and Kuwait reviewed their relationship in the early 1960s. This was done against the backdrop of the ongoing process of decolonisation. On 19 June, 1961 Kuwait and the UK decided to terminate the 1899 treaty arrangements which had allowed Britain to deploy its armed forces in Kuwait. Thus Kuwait became independent.

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Withdrawal of troops by Britain was followed by deployment of troops by Iraq. This made British forces to return to Kuwait by 1 July, 1961. So Kuwait immediately requested the UN Security Council to meet and discuss this issue, and resolve it peacefully. Britain supported the request made by Kuwait. But on 2 July, 1961, Iraq requested the UN Security Council to consider the threat posed by Britain to the independence and security of Iraq. Iraq also argued that Kuwait lacked the standing to bring any issue before the UN Security Council since Kuwait was not an independent state.

UN Security Council met on 2, 5, 6, and 7 July, 1961 to consider both complaints. In the debate Iraq reiterated its desire to seek resolution of its dispute with Kuwait through peaceful means. But at the same time Iraq also stressed that it wanted to recover its legitimate rights in Kuwait and strongly objected to the presence of British forces in Kuwait. Kuwait promised that British troops would be asked to go back as soon as it was ensured that there was no threat to its independence and security. Britain, France, US and a majority of other members of the Security Council supported Kuwait and also appreciated Iraq's commitment to peace. But the United Arab Republic (the Union of Egypt and Syria) and some other states wanted immediate withdrawal of British troops from Kuwait. And they also suggested that League of Arab States be
allowed to settle the dispute. The USSR favoured Iraq and said that British forces in Kuwait threatened peace.

**Kuwait's Membership of the UN:**

Kuwait applied for membership of the UN on 6 July, 1961. On the same day, Britain submitted a draft resolution urging the Security Council to call upon all states to respect the independence and territorial integrity of Kuwait, and work for peace and tranquility in that area. The draft resolution also stated that British forces in Kuwait would be pulled out as soon as Kuwait thought it necessary. And on 7 July, 1961 the United Arab Republic submitted an alternative draft resolution because it considered the British draft incomplete. The Arab Republic in its draft resolution wanted the Security Council to urge for peaceful settlement of the issue and also immediate pull out of British armed forces in Kuwait.

Both draft resolutions came to a vote on 7 July, 1961. The British draft could not be adopted since it failed to obtain the necessary seven votes, as the Security Council at that time consisted of eleven members in all.

The Council of the League of Arab States voted to admit Kuwait as its member, provided Kuwait requested withdrawal of British forces and allowed to deploy a League force along the Iraq-Kuwait border. The League asked Iraq not to use force to annex Kuwait and also agreed to aid Kuwait in becoming a member of the
UN. Kuwait accepted both the requirements of the League and joined it on 30 July, 1961 despite objections raised by Iraq.

The Arab League and Kuwait signed an agreement on 12 July, 1961 regarding the deployment of Arab League Security Forces in Kuwait. These forces consisted of the troops from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and the United Arab Republic. They began to take up their positions along the Kuwaiti side of the border on 10 September, 1961. Conversely, the British forces began their withdrawal, and completed it by 19 October, 1961.

The UN Security Council met on 30 November 1961 at the request of the United Arab Republic to consider Kuwait's earlier application for membership of the UN. During the debate, Iraq, supported by the Soviet Union, contested the very eligibility of Kuwait to be a member of the UN. Iraq vigorously argued that Kuwait was never an independent state. The United Arab Republic sponsored a draft resolution requiring the Security Council to recommend Kuwait for membership. But it was not adopted following the negative vote by the Soviet Union.

**Kuwait Joins the UN:**

On 20 April, 1963 Kuwait once again applied for membership of the UN. By this time there was normalcy along the Iraq-Kuwait border and also withdrawal of Arab League forces from Kuwait had taken place. The Security Council met on 7 May, 1963 to consider
the Kuwaiti request. So Iraq once again reiterated its well-known position that Kuwait was an integral part of its territory and questioned eligibility of Kuwait to be a member of the UN. But this time, the Security Council voted unanimously to recommended that General Assembly favourably act on the request made by Kuwait. The UN General Assembly in its fourth special session overwhelmingly endorsed the recommendation on 14 May, 1963 and admitted Kuwait as 111th member of the UN.⁴

**Iraq and Kuwait sign Agreed Minutes**

There was a military coup in Iraq in February 1963, that is just prior to the renewed request made by Kuwait to the UN for its membership. The new leadership in Iraq declared its commitment to the ideals of Arab unity and socialism. Initially the new Iraqi government stuck to the position of its predecessor over the issue of Kuwait. But few months later Iraq softened its stand, and that resulted in a major breakthrough. On 4 October 1963, high-level delegation from Iraq and Kuwait led by their Prime Minister met in Baghdad. Iraq acknowledged the fact that Kuwait was an independent and sovereign state. Iraq also recognised its boundaries with Kuwait as specified in the 1932 exchange of letters.

In addition, according to the ‘Agreed Minutes’ of that meeting, both countries decided to establish diplomatic relations. The Agreed

Minutes also referred to a statement made by the government of Kuwait on 9 April, 1963 in which Kuwait expressed its desire to terminate its 1961 defence treaty with the UK. And this was done on 13 May 1968. With the exception of one significant Iraqi incursion into Kuwaiti territory in March 1973, the Iraq-Kuwait border was calm until 1990.5

But the period between February 1990 and July 1990 witnessed frequent statements by President Saddam Hussein of Iraq and other Iraqi officials advancing a host of political, territorial, and financial claims against Kuwait. Some of the accusations that were made by Iraq against Kuwait were that Kuwait had extracted Iraqi crude oil worth $2.4 billion by 'slant-drilling' into the Rumaila oilfield; that Kuwait’s illegal possession of Warba, Bubiyan and Failaka islands in the Persian Gulf obstructed Iraq’s access to Gulf waters; and that Kuwait and other members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) were not adhering to OPEC’s oil-export quotas, thereby depressing oil prices across the globe, and depriving Iraq of resources it needed to pay its debts and facilitate its recovery from the devastating eight-year war with the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the latter part of July, Iraq deployed its military forces along the border with Kuwait.

Kuwait in its response to Iraqi charges said that there was no truth in the allegations made against it. On 31 July, the Crown Prince of Kuwait and the Vice-Chairman of Iraq's Revolution Command Council met in Saudi Arabia in an attempt by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to avert a serious confrontation. But there was no breakthrough. And eventually on 2 August, 1990 at 1 a.m. local time, Iraqi troops crossed the international frontier and invaded, and occupied Kuwait.

**Iraqi Invasion and International Response:**

Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August, 1990, and just within eleven hours of outbreak of the crisis, the UN Security Council met to discuss the issue. It adopted Resolution 660 (1990) which condemned the invasion, demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces, and called upon Iraq and Kuwait to resolve their differences through negotiations.

The Security Council met on 6 August, 1990 and adopted resolution 661 (1990). The resolution imposed comprehensive and mandatory sanctions against Iraq and occupied Kuwait and also established a committee, known as the Sanctions Committee to monitor the sanctions.

On 7 August 1990, a coalition of UN member states cooperating in the defence of Kuwait began sending military forces to the Gulf region. And on 8 August, 1990, Iraq declared
'comprehensive and eternal merger' of Kuwait with Iraq. On 9 August 1990 the UN Security Council adopted resolution 662 (1990) which declared the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait to be "null and void".

On 12 August, 1990 Kuwait informed the UN that it had requested military assistance to ensure the implementation of resolution 661 (1990). On 13 August, 1990 Iraq sent a letter to the UN Secretary General describing the sanctions imposed by the Security Council as "unjust" and "iniquitous".

On 18 August, 1990, Iraq announced that it detained a number of third-state nationals. The Security Council immediately met and adopted resolution 664 (1990) which demanded that Iraq should allow departure of those individuals from both Iraq and Kuwait.6

On 25 August, 1990 the government of Jordan requested for international assistance to alleviate the conditions of people uprooted from Iraq and Kuwait as a result of invasion. According to the International Labour Organisation, by early February 1991, about 2 million of the 2.8 million migrant workers and their families in Iraq and Kuwait fled, and 70,0000 of them entered Jordan. The office of United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) served as a nodal agency for an emergency operation to evacuate displaced

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people to their countries of origin. The UNDRO also provided assistance to those who could not be transported immediately.

On 25 August 1990, the Security Council adopted resolution 665 (1990) that authorised maritime forces in the Gulf to take necessary steps for implementation of sanctions against Iraq.

Between 30 August and 2 September, 1990 the UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar met Tariq Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq and also the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq in the Jordanian capital Amman.

On 13 September, 1990 the Security Council adopted resolution 666 (1990) which requested the Sanctions Committee to evaluate whether there was an urgent humanitarian need to supply food to Iraq and Kuwait.

On 16 September, 1990 the Security Council adopted resolution 667 (1990) that condemned aggressive acts perpetrated by Iraq against diplomatic missions and the abduction of personnel from those missions and demanded the immediate release of third-state nationals.

On 24 September, 1990 the Security Council adopted resolution 669 (1990) which requested the Sanctions Committee to examine requests for assistance from states facing special economic problems following the enforcement of sanctions against Iraq.
On 25 September, 1990 the Security Council adopted resolution 670 (1990) which widened sanctions against Iraq to include additional measures affecting shipping and air transport.

On 28 September, 1990 Iraq announced that it would begin releasing detained third-state nationals.

During the forty-sixth session of the UN General Assembly debate a large majority of UN member-states opposed Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The UN members also called for restoration of the legitimate government in Kuwait.

On 11 October, 1990 Iraq released all detained women and children. But other third-state nationals continued to be detained at strategic sites.

On 29 October, 1990 the Security Council adopted resolution 674 (1990) which demanded that Iraq should release all third-state nationals held in Iraq and Kuwait. The resolution also confirmed that Iraq was liable under international law for any loss, damage, or injury as a result of its invasion and occupation of Kuwait.

On 29 November, 1990 the Security Council adopted resolution 678 (1990) which authorised UN member states cooperating with the government of Kuwait to use "all necessary means" to uphold and implement the Council's resolutions on the

On 18 December, 1990 the UN General Assembly called on Iraq to respect human rights in occupied Kuwait.

On 9 January 1991 the US Secretary of State, James Baker and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Tariq Aziz met in Geneva. On 12 and 13 January, 1991, the UN Secretary General met President Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz to urge Iraq to comply with the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council.7

On 15 January 1991, the UN Secretary General in a statement to the press appealed to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq to comply with the relevant resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council.

On 16 January, 1991, coalition forces began aerial bombardment on Iraq. Kuwait informed the UN Secretary General that Iraqi forces continued to occupy Kuwait despite the expiry of the period specified by Security Council resolution 678 (1990) and that Kuwait, with the cooperation of friendly states was exercising its right of self-defence.

7 The United Nations and Iraq-Kuwait Conflict, 1990-1996, New York: UN Department of Public Information, 1996, p. 120.
In the earlier part of February 1991, there were reports of a massive oil slick in the Persian Gulf. Following these reports, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) dispatched a team of experts to the region to assess the preliminary impact.

Between 16 and 21 February, 1991 a joint mission of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) delivered medical care and 54 tons of medical supplies (including basic health kits, antibiotics for children and oral dehydration salt packs) and assessed future health-care needs.

On 21 and 22 February 1991, Iraq set fire to more than 500 Kuwaiti oil wells.

On 24 February 1991, coalition forces began ground preparations moving into occupied Kuwait and Iraq.

On 27 February, 1991, Kuwait city was liberated. The coalition member-states declared the end of ground operations. In a letter to the UN Secretary General, Iraq stated that it would fully comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions, provided that certain conditions were met. In a second set of letters, Iraq informed the President of the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary General that all Iraqi forces had been withdrawn from Kuwait. The President of the Security Council confirmed the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from occupied Kuwait.
On 28 February, 1991 hostilities were suspended. Iraq officially stated its resolve to comply fully with resolution 660 (1990) and all other Security Council resolutions related to the Iraq-Kuwait situation.

At the beginning of March 1991, internal conflict broke out in both north and southern Iraq, resulting in large flows of refugees and displaced persons.

On 2 March, 1991, the Security Council adopted resolution 686 (1991) which noted the suspension of all offensive combat operations demanding Iraq's compliance with all 12 relevant resolutions of the Security Council. The resolution gave top priority to the repatriation of Kuwaitis, and welcomed the decision by the coalition states to begin the release of Iraqi prisoners of war (POWS), and also requested the UN, its specialized agencies, and other international organizations in the UN system to cooperate with the government and people of Kuwait in the reconstruction of their country.

On 3 March, 1991, the President of the Security Council welcomed the decision of the Council's Sanctions Committee to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance and pledged immediate action on the assessment of a forthcoming mission to the area.
On 4 March, 1991, the government of Kuwait returned to Kuwait city and resumed the charge of the state.

On 6 March, 1991, the Commission on Human Rights decided to assign special rapporteurs to study the situation of human rights in Kuwait and Iraq.

Between 6 March and 6 April 1991, a large-scale repatriation of Kuwaitis took place, including more than 4,000 prisoners of war and more than 2,000 civilians.

And eventually on 8 March, 1991, Iraq’s Revolution Command Council declared that all its earlier decisions in respect of Kuwait taken since 2 August 1990 became null and void.\(^8\)

**Domestic Political Scene in India During the Gulf War of 1990-1991:**

Political scenario in India before, during and even after the Iraq-Kuwait war was that of uncertainty and instability. It was for the second time since independence of India that there was a non-Congress government at national level. There was a ‘hung parliament’ because no political party could win an outright majority of seats in the ninth general elections held in three phases on 22, 24 and 26 November 1989. The then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi decided on 17 October, 1989 to call the elections

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almost a month ahead of the schedule. Reasons for going in for early polls could be many. One of the motives of Rajiv Gandhi could be the desire to take away political initiative from the opposition. The opposition parties were insisting that Rajiv Gandhi should resign. Rajiv Gandhi's image of 'Mr. Clean' of Indian politics when he took over in 1984 was substantially tarnished following one startling revelation after another about the complicity of the Prime Minister and some of his friends and colleagues in politics in the Bofors kickback scandal. This led to perceptible decline in the credibility of the government and popularity of Rajiv Gandhi.\(^9\)

In addition to this, the defeat of the government sponsored 64\(^{th}\) and 65\(^{th}\) Constitution Amendment Bills of *Panchayats* and *Nagarpalikas* for the lack of necessary support from the opposition parties in Rajya Sabha on 13 October, 1989 provided the Prime Minister a golden opportunity to criticise the opposition parties for preventing much needed decentralization of authority and empowerment of the people at grass-roots level from fructifying.

But Rajiv Gandhi did not immediately dissolve Lok Sabha after his decision to seek a fresh mandate; nor did he choose to go in for simultaneous Legislative Assembly elections in as many states as he could have done so. The Congress (I) leader was reportedly under pressure from some of the Chief ministers of

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Congress (I) ruled states to hold simultaneous elections to the legislature at national as well as state level. But with the exception of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa and Sikkim, elections for the two levels were ruled out. This was done perhaps for two significant reasons. The immediate dissolution of Lok Sabha would have deprived the Members of Parliament (MPs) of their parliamentary perks and privileges, and simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies would have confused the voters during campaign by mixing up a variety of local issues with the national issues, and Congress (I) being a ruling party in several states besides at the national level would have suffered electoral losses.¹⁰

On the eve of ninth general election and five State Legislative Assembly elections in November 1989 Indian polity seemed to be moving towards a sort of tri-polar system. Three main political actors were the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the one hand, the Janata Dal-led National Front parties in close alliance with the CPI-M and CPI on the other hand, and the Congress (I), in between the two.

The ruling Congress (I) in its 1989 election manifesto painted for the electorate a rosy picture. It presented itself before the voters as a party of performance and promise. The Congress (I) manifesto

recalled its rich legacy of "Democracy, Secularism, Socialism and
Non-alignment; the vision of its great leaders like Mahatama
Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi and also the
achievements of Rajiv Gandhi government. The Congress (I) claimed
that it had strengthened the integrity of the Indian Union, upheld
the cherished tradition of secularism, restored the sanctity of the
Golden Temple, consolidated the foundations of democracy at the
grassroots, and preserved the stability of the government.

Congress (I) also claimed that it had brought cleanliness into
the politics and provided the government which works. According to
the manifesto, the outside world listened with respect to India
under the prime ministership of Rajiv Gandhi. Congress (I) assured
the electorate autonomy to radio and television, more freedom to
the press, judicial reforms more power and resources to Panchayats
and Nagarpalikas, and make administration people-oriented. The
Congress (I) felt assured of being returned to power with thumping
majority by inflicting a crushing defeat on the opposition parties.
Congress (I)'s election manifesto argued that, a vote for the
opposition was a vote for instability, and a vote for the Congress
was a vote of confidence in India.  

The opposition parties of the left as well as the right wing on
the other hand fiercely competed with each other in painting a

\[\text{\footnotesize 11 Indian National Congress (I), Election Manifesto: General Elections, 1989, New Delhi.}\]
gloomy picture of the country, and made as many allegations against the Congress (I) and Rajiv Gandhi as possible. Several of their charges were based on facts, but at times there were exaggerations as well.

The National Front noted that India was weak and demoralized. It thought the country was facing a crisis of confidence, crisis of characters, and crisis of leadership. The National Front's election manifesto observed that the nation was burdened by the price rise, hurt and fractured by communal and caste based violence and embarrassed by corruption at the apex. So the people of the country were yearning for relief. Voters wanted a clean and efficient alternative to the discredited Congress (I). And the National Front offered itself as an alternative to the maligned Congress (I).

The National Front presented its record of performance during 1977-1979. It assured the people that the constituent parties of the National Front were committed to the philosophy of national unity, democracy, socialism, secularism and federalism. The National Front leadership went to the people with the confidence and conviction that they wanted a change, a change for
the better which would root out corruption and pave the way for clean and efficient government.\textsuperscript{12}

The major allies of the National Front such as CPI, CPI (M), Janata Party, Lok Dal which had issued their own election manifestoes as well had also painted a gloomy picture of the country. The Communist party of India (CPI) accused the Rajiv Gandhi government of promoting communalism, eroding democratic values and institutions, making mockery of the notion of the decentralisation of power, undermining public sector and encouraging privatisation, and failure to prevent atrocities on women, Harijans and the Adivasis.\textsuperscript{13} The Communist Party of India (Marxist) in its election manifesto said that the country was charged with rampant corruption, secessionist forces, and communal violence. The CPI(M) found that there was hunger, starvation, unemployment, closed factories, sick industries, devolution of rupee, deficit budgets, and growing dependence of India on the Western aid. The CPI (M) urged the Indian voter to vote against the Congress (I) against this backdrop.\textsuperscript{14}

The Janta Party found corruption to be the main feature of the Rajiv Gandhi government. Besides corruption, there were problems such as communalism, law and order, criminalisation of

\textsuperscript{12} National Front, \textit{Manifesto: Lok Sabha Electins, 1989}, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{14} Communist Party of India (Marxist), \textit{Election Manifesto, 1989}, New Delhi.
politics. On the other hand, the Lok Dal observed that there was lack of commitment, lack of discipline, and lack of confidence in the credibility of the Rajiv Gandhi government.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the third serious competitor in the race for power in its manifesto said that India was in the grip of a serious multidimensional crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The election manifesto of BJP said that the national mood was not just of cynicism, but of mounting disgust and rage. According to the BJP’s election manifesto the leadership of Congress (I) was highly incompetent and corrupt which lacked a sense of commitment to the country, its democratic institutions and cultural traditions. BJP accused the Rajiv Gandhi government of misleading the Parliament and the nation, subverting the democratic process, instigating communal riots, mugging the press, undermining the judiciary, and failing to check unemployment, price rise and plunder by foreign interests.

The BJP too offered itself before the electorate as a viable alternative. It projected itself as a beacon light for India and claimed to be a party which could throw out the last vestiges of the dynastic rule which it perceived as mainly responsible for the plight of the country. The BJP promised to enshrine right to work as a fundamental right of citizens in the Indian Constitution and also to

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16 Lok Dal, Ghoshana Patra (Hindi), 1989, New Delhi.
convert All India Radio and Doordarshan into autonomous corporations. In the realm of voting the BJP was in favour of introducing compulsory voting for all citizens and arranging public funding of elections.\textsuperscript{17}

Ninth general elections and five State Legislative Assembly elections were held on 22, 24 and 26 November 1989 in a phased manner. The eighth Lok Sabha was dissolved by the President of India on 27 November, 1989, and the ninth Lok Sabha was constituted by the Election Commission of India on 2 December, 1989. The interlude of four days between 27 November, 1989, and 2 December, 1989 brought about a sea change in Indian politics. There was a major defeat of the Congress (I) in elections. Opposition parties collectively won majority in the ninth Lok Sabha. But as shown later in Appendix B, not a single political party was able to win a majority of seats on its own.

So it was the case of a 'hung parliament' and in such a scenario, Congress (I) was the single largest party in the ninth Lok Sabha. Comparative party composition in the eight Lok Sabha and the ninth Lok Sabha can be seen there in Appendices 'A' and 'B' respectively.

Following heavy losses in the Lok Sabha elections, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi resigned on 29 November, 1989. The

President of India accepted the resignation but asked Rajiv Gandhi to continue till a new government was sworn in. Though Congress (I) was the single largest political party in the ninth Lok Sabha, taking into account the overall anti-Congress (I) nature of the mandate, Congress (I) Parliamentary Board made a wise and laudable decision of not staking a claim to form government in the ninth Lok Sabha. So President R. Venkatraman invited Vishwanath Pratap Singh, leader of the opposition to form a new government. V.P. Singh accepted the invitation. President R. Venkatraman administered the oath of office and secrecy to V.P. Singh and Devi Lal as Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister respectively on 2 December, 1989.

Members of the ninth Lok Sabha took their oath on the first day of the session on 18 December, 1989. The President addressed Parliament on 20 December, 1989. The new government of V.P. Singh sought and won a vote of confidence in Lok Sabha on 21 December, 1989. Since the National Front of V.P. Singh also did not enjoy majority in the hung Lok Sabha, it had to rely on support from the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Left Parties such as CPI and CPI (M). Quest for power brought almost all the non-Congress(I) political parties together. So, anti-Congressism helped them win elections collectively, and subsequently form a government as well.

\[18\] *Debates, Lok Sabha*, 21 December, 1989 (entire volume).
While doing so, their political and ideological differences remained intact.\footnote{Debates, \textit{Lok Sabha}, 2 December, 1989 (entire volume).}

Contradictions between the National Front and its two supporters BJP on the one hand, and CPI, CPI (M) on the other surfaced in the beginning itself. There was internal rivalry among various leaders of National Front itself. This became apparent even before the formation of the government. Chandra Shekhar was not at all happy to see V.P. Singh as Prime Minister. Devi Lal wanted to become Deputy Prime Minister at least. So as soon as elections were over, clashing ambitions, oversized egos, and ideological preferences came to the fore. So V.P. Singh was elected as leader of the National Front to become prime minister with a great difficulty. The first ever difference between V.P. Singh and his deputy Devi Lal was made public at the time of the swearing in ceremony itself on 2 December 1989. Devi Lal while being administered the oath of office and secrecy by President R. Venkatraman made a joke of himself by insisting on inserting the term Deputy Prime Minister into the oath despite the President’s polite admonition that he should only say minister, because the Indian Constitution does not mention Deputy Prime Minister anywhere. This was just the
beginning of ambitions of one leader clashing with that of the other. 20

After taking over the office, V.P. Singh made a high profile visit to Punjab on 7 December, 1990. During this trip, he visited the famous Golden Temple in Amritsar and drove around in an open jeep. This was quite unusual if contrasted with the heavily guarded visits of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. V.P. Singh said in Punjab that he would reverse the policies of Congress(I) leadership. But in terms of action there was not much change. While Punjab was as bad as ever at the end of his term, Jammu and Kashmir worsened. Prime Minister V.P. Singh appointed George Fernandes head of the Committee on Kashmir Affairs. But at the same time Arun Nehru and Mufti Muhammed Sayeed were allowed by V.P. Singh to continuously interfere in the work of George Fernandes.

Prime Minister further complicated the Jammu and Kashmir issue by appointing Jagmohan the Governor of that state without the necessary consultations while making any such appointment. Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Dr. Farooq Abdullah resigned in protest because the same Jagmohan had cost Abdullah his chief minister ship in 1983 by encouraging defections against him. Jagmohan dissolved the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative

20 The Times of India, 3 December, 1990.
Assembly. And again V.P. Singh recalled Jagmohan without any consultations and made him a member of Rajya Sabha.21

There was very little time for the V.P. Singh government to concentrate on any of the burning issues facing the country. Most of the time the leadership was preoccupied with its survival in office which was always threatened by the ongoing internal differences among the party leaders. As soon as Farooq Abdullah resigned, Chandra Shekhar welcomed his decision. Ajit Singh was not liked by Devi Lal, and Devi Lal was liked by nobody except by Chandra Shekhar. Devi Lal preferred his own son Om Prakash Chautala to Ajit Singh, son of former Prime Minister Charan Singh, to be the Chief Minister of Haryana. Om Prakash Chautala contested Legislative Assembly election from Meham constituency in Haryana. There were reports of irregularities such as large scale rigging and intimidation of voters by supporters of Om Prakash Chautala in Meham. So the Election Commission countermanded election in Meham constituency. Chautala resigned as Chief Minister, but he was reinstated by his party and Devi Lal’s consent within two months of the resignation. This made two ministerial colleagues of V.P. Singh, Arun Nehru, and Arif Mohammed Khan to step down from the government. Even V.P. Singh offered to resign. But Devi Lal persuaded them to continue in office.

However, Devi Lal did not stop there. He accused Arif Mohammed Khan and Arun Nehru of corruption. He even produced a copy of the letter allegedly written by V.P. Singh to President R. Venkatramam in 1987, accusing them of involvement in the Bofors deal. V.P. Singh immediately denied having had done any such thing, and said that the letter was a case of forgery. So he asked Devi Lal to resign on 1 August, 1990. And this further complicated problems for V.P. Singh and his government.22

Devi Lal resigned and gave a call for a massive rally of peasants in New Delhi on 9 August, 1990. This was an attempt by Devi Lal to demonstrate his electoral base and strength to his critics, especially in the V.P. Singh government. And perhaps in response to this, V.P. Singh who was feeling insecure, and also wanted to divert attention, he made the most essential, and progressive decision to implement the recommendation of the Mandal Commission which sparked off a new controversy in India.

It is pertinent to note that the Janata government, that is the first non-Congress government since independence had appointed Mandal Commission in late 1970s. The commission recommended that 27 per cent of jobs in the government services and public sector undertakings be reserved for candidates belonging to the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). But these recommendations

22 op. cit. pp. 288.
ensuring social justice to those who were victims of the obnoxious caste system were ignored by Indira Gandhi as well as Rajiv Gandhi. And V.P. Singh's decision to implement these recommendations generated furore because the total percentage of reserved jobs increased from 22.5 per cent to 49.5 per cent. 22 per cent jobs were already reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The Mandal Commission recommendations also guaranteed reservations in educational institutions and promotions. So the upper castes protested against the V.P. Singh government in various parts of India, especially in north and west.

Prime Minister V.P. Singh's decision to adopt and implement the Mandal Commission Report created a rift in his government, party, and the supporters such as BJP and Communist Parties as well. Leaders within the National Front such as Biju Patnaik, Ramkrishna Hegde, Yashwant Sinha, and Arun Nehru complained that they were not consulted by the Prime Minister on the issue of implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations. The Leftist parties and the BJP were irritated because the Prime Minister did not take them into confidence before announcing his decision. Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal condemned the decision of the government. The government was criticized for announcing the decision at a wrong time; for not forging a consensus; for creating
further caste-based division in society, and also for applying faulty criteria for identifying backward castes.

Anti-Mandai protests took the form of attacks on public property. There were reports of buses being burnt. Rallies, meetings, and discussions in the news media highlighted different aspects of the controversy. At some places, even one or two incidents of self-immolation took place. What was supposed to be a mechanism for ending the caste system in a long run, consolidated the case-loyalties in the immediate aftermath. The Anti-Mandal protests ended when the Supreme court of India granted a stay on the implementation of the Mandal Report on 1 October 1990.23

In the meantime, BJP had its own objectives to achieve. And perhaps the ongoing controversy over the issue of Mandal Commission recommendations provided the BJP leadership much-needed space to raise issues more important to it. So the first step taken by BJP in that direction was to say that it could withdraw support from the government over the issue of popular protests against the Mandal Commission. On 25 September, 1990 BJP leader Lalkrishna Advani began his about 7,500 kilometre Rath Yatra or chariot ride from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh to lay the foundation stone of Ram Mandir (Temple) at a controversial and disputed site of the medieval Babri Masjid

23 op. cit. p. 289-290.
(Mosque). But his journey was abruptly halted on 23 October 1990 when the state government of Bihar ordered his arrest at Samastipur while he was passing through that state. This prompted the BJP to announce that it would stop supporting the government. It was difficult for V.P. Singh also to please BJP and alienate his leftist allies in politics.

On 30 October, 1990 the state government of Uttar Pradesh ordered the police to fire on the crowd trying to reach the venue in Ayodhya chosen for the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Ram temple. So the rath yatra, Advani’s arrest, and the firing at Ayodhya aroused communal passions. Subsequently there were communal riots in India, especially in the northern part of the country. Amidst this, the internal rivalries among the leaders of Janata Dal—a major constituent of the National Front—continued to grow. On 5 November, 1990, the Janata Dal split into two factions. There were about 58 parliamentarians who broke away from the Janata Dal. The new group called itself Janata Dal (Samajwadi), and it was led by Chandra Shekhar, a major rival of V.P. Singh. And on 7 November, 1990 the second attempt to run a non-Congress government came to an end when the V.P. Singh government lost a vote of confidence in Lok Sabha. After losing
confidence of the majority of Lok Sabha V.P. Singh tendered his resignation.24

Down fall of the non-Congress government within eleven months of its formation was a welcome development for the Congress(I). It was just a year ago that all the non-Congress(I) parties in India ganged up against the Congress(I) government of Rajiv Gandhi, collectively, if not individually won majority of seats in Lok Sabha, formed government promising a new era of clean, efficient and stable government. The V.P. Singh government was supported by rightist as well as leftist parties. And it was ironical that the government had to step down due to its own internal pressures, contradictions, and rivalries in such a short period of time. This added to the prevailing sense of political instability and uncertainty in the country.

Congress(I) got an opportunity to assail the opposition parties for plunging the country into an era of instability. Congress (I), despite being the single largest party in the ninth Lok Sabha again refused to take an initiative in forming a successor government. Instead of forming a government, Congress preferred to support a government led by Chandra Shekhar from outside. Congress(I) took a long-term view of the situation and decided not to lead or form a government because in a hung parliament Congress(I) would have

to depend on other parties for their support. So it would have been either a coalition government or Congress government being supported by other parties from outside. In any case, instability, uncertainty and worries of survival in office would have been the hallmarks of any such government. That would have placed the Congress(I) in the same category where the non-Congress(I) parties were. And that would have also deprived the Congress(I) of claiming to provide a stable and strong government that would last for five years in future election campaigns.

On the other hand a former Janata Dal dissident and the newly formed Janata Dal (Samajwadi) party's leader, Chandra Shekhar, who was a long time aspirant for the post of the prime minister and had just about 63 MPs on his side merrily accepted the invitation of the President to form and lead a new government. He did so on the basis of assurances from the Congress(I) leader and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that the Congress(I) would support the Chandra Shekhar government from outside. This was unprecedented that somebody formed the government even when he had only 54 MPs in Lok Sabha and 9 MPs in Rajya Sabha. So, if Chandra Shekhar had his own ambition of becoming the prime minister even when he had just ten per cent of the members of Lok Sabha and 0.8 per cent MPs in Rajya Sabha with him, Congress(I) leader, Rajiv Gandhi, leading the single largest party in Parliament
was not less ambitious. So it was quite expected that Congress(l) would not have indefinitely and unconditionally supported the government. Nor could have Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar expected that any such miracle could have happened and he would have remained in office for five years merely on the basis of charity and philanthropy form others.

So Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal were sworn in as Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister respectively on 10 November, 1990. The new minority or rather rump government passed the vital parliamentary test of surviving a vote of confidence on 16 November 1990. On the day of the trust vote, the Chandra Shekhar government had only two members in its Council of ministers. Five days later, the Prime Minister somehow managed to constitute a team of his own. Most of the ministers in the Chandra Shekhar government were from the erstwhile Janata Dal, who left it along with Chandra Shekhar and formed the Janata Dal (Samajwadi). There were a few defectors from Congress(l) as well who were not happy with Rajiv Gandhi's decision not to form a Congress(l) led coalition government. This deprived them of the chance of becoming ministers. President R. Venkatraman administered the oath of office and secrecy to the new Council of Ministers on 21 November, 1990.

\[25\text{ Debates, Lok Sabha, 16 November, 1990, New Delhi (entire volume).}\]
The first ever difference of opinion between the Congress(I) and Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar became public when the Congress(I) leaders objected to induction of defectors from Congress(I) into the Council of Ministers by the Prime Minister. Subsequently Chandra Shekhar government’s offer of unconditional talks with militants in Punjab also made political parties in India including the Congress(I) to raise their eye-brows. Chandra Shekhar used to behave as if he had secured majority of seats in Parliament by winning elections, and thereby he was free to take new policy measures on variously fronts by himself. This did not suit the Congress(I). Sometimes even good things such as absence of communal and casteist issues on the agenda of Chandra Shekhar indirectly and unconsciously harmed the Congress(I). After all there was a significant reduction in communal and casteist violence in India during the tenure of Chandra Shekhar. Chandra Shekhar’s free availability and easy accessibility, pragmatism on economic front, boldness on the issue of talks with militants, and lack of commitment to the politics of religion and caste only enhanced his stature.

Chandra Shekhar was becoming popular at the cost of Congress(I), and Rajiv Gandhi. This put the Congress(I) in an agonising dilemma. Though Chandra Shekhar did not have majority in Parliament and was surviving thanks to the support from
Congress(l), popular perception was that Chandra Shekhar wanted to take decisions which were in national interest, and Congress(l) was preventing him from doing so. And there were some very vital reasons which made people think like this, and blame Congress(l) for aggravating the already worsening socio-political, economic scenario in India.

Besides the political instability caused by emergence of a hung Lok Sabha which witnessed formation of two governments within a year and that to without any guarantee of political stability, India faced a variety of challenges on various fronts. The year which began with great hopes after the ninth general elections turned out to be highly disappointing. Widespread violence based on religion, caste, continuing problem of insurgency in Punjab and North-East, worsening situation in Jammu and Kashmir, balance of payments crisis on the economic side, that is non-availability of adequate foreign exchange for imports, constantly widening budget deficit, ever increasing losses suffered by public sector units, steep hike in prices of petroleum products in international markets following Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait were just some of the challenges staring in the face of India.

Iraq-Kuwait dispute had not left India immune in anyway. It had social, economic, religious, and also political consequences on India. India had to evacuate and fly back home about 1,50,000 of
its citizens working in Iraq and Kuwait due to fear of an impending war. This was an expensive exercise. At the same time Indian economy stopped getting remittances from these workers who were earlier working in Iraq and Kuwait, and had to come back home fearing that there would be an international action against Iraq for illegal occupation of Kuwait. Hike in prices of petroleum products also affected Indian economy adversely. Growing international, especially US-led UN rhetoric against President Saddam Hussein of Iraq was making him popular among a section of Indian Muslims, while there was anger among other Indians against Saddam Hussein for invading Kuwait and causing price rise as far as petroleum products were concerned. Even Indian government did not endorse the illegal invasion, occupation and annexation of Kuwait by Iraq. So the country was getting divided along the religious lines on an international issue.

Even on international stage, India's position in early 1990s was not less precarious than the one on domestic level. The Cold War between communism and capitalism had just ended. US had emerged triumphant in the Cold War. Its principal rival the Soviet Union had lost the Cold War and was on the brink of collapse and disintegration. So the US was the sole surviving super power. Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe had collapsed like a pack of cards in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Germany got
unified. A new era of cooperation had begun between the US and
the Soviet Union on international issues including that of liberation
of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

Similarly the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was in a critical
position. Yugoslavia, the then Chairperson of NAM was experiencing
political, social, and economic upheaval. Another leading member of
the NAM, Egypt was a US ally against Iraq. And India, besides its
domestic problems as explained earlier in this chapter, along with
several other developing countries was dependent on the US and
other Western countries for getting loans from the International
Monetary Fund and the World bank to tackle major economic
problems at home.

So it was against this backdrop that the people of India were
expecting the political leadership of the country to transcend the
narrow political and any other differences, and take any decision on
the basis of enlightened national interest. There was not much
scope for politicization of any matter, at least in the minds of people
at large. And this is what any rational human being would have
expected at such a critical juncture. And therefore the rising
popularity of Chandra Shekhar was not serious a concern for the
Indian voter as it was there for the Congress(I) party and its leader
Rajiv Gandhi. In fact Congress(I) party was also trying its best not
be seen as a spoiler. But it was a tight rope walk for Rajiv Gandhi.
There was intense pressure from within his party to make sure that Congress(I) becomes a ruling party. And the only way left was to have or rather precipitate mid-term elections.

Amidst a highly precarious situation facing the Congress(I) there was a major relief to the party. It was in the form of a news report published in The Times of India on 28 January 1991 on its front page. The news item dispatched by Srinivas Laxman, from Bombay on 27 January 1991 was about US Air Force transport planes being refueled at Sahar airport in Bombay. Text of the report which began with the headline 'US Air Force Planes Refuelled at Bombay' was as follows:

"38 US Air Force C-141 transport planes shuttling between the Philippines and the Gulf since January 9, 1991 have refuelled at the Sahar international airport here.

Aviation officials said here today that these planes were reportedly carrying material for 'Operation Desert Storm'.

Officials told The Times of India News Service that following a request from the US Embassy in New Delhi, the Civil Aviation Ministry asked Bombay Airport officials to render all possible aid to the transport aircraft.

They were even exempted from the 25 percent fuel cut which has been imposed since January 22, 1991 following a high-level meeting in Delhi last Monday."
The planes whose refuelling halts in Bombay were kept a closely guarded secret, are parked at remote bay of the Sahar air terminal, near the Air India hangar. Though Operation Desert Storm started on January 17, 1991, war preparations, it would appear, began almost a week earlier. This is evident from the fact that the first C-141 plane landed here on January 9, 1991 enroute to Dubai.

After January 9, there was a three-day gap and from January 12 they have refuelled here almost everyday. On January 12, one aircraft landed here which was bound for Duabi.

The aircraft usually depart immediately after being refuelled and half here for a little more than an hour per visit.”

The details of the subsequent flights are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of C-141s</th>
<th>Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 14</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Dubai and Fujaria (UAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 16</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>One to Fujaria, Two to Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 17</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Both to Fujaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 18</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 19</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>One to Dubai, Two to Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 20</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 21</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>One to Fujaria, and One to Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 22</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>One to Fujaria, and Two to Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 23</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Three to Manila, and One to Fujaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 24</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Three to Fujaria, and Two to Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 25</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Two to Fujaria, and Two to Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 26</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Two to Manila, and Two to Fujaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 27 (till noon)</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>One to Manila</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following publication of this news report by *The Times of India* on 28 January 1991, Indian government through its official spokesperson explained the matter to the county and all other concerned through the news media.

On 28 January, 1991, the day on which the news regarding refuelling of US Air Force planes in India appeared, an official spokesman of the Indian government said that the government had recently granted some US air force planes transit and refueling facilities in Bombay "in keeping with our (India's) friendly relations" with that country (US).

The government spokesman clarified that the permission was given for the purpose of carrying non-lethal supplies, including medicines, and for evacuation of personnel on medical, humanitarian and emergency grounds.
The spokesman also said that the US government had agreed to replace the fuel supplied to the aircraft.

In his reply to a question from a journalist, he said the planes had “obviously” landed with prior notice. The spokesman told the press that he was not in a position to say whether the American planes were inspected to check the nature of the cargo or whether there was any set procedure for inspecting such aircraft in transit. But he stated, “As far as we are aware, they were carrying non-lethal supplies”

On 28 January, 1991 itself sources in the Ministry of Civil Aviation said in New Delhi that the Ministry had nothing to do with the refuelling of Indian or foreign military aircraft.

When US Embassy in New Delhi was contacted for its reaction to the refuelling issue, its spokesman said his government did not, as a rule, comment on the movement of military aircraft.

But informed sources pointed out that India was a party to the UN Security Council resolution calling for withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. And therefore India could not deny refueling facilities to the US aircraft.27

But political parties in India, including the Congress(I) a principal supporter of the Chandra Shekhar government – were not at all satisfied with an explanation given by the government. the

Congress(I) in fact was one of the most vocal critics of the Chandra Shekhar government. The Congress (I) spokesman V.N. Gadgil said, "the minority government" had no right "to deviate from India's consistent and principle-based policy." So it was for the first time ever since the Congress(I) extended support to the Chandra Shekhar government that it termed the government a "minority government".

Gadgil said, "The government" had "clearly deviated from India's consistent policy without consulting Parliament which was in session at that time (till 11th January) or the political parties." The Congress(I) spokesman said that it had been India's policy to refuse all aircraft carrying military supplies for war permission to use Indian air space.

Gadgil also said that his party wanted to know whether, before permission was granted, any clarification was sought by India's permanent representative to the UN from the Secretary-General regarding the provisions of the UN Charter under which permission to refuel was sought.

Gadgil was accompanied by Romesh Bhandari, Convener of the Foreign Affairs Cell of the All India Congress Committee. Both of them gave the impression that the Congress(I) party had found an issue from which the government would find it extremely difficult to dissociate itself.
Yet another political leader from the Congress(I), Professor K.K. Tewary, a former Minister of State for External Affairs in the government of Rajiv Gandhi said that it was shocking that the Chandra Shekhar government had allowed refuelling of American transport planes at Bombay. According to Tewary it was “an unmitigated crime against the nation and the people of India” for which the Chandra Shekhar must have gone “lock, stock, and barrel”. So Congress(I) leaders considered the Chandra Shekhar government’s decision to allow US military planes to refuel in India as violation of India’s policies.28

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) and other parties also reacted to the refuelling of US planes in India. Representatives of the Delhi state units of Janata Dal, Congress(S), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the RSP, and Forward Bloc had a meeting in Delhi on 29 January, 1991 to plan what they called a “massive campaign against the Gulf war unleashed by the US and its stooges. “The parties gave a call for demonstration in front of the US Embassy on 5 February, 1991. This huge demonstration was to be preceded by four public meeting in four parts of Delhi city, Karol Bagh, Nizamuddin, Kalkaji and Shahdara.

CPM spokesman Jogendra Sharma said, “for the first time since independence, an Indian government openly and shamelessly

sold out its foreign policy to the US." The CPM spokesman also said that anti-war demonstrations were not being banned even in the US, but Indian government banned them, and even lathi-charged the demonstrators.

The leaders also called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in the Gulf and resolution of Palestine problem. The spokesman, Jogendra Sharma said that the US had no business to attack any third world country and US war against Iraq had to be stopped first.29

Gurudas Dasgupta, a CPI parliamentarian described the refuelling permission given to the US military transport planes as "atrocious". He said that in the past India had never "sold out its airports" to any war-mongring nation. Dasgupta also said "If the step had been taken for the sake of IMF loans, then we (India) should forego such loans."30

There was another news item that appeared in The Times of India next day on 29 January 1991 about refuelling of US planes in India. The report said that a C-141 transport aircraft of the US Air Force got refuelled at Sahar airport in Bombay.

The same news report also stated that the International Airports of India (IAAI) had levied a charge of nearly Rs. 25,000 for

29 The Times of India, 30 January, 1991. p. II.
30 op. cit. p. 7.
each aircraft per halt. But the newspaper also reported that a section of the employees in three airlines – Indian Airlines, Air India, and Vayudoot – was upset over the fact that while the Indian government had cut the supply of aviation turbine fuel to three carriers by 25 per cent, the US military planes were exempted from the restriction.31

Congress(I) party in its continuing political campaign on refuelling issue next day accused the predecessor of Chandra Shekhar, that is, former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh of granting permission to the US military planes for refuelling in India. Another spokesman of the Congress(I), M.J. Akbar said on 29 January 1991 that the V.P. Singh government allowed the US Air Force transport planes to avail refuelling facilities in India since September, 1990.

M.J. Akbar asserted that the decision of the V.P. Singh government was there in the official files M.J. Akbar demanded that the Chandra Shekhar government should tell the country all details of what happened in September, 1990. And Akbar also demanded that the Chandra Shekhar government should review he decisions of its predecessor on the refueling issue.

When asked to comment on the report that V.P. Singh was shocked to know that US aeroplanes were getting refuelled in India,

M.J. Akbar said “I can only be shocked at the shock of the Janata Dal. V.P. Singh’s hypocrisy on this subject is on par with his hypocrisy on so many other issues. If the Janata Dal has any self-respect, they cannot allow a person (V.P. Singh) who has betrayed India to remain in any responsible position in public life. One of the governments that colluded with US interest and betrayed the independence of India’s foreign policy was that of V.P. Singh’s. It is he who will go down as the first Prime Minister to barter away the country’s interest”.

M.J. Akbar also accused V.P. Singh of keeping quiet over the refuelling issue because his National Front government knew in August–September, 1990 that the US State and Defence Departments were planning the Gulf war. At one level the US was mobilizing support for the UN Security Council , and at other level it was working out its military requirements.

According to M.J. Akbar, due to the National Front government’s collusion with US interests it suffered from a deep guilt, particularly about approaching Iraq and taking any step to prevent the war.

When M.J. Akbar was asked by a press reporter whether the Chandra Shekhar government should have implemented the previous (V.P. Singh) government’s agreement, Akbar said that it
should not have. Therefore his Congress(l) party was in favour of reviewing the agreement.

Another spokesman of the Congress(l), V.N. Gadgil remarked that what was more objectionable was that the US military planes were flying to and from the war zone.32

In the ongoing process of levelling charges and counter-charges against one’s political opponents on 29 January, 1991 the former minister for External Affairs Inder Kumar Gujral in V.P. Singh’s government firmly denied Congress spokesman’s claim that V.P. Singh government decided to allow the US military planes to refuel in India I.K. Gujral said he was surprised by M.J. Akbar’s statement in this respect. I.K. Gujral also said, it was “a fib being floated to get out of the jam in which the Congress found itself stuck”.33

On 29 January, 1991 Former Prime Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, said that there should be an emergency session of the UN Security Council to end the Gulf War. He also demanded that there should be a special session of Parliament to discuss the Iraq-Kuwait issue. V.P. Singh accused the Chandra Shekhar government of echoing the American view after getting heavy loans from the

33 The Times of India, 30 January, 1991, p. 5.
International monetary Fund V.P. Singh also observed that prior to getting loans from IMF the Indian government was pro-Palestine.34

On 29 January, 1991 itself another former Prime Minister and the Congress (I) leader Rajiv Gandhi suggested that India’s Permanent Representative to the UN should ask for an immediate meeting of the Security Council to review progress of implementation resolution 678 which authorized the US-led alliance to use force against Iraq.

Rajiv Gandhji wrote a four-page long letter to Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar in which he argued that the US gave peace no chance. According to him, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq had not closed door for negotiations for a peaceful solution to the Gulf crisis. And inspite of that, the multi-national forces attacked Iraq immediately after the expiry of deadline. Rajiv Gandhi cited two quotations in favour of this argument. He referred to a statement published in a Milan-based weekly by the UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar that the Gulf war was not the UN’s War. Rajiv Gandhi also quoted the Soviet Union’s President Mikhail Gorbachev’s statement that while Gorbachev was in constant touch with Washington to urge Americans to delay the use of force, “the peaceful path was summarily rejected”.

Rajiv Gandhi urged Chandra Shekhar government to verify from the official records of the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi whether the extracts quoted from De Cuellar's report were accurate. Rajiv Gandhi argued that if those reports concerning De Cuellar were accurate, then why did not the Indian representative to the UN seek longer time for a peaceful solution so that at least India would have been seen doing its best to find peaceful resolution to the dispute before resorting to the war.

Rajiv Gandhi pointed out in his letter that the war instead of restoring the sovereignty of Kuwait was hitting Iraq relentlessly. There was a large scale destruction of civilian, economic, and industrial targets besides military installations. Rajiv Gandhi also expressed his concern over the attacks on holy places such as Najaf and Karbala, and damage to archaeological and historical heritage of one of the oldest civilizations.

Rajiv Gandhi stated in his letter to the Prime Minister that the tragedy of a prolonged war must be averted, and urged the Indian government to bring about a cessation of hostilities.

It is noteworthy that while his party was busy criticizing Chandra Shekhar and V.P. Singh governments for granting the US Air Force planes refuelling facilities in India, Rajiv Gandhi's letter to
the Prime Minister did not even make a cursory reference to that issue.35

While the two former Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh were not quite happy with the way US and its allies handled the Iraq-Kuwait dispute, Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar said that it was Iraq which should have paved the way for ending the Gulf War by showing some flexibility. Chandra Shekhar in an interview to an editor of a Urdu daily Quami Awaz, Mohan Chirage said, "President Saddam Hussein did not ask or consult anybody before annexing Kuwait".

Chandra Shekhar also said that if the war continued it would adversely affect India. Therefore India needed to make efforts for bringing an early end to the war.36

As a part of the ongoing political controversy in India over the refuelling of US planes, 6 members of Lok Sabha -four of them were Independents- threatened to withdraw their support from the Chandra Shekhar government to protest against the government's decision. An independent member of Lok Sabha, Mohammed Hassan Commander said that the Chandra Shekhar government's decision to extend refuelling facilities to the US planes in Bombay was "tantamount to a total breach of trust" which the Iraqi

government reposed in India and "a sell out to American imperialism."

The other MPs who attended a meeting along with Mohammed Hassan Commander were Munnan Khan, Mohanbhai Delkar, Devji Jogibhai Tande, all Independents, Nandu Thapa of Sikkim Sangram Parishad, and Rajdev Singh of the Akali Dal (Mann).37

Protests, demonstrations, anti-war rallies, organised by political parties, peace activists continued in India during the US-led multinational coalition's effort to evict Iraq from Kuwait. These protests were mainly to pressure the Chandra Shekhar government for reviewing its decision to allow the US planes avail refuelling facilities in India. Refuelling was underway amidst these protests at home. And during this period, Parliament was in recess since 12 January, 1991. So political parties, especially Congress(I) and Leftist parties were protesting on the streets.

But as soon as the budget session of Parliament approached, focus of attention shifted to politics inside the Parliament. The budget session was scheduled to commence from 21 February, 1991. Congress(I) and Leftist parties had sought resignation of the Chandra Shekhar government. Though BJP was also in favour of ending war in the Gulf, it did not blame either Chandra Shekhar or

V.P. Singh government for refuelling; nor did the BJP seek resignation of the Prime Minister. But there was constant pressure on the Chandra Shekhar government to review policy on refuelling.

On 19 February, 1991 that is just two days ahead of the budget session, the Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs disclosed in New Delhi that the US government had decided to make “alternative arrangements for transit halts and refuelling of their transport aircraft bound to and from the Gulf.” The spokesman refused to answer various questions including whether the Indian government had made any suggestion in this regard to the US administration.38

Subsequently there was a softening of the stand adopted by the Congress(I) over the issue of refuelling. Though Congress(I) leadership did not stop criticizing the Chandra Shekhar government for violating well-established policy of non-alignment, the party at least refrained from repeating the threats of withdrawl of support from the government. The party spokesman V.N. Gadgil said that though it was difficult to keep all the party members in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha together, the party leadership would ensure that the government did not fall for want of Congress(I) votes.

But at the same time Congress(I) spokesman made two important points. Firstly with the beginning of the budget session,

centre of political activity would shift to Parliament. And secondly, that when the Congress(l) decided to support the Chandra Shekhar government in November, 1990 despite being the single largest party in a hung Lok Sabha, no political party except the BJP was in favour of mid-term elections. At that time others feared that there would be a lot of violence, and also they were not sure whether a clear verdict would emerge in a polarised atmosphere. By the third week of February 1991, there was a “slight improvement in the situation”.

The Congress(l) spokesman also added that the Congress(l) party was not going to accept any deviation from the national policy of non-alignment nor was it going to compromise on any of the basic tenets of Congress ideology, whether internationally or internally.

The Congress Working Committee also took note of the “bold initiative” taken by Rajiv Gandhi on the Gulf issue. Party spokesman Gadgil said that Rajiv Gandhi had once again shown that he was the only leader with “an international standing and an international constituency”.39

As scheduled, the budget session began on 21 February, 1991 with the President’s address to the joint sitting of members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Members of Opposition parties

boycotted the address of the President to Parliament to protest against the Chandra Shekhar government's decision to seek just a vote on-account instead of presenting a full-fledged budget. So there was no general budget nor was there railway budget. And even the duration of the budget session was curtailed from three months to three weeks. The government had to change the scheduled business of Parliament due to pressure from Congress(I) leadership.

But next day on 22 February, 1991 when the two Houses of Parliament began their sittings, there were acrimonious and heated exchanges between the opposition members and the ruling Janata Dal (S) and Congress(I) members. While the opposition party members wanted an immediate debate on the refuelling controversy, ruling party members were in favour of transacting the normal business of the two Houses first, and then taking up the refuelling issue. Having immediate debate on the refuelling of US military planes in India would have implied suspension of the crucial Question Hour. During Question Hour, parliamentarians get an opportunity to seek answers from government ministries and departments to questions of public importance. Whenever there is any vital issue to be debated, Question Hour is suspended, other scheduled business of the House is put aside and the concerned

subject is discussed on a priority basis. In order to get this thing done, those members of House who seek any such change in the schedule they have to convince the concerned presiding officer, Speaker in case of Lok Sabha, and Chairperson in case of Rajya Sabha. It involves a lot of procedural wrangling between those legislators who want to adjourn the already decided business and take up the unforeseen issue because of its immediate relevance, and those who would like to go by the schedule which is very often determined by the government.

It is noteworthy that normally there is one or the other political motive in either opposing or supporting any such move. While members of Rajya Sabha could resolve this procedural matter within the first few minutes of the Question Hour, Lok Sabha consumed the entire question Hour just to decide whether to suspend it or not and to take up the sensational subject of refuelling. And it took Lok Sabha yet another 22 minutes of the following Zero Hour to settle the matter.

Chairperson of Rajya Sabha, Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma told the House that he had received two notices seeking suspension of Question Hour under Rule 267 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Rajya Sabha. One of those two notices was jointly signed by M.S. Gurupadswamy, Dipen Ghosh, N.E. Balaram, Dr. Nagen Saikia, Debabrata Biswas, and Sukomal Sen. And the
other notice was signed by Mohammed Afzal. So the Chairperson gave consent to M.S. Gurupadswamy to move the motion, and M.S. Gurupadswamy initiated the discussion on Gulf War in Rajya Sabha.41

Speaker of Lok Sabha Rabi Ray, informed the House that he had received thirty four notices of Adjournment Motion regarding failure of government (of Chandra Shekhar) to take timely decision about stoppage of refuelling of US planes and proper initiatives in regard to Gulf War compatible with the pronounced national foreign policy from 34 members. Names of those members were as follows:

1. Yamuna Prasad Shastry
2. Santosh Bhartiya
3. K.S. Chavda
4. Professor Saifuddin Soz
5. Professor Madhu Dandavate
6. Indrajit Gupta
7. Dr. Chinta Mohan
8. Manjay Lal
9. Dr. Venkatesh Kabde
10. M.S. Pal
11. Hari Kishore Singh
12. Ram Singh
13. Taslimuddin

14. Inder Kumar Gujral
15. Dr. S.P. Yadav
16. Palas Barman
17. Srikant Jena
18. Anadi Charan Das
19. A.K. Roy
20. Basudeb Acharia
21. Dr. Biplab Das Gupta
22. Sudarshan Ray Chaudhari
23. Subhashini Ali
24. Gopal Pacherwal
25. Somnath Chatterjee
26. Saifuddin Choudhury
27. Harishanker Mahale
28. Ram Vilas Paswan
29. Bhajman Behera
30. Harsh Vardhan
31. Yusuf Beg
32. Ganga Charan Lodhi
33. K.P. Unnikrishnan and
34. Chitta Basu

Speaker of Lok Sabha, Rabi Ray gave his consent to A.K. Roy who had secured first place in the ballot to move the motion in the following form: “Failure of Government to take timely decision about
stoppage of refuelling of US aeroplanes and proper initiatives in regard to the Gulf War compatible with the pronounced national foreign policy".42

While Rajya Sabha debated the refuelling controversy for over two days, on 22 and 25 February, 1991, Lok Sabha concluded the discussion on 22 February, itself. Prime Minister replied to the debate in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Both the Houses passed an identical resolution on 22 February, 1991 expressing concern over the destruction and devastation unleashed by the war in the Gulf, and the danger it posed to international peace and security. The resolution called for mobilisation of global support for the Gorbachev proposals to end hostilities and pave the way for lasting peace in the region.43 The Adjournment Motion on refuelling in Lok Sabha involved voting immediately after the debate. So the Congress (I) opposed the motion and supported the Janata Dal (Samajwadi) government of Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar. While the BJP members abstained from voting, other opposition parties mainly the communist parties and National Front voted in favour of the Adjournment Motion censuring the Chandra Shekhar government. So the motion was defeated by 206 vote to 83.44

A.K. Roy of Marxist Coordination Committee from Dhanbad Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar moved the Adjournment Motion on refuelling in Lok Sabha. There were other members who followed him in the debate. They were M.J. Akbar, I.K. Gujral, Jaswant Singh, Eduardo Faleiro, Indrajit Gupta, Sudarsan Raychaudhari, Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait, Chitta Basu, Saifuddin Soz, Inder Jit, Thambi Durai, Yadendra Datta, Samarendra Kundu, Guman Mal Lodha, Ram Krishan Yadav, P.V. Narasimha Rao, and Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar. Other members who intervened in the debate were Somnath Chatterjee, Nirmal Kanti Chaterjee, Tarit Baran Topdar, Yamuna Prasad Shastri, Mallikarjun, Shopat Singh Makkasar, Madhu Dandavate, Anil Basu, Biplab Dasgupta, Subramaniam Swamy, Srikant Jena, Vasant Sathe, J. Jamuna. Lok Sabha began discussion on Adjournment Motion at 12.22 noon and continued till 18.00 hours in the evening. Motion was put to vote and outcome was announced by 18.13 hours. The House adopted a unanimous resolution at 18.25, which was placed at 18.20 before the House by the Speaker himself.45

Rajya Sabha discussed the refuelling issue for two days, on 22 and 25 February 1991. M.S. Gurupadswamy, a Rajya Sabha member elected from Uttar Pradesh initiated the debate. Others who followed him on 22 February itself were G. Swaminathan,

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There were other Rajya Sabha members who took part in the debate on 25 February, 1991. They were M.M. Jacob, M.A. Baby, Bhuvnesh Chaturvedi, Dinesh Goswami, Mohammed Afzal, S.S. Ahluwalia, Sourendra Bhattacharjee, Dr. Abrar Ahmed, P. Upendra, Ram Avadhesh Singh, and Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar. 47

A.K. Roy while moving motion for adjournment in Lok Sabha termed the Gulf War as the ‘biggest problem’ facing both India and the outside world. He considered US-led multinational coalition’s attempts to liberate Kuwait from the illegal occupation of Iraq as a ‘blatant aggression’, and ‘crime’ in the name of liberation and justice. Roy argued that the coalition’s military action against Iraq of using about one lakh sorties and dropping more than one lakh tones of TNT was six to seven times more than whatever was

dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and people died. In the opinion of A.K. Roy, Gulf War affected India economically, political and culturally. Roy very rightly pointed out that India enjoyed friendly relations with the Arab World, and especially Iraq, a country which had stood by India on various occasions.48

A.K. Roy said that India's friend Iraq was in trouble because it was being bombarded every day by the US, "an imperialist" country, and a "so-called super power". According to Roy, Iraq-Kuwait dispute was an intra-Arab dispute, and the US-led coalition had no business to interfere. Roy opined that India should have told Iraq also that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was not proper. But he regretted that the Indian government of Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar did not act in that way. He said that he had sent a telegram asking the Indian government to convene a special session of Parliament to decide on the issue of refuelling. He criticized the Chandra Shekhar government for not doing so. Roy accused the Chandra Shekhar government of rather callously watching the destruction of Iraq.

A.K. Roy questioned the very honesty and sincerity of the Indian government in having a debate on the refuelling controversy. He pointed out that neither the senior minister in the government nor the Prime Minister himself was present in Lok Sabha when this

discussion got underway. And what was “more shameful” according to Roy was that the Chandra Shekhar government granted refuelling facilities to the US military planes in India. And this was done despite the objections raised by all political parties, including the government’s “godfather”, “mentor” the Congress(!) party. The government of Chandra Shekhar was accused of moving away from the traditional policy of non-alignment and also of colluding with the US which according to him was “shameful”.

Roy also questioned the American double standards over implementing UN resolutions on Kuwait instantaneously but not doing anything about UN resolutions on Palestine which were adopted much earlier. For instance resolution 242 of 1987, resolution 465 of 1980, resolution 478 of 1980 require Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territory, end to Israeli settlements in occupied territories, and give up claims over Jerusalem as capital respectively.

A.K. Roy disagreed with the US interpretation of the UN resolution 678 authorising the US and its allies to take any action against Iraq to evict it from Kuwait. Roy said that American aggression was without any basis. Roy thought that Indian government’s silence over the US action against Iraq was perhaps because of the fear that IMF loans to India would be affected. Roy

condemned the Chandra Shekhar government for approving the “blatant aggression” against a friendly country Iraq.

Roy concluded by censuring the Indian government for its failure to rise up to the occasion in an hour of crisis and to uphold the honour of the country.\textsuperscript{50}

Next speaker M.J. Akbar of Congress (I) party began by asking a couple of questions whether India shall be a nation-state or municipality? Whether foreign policy of a nation shall be guided by an independent morality or by somebody else?; whether India shall be a municipality which runs at the behest of foreign powers, particularly those powers which subjugated India in the past and were supposed to have left on 15 August, 1947. M.J. Akbar said that he felt sad because Chandra Shekhar government “abdicated its responsibility” in responding to a “very serious situation” in the Gulf. He was of the view that had Indian government been active in bringing peace to the Gulf, there would have been an Indo-Soviet peace initiative, instead of merely a Soviet peace initiative.

M.J. Akbar said that the reason why there was a debate was that the Chandra Shekhar government shifted country’s foreign policy from deep ideological commitment to populism or popular values. Policies, especially foreign policies are not made by budgets alone, said M.J. Akbar. He reminded the government that any

\textsuperscript{50} Debates, Lok Sabha, 22 February, 1991, col. 474-491.
government cannot be reduced to an accountant thinking of profit and loss only. He also argued that if foreign policy does not evolve from ideology, it leads to confusion and to betrayal. M.J. Akbar advised the Indian government not to follow the example of Pakistan, a country based on “false ideologies”.

M.J. Akbar argued that abdication of Indian foreign policy began since V.P. Singh’s prime ministership. According to M.J. Akbar, the refuelling decision was preceded by something even worse, by a larger and a bigger sell out of the Indian interests in August -September, 1990 when the V.P. Singh government, by an unprecedented decision allowed the use of air corridor for US planes.

M.J. Akbar accused V.P. Singh and I.K. Gujral of misleading the nation over the issue of refuelling. He said that refuelling is allowed in peace time and there is nothing wrong in it. But allowing refuelling to military aeroplanes during war cannot be justified. He charged both V.P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar governments with granting American military planes permission to refuel in India during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm respectively.51

There is no documentary proof available in the public domain about whether V.P. Singh or Chandra Shekhar government allowed

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US to refuel its planes. But M.J. Akbar said in Lok Sabha that V.P. Singh government secretly allowed the US to use air corridor, and also to refuel in India. And he said that Chandra Shekhar merely continued the policy adopted by V.P. Singh government.

I.K. Gujral spoke after M.J. Akbar. Gujral refuted the allegations made against the V.P. Singh government. Rather he accused M.J. Akbar of mixing facts and not sticking to truth. Gujral reminded Congress (I) members that it was during the 1980s when Indira Gandhi was in power that foreign ships and planes were allowed to pass through the Indian skies and waters. Those planes and ships were also provided rest, recreation, and refuelling facilities. Gujral said that he agreed with those policies of Indira Gandhi because they were part of her larger efforts to improve India's relations with other countries. Gujral very rightly said that foreign policy was a matter of consensus, and above narrow partisan interests. Therefore, he urged critics of refuelling or overflight permission to take a holistic perspective of the situation.

I.K. Gujral told the Lok Sabha that he tried his best to avoid the war. Neither he nor his leader V.P. Singh assumed that was inevitable. Therefore he went to the United Nations, Moscow, Baghdad to pursue peaceful resolution of Iraq-Kuwait dispute. But Gujral said that his government did not want to send a message
that anti-warrism meant anti-Americanism. He said that he was not anti-American either in the past or present and even in future.

But Gujral accused the Chandra Shekhar government of indecisiveness. He said that India should have demanded cease-fire immediately after the military coalition's war against Iraq. He also charged the Chandra Shekhar government with ignoring the non-Aligned movement. (NAM).52

After Gujral, it was the turn of BJP member Jaswant Singh to take part in the debate. Jaswant Singh began by saying that a much wider subject of great importance to India was unfortunately reduced to an issue of approval or disapproval of censure motion against Chandra Shekhar government. He claimed to have been struck by a sense of irony that participants in the government criticized it. He said that BJP which was in opposition wanted discussion on the over all Gulf policy, rather than merely on refuelling. Therefore, Jaswant Singh told the Lok Sabha that BJP did not entirely agree with the adjournment motion.

Jaswant Singh recalled that reberthing and refuelling facilities were extended by Indira Gandhi in 1984 to the US. So he argued that if that decision of Indira Gandhi was based on non-alignment, why not the decisions of other governments. He criticized Congress (I) and other opponents of refuelling for being

narrow minded and partisan. And he told them non-alignment cannot be reduced to merely and blindly anti-Americanism or anti-Sovietism.

Jaswant Singh said that the BJP wanted peaceful resolution of Iraq-Kuwait and Israel-Arab problems. He said that United Nations should play a crucial role in settlement of these disputes. But Jawant Singh regretted that members from Congress(I) and other parties did not show adequate interest in discussing all these issues in great detail. He urged the members who were saying that non-alignment was compromised, to review the policy of non-alignment itself in the rapidly changing world.⁵³

Rest of the debate that proceeded in Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha took place along the customary party lines. Members of Congress(I) and socialist parties criticized the Chandra Shekhar government for allowing US planes to refuel in India to attack against Iraq and violating India's traditional policy of non-alignment. And this is quite natural because India-US relations have experienced ups and downs several times.

But as far as politicisation of the refuelling issue by Congress(I) was concerned it was out of political compulsions. Rajiv Gandhi thought that when the country was polarized along the liens of caste and religion, by taking a different stand Congress(I)

could better its electoral performance. So Rajiv Gandhi and his party attempted to combine the issues of “non-alignment, Indian nationalism (opposing super power domination), and support of Indian Muslims for Iraq”. Members of BJP disagreed with the criticism of government made by Congress(l) and socialist members.

Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar in his reply in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha as well refused to go into the past controversies when foreign planes and ships were allowed to refuel in India. He said that raising the past matters was inappropriate. He refuted allegations of violating the policy of non-alignment by allowing refuelling during war time, and betraying Iraq by supporting US imperialism. Prime Minister told the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members that international scenario had changed a lot. Countries like China and the Soviet Union also did not openly oppose the US-led multinational coalition forces.

Chandra Shekhar said that India’s national interest was more important to him than ‘universalised patriotism’ preached by his critics to him. He said that there was no point in supporting Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait or US action against Iraq. But he said that flexibility was to be shown by everybody. He called for support to Gorbachev’s peace proposals.

By the time debate in Parliament was over, Rajiv Gandhi was preparing to leave on a peace mission to Teheran via Moscow. This was a significant domestic and to some extent international achievement for Rajiv Gandhi and his party. Chandra Shekhar government being a minority government did not have the required support or legitimacy to take any such initiative. Even the foreign minister in Chandra Shekhar government did not have that much interest and legitimacy in foreign policy since he was disqualified from Lok Sabha membership for violating anti-defection law.