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# Gandhi ends first year flexing muscles as euphoria fades

**NEW DELHI**—Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has vowed to take tough action to conquer what he sees as India's political and social ills after basking in a year-long glow of triumph for hauling the country back from the brink of widespread unrest.

Cracks have started appearing in the national euphoria swirling around the former airline pilot who succeeded his murdered mother as a political novice 14 months ago and then went on to score a record general election victory.

Both Gandhi's friends and opponents say he starts 1986 facing strong challenges to his leadership of India's 750 million people after the year of showpiece successes.

As India's youngest leader at 41 and with only four years in politics, Gandhi won praise even from critics or defusing major domestic and foreign crises.

Gandhi, speaking against a backdrop of electoral setbacks for his Congress (I) Party delivered a blistering indictment of the ills plaguing Indian society at centenary celebrations of the party last week.

Normally mild-mannered Gandhi thundered that the country was riddled with grasping people devoid of competence and integrity. He vowed to change India from top to bottom.

He also lambasted his own party. Saying it contained many power brokers and was drifting away from the people because of its preoccupation with ruling.

He appeared to step back from visions of a headlong, High-technology journey into the 21st century by calling on his countrymen to shun foreign goods and return to the simple values of Mahatma Gandhi, who spearheaded India's struggle for freedom from British rule.

Gandhi, who had promised 'a government that works faster', was clearly worried about growing criticism that his policies could hit domestic industry and the 300 million Indians living below the poverty line.

Respected commentator G.K. Reddy wrote in the Hindu newspaper that Gandhi planned to give his 'undivided attention' to domestic issues in 1986 and had put off visits to Australia and New Zealand scheduled for February.

'His advisers have begun noticing some undercurrents of public impatience with the tardy performance of the government despite his continued popularity with the people,' Reddy said.

Congress (I) sources said party workers were also upset that access to the prime minister, who is surrounded by tight security, was more difficult than to his mother and predecessor Indira Gandhi.

Party veterans feel that peace accords Rajiv Gandhi clinched in strife-torn Assam and Punjab were seen by minority groups as sell-outs and led to crushing defeats for Congress (I) in elections in both states.

In a sign of growing political polarisation, regional groups like Punjab's Akali Dal and the Assam People's Front have emerged as a major force in the Lok Sabha, parliament's lower house, occupying 65 of its 544 seats.

Congress (I) won an unprecedented three-fourths majority in parliament a year ago but opposition groups now rule nine of India's 22 states, elbowing the party aside in key strongholds and confining it to the Hindi-speaking north.

'The party's central leadership seems to have lost many of its organic organisational links,' Amalendu Das Gupta, editor of the conservative Statesman newspaper wrote last Tuesday.

Das Gupta said 1985 had been marked by 'hasty and amateurish tinkering with problems of great complexity, and generally by inadequate comprehension of much of the intractable Indian reality.'

Gandhi savagely attacked opposition groups last week, saying 'their ideological roots are shallow, their political outlook circumscribed by region, caste and religion, wherever they have come to power, they have retarded social and economic progress.'

But the Times of India newspaper, normally a staunch Gandhi supporter, said Gandhi's moralistic tone and reformist anger could not serve as a 'sensible blueprint for action.'

'He spoke with the zeal and urgency of a crusader, as if the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah awaited India unless someone rescued it in time,' the newspaper said in an editorial.