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# SANJAY KILLED IN AIR CRASH

## A personal tribute

By Khushwant Singh

No greater tragedy could have hit India than the passing of this young man on whom millions of Indians pinned their hopes for a better future. As the lights go out of our homes, our hearts go out to Indira Gandhi and Maneka, two-month-old Feroze Varuna, Rajeev and Sonia and Amteshwar Anand. We dip our flags in salute to this intrepid young man.

I had known Sanjay over the last many years and became very fond of him. Some of it was no doubt due to the farrago of calumny that had been let loose against him by wicked politicians and self-styled intellectuals of our cities. It was like a father fighting back to defend his wrongly maligned son. But it was more due to his many qualities: a warm heart, a puckish sense of humour, fierce sense of loyalty towards those who stood by him—and, above all, a demonic zeal to get things done without bureaucratic fuss or fanfare. He was a living example of practising what he preached: *kam ziyada baten kam*—more work, less talk.

I will cherish many happy memories of him: driving his little Maruti over ploughed land and stubble, with him urging me to let it go full throttle; of his visit to Bombay facing a crowd, hurling vile abuse, with a gentle smile on his face and counselling fiery Maneka to hold her peace. Then of Sanjay triumphant; flowers and deafening roar: *Desh ka नेता—Sanjay Gandhi!*

I met him last only a few days ago. I had lots of recommendations, *sifarish*, to make and he had given me half-an-hour of his time to do so. I had selected only six. He took exactly six minutes to say "No" six times and sent me off with a cup of tea to play with his son. I blessed him for being so decisive. No false promises, no evasive silences.

Sanjay was an unusual politician; outspoken, honest, blunt. His "no" meant "no," not "maybe." His "yes" meant "yes," it will be done. Not "perhaps" or "I'll see what I can do."

We bid farewell to our young departed leader with tears that will take an age to wipe off our eyes. His dying has made us rarer gifts than gold. He has laid the world away and poured out the red wine of youth, and given up the years that were to be his.

The best tribute the nation can pay him is to create the India of his dreams: green with teeming forests, cleansed of all the filth in its cities; with small healthy families and smiling happy girls freed of worry over their dowries.

## Co-pilot in 2-seater also dead

## Mishap near home

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—Mr Sanjay Gandhi, son of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, died in a plane crash near Willingdon Crescent here this morning.**

Capt. Subhash Saxena, a former Chief Instructor of the Delhi Flying Club who accompanied Mr Gandhi in the plane—a two-seater Pitts—also died in the crash. The plane had taken off from the Safdarjung Airport about 8 a.m. and crashed about 8-10 a.m.

According to an official spokesman, "it was not clear who flew the plane. Both Mr Gandhi and Mr Saxena were qualified to fly it. The plane was duly certified and cleared by the Director-General of Civil Aviation."

The plane struck a tree before crashing down by the side of some barracks behind the NDMC housing complex, Palika Vihar, in Willingdon Crescent. Incidentally, Mr Gandhi's house—12, Willingdon Crescent—was not far from the accident site.

The plane did not catch fire but plenty of smoke was emitted by its wreckage, according to eye-witnesses. The wreckage was limited to a small area.

At 8-10 a.m. the Safdarjung Airport control tower saw the aircraft going behind Ashok Hotel. When it was no longer noticeable and about 10 minutes passed, the airport sounded the sirens. The driver of Mr Gandhi's car rushed to the spot of the possible accident.

As the news spread, Mrs Gandhi's Cabinet colleagues, Vice-President M. Hidayatullah, the service chiefs, top Government officials including the Lt-Governor, and several important political leaders reached the hospital.

The medical formalities at the hospital were over by 1-45 p.m. when Mr Sanjay Gandhi's body was decked with flowers was taken on a police van to the Prime Minister's house. Mrs Gandhi and Mrs Maneka sat beside the body on the van.

Mr Rajiv Gandhi, Mrs Gandhi's elder son, and his family who are

## Cremation today at Shanti Vana

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—The funeral of Mr Sanjay Gandhi will take place at Shanti Vana, the crematorium of his grandfather Jawahar Lal Nehru, tomorrow evening.**

The funeral procession will start from the 1, Safdarjung Road residence of the Prime Minister at 4 p.m. and is scheduled to reach Shanti Vana at 6 p.m.

The delay in the funeral was inevitable as Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the elder son of Mrs Gandhi, was away with his family in Italy on a holiday.

Mr Rajiv Gandhi is expected to reach here by tomorrow morning. Mr Sanjay Gandhi's mother-in-law who is also abroad is expected to return home tomorrow.

The decision regarding the funeral site was finalised this afternoon after Mrs Gandhi accompanied by Lt-Governor Jagmohan visited the Shanti Vana.

The Delhi Police after working out the arrangements announced

tonight that the procession will pass through Akbar Road, Gole Market, Kirti Nagar, Menon Marg, Chowk, Rajpath, India Gate, Tilak Marg, Indraprastha Marg and King Road.

Road users have been asked to follow the instructions of the traffic policemen along the procession route. No vehicle will be allowed to be parked anywhere along the route and cross-traffic will not be permitted at any point while the procession is passing through.

Unlabelled vehicles may be parked behind the Red Fort in the open ground or in the ground opposite Raj Ghat, the police spokesman said.

The body of Captain Subhash Saxena, former Chief Instructor of the Delhi Flying Club, who died along with Mr Sanjay Gandhi this morning will be cremated tomorrow at 12 noon at Nigambodh Ghat.

## Fatal fourth loop in air

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—The brand new, imported red Pitts aircraft that Mr Sanjay Gandhi flew this morning had won the world championship four times in aerobatics.**

This recent acquisition was being tested by the Chief Flying Instructor of the Delhi Flying Club, Capt. Subhash Saxena, who died along with Mr Gandhi. Yesterday morning he had flown Swati Dhirendra Brahmachari and Mrs Maneka Gandhi. Today, he had taken Mr Sanjay Gandhi for a "joy ride."

According to knowledgeable sources, Mr Sanjay Gandhi was in the rear seat, holding the controls.

Licence (CPL) during the Janata regime just to prove that he was in no way favoured.

In aerobatic feats Mr Sanjay Gandhi had scored above other competitors. He excelled in pinpoint landings and exploding balloons with his aircraft propellers in the sky. Besides, he had won several coveted prizes in aerobatics during the Janata regime.

Flying was his passion. Unlike his elder brother, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, who started with a glider and graduated into a good commercial pilot, Mr Sanjay Gandhi, straightaway went for powered flying. The glider to him had limited scope.



The twisted metal remains of the plane which crashed near Willingdon Crescent Mr Sanjay Gandhi and Mr Subhash Saxena, co-pilot.—K. K.

Mr Shyamal Yadav, Congress-I member of Rajya Sabha, was elected president of the All-India Railway Switchmen, Cabinmen and Levermen's Association at its second annual conference in Nagpur on

## Inquiry to be held

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—The Government has decided to hold a court of inquiry to prove the circumstances and causes leading to the plane crash this morning.**

The names of the personnel constituting the court of inquiry will be announced tomorrow. The inquiry is likely to be headed by a former judge of a High Court.

Under the Civil Aviation laws, every air accident has to be investigated either by the Air Safety Directorate of the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) or a higher level court of inquiry appointed by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

Meantime, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism has sent a preliminary report on the Pitts crash to Mrs Gandhi.

According to the Civil Aviation Ministry sources, Mr Sanjay Gandhi was at the rear seat, while Mr Subhash Saxena sat in the front seat of the two-seater single-engine biplane.

## Second visit to crash site

**NEW DELHI, June 23 (UNI)—A grim-faced Mrs Indira Gandhi, her eyes red and swollen, visited the site of the air crash at 3.50 p.m. today.**

Mrs Gandhi emerged from her white Ambassador car and walked a few yards, jumped the rope cordoned off and told the experts inquiring into the crash, "Sanjay was wearing a wrist watch and had a bunch of keys."

Mrs Gandhi was told by the experts and senior police officers that both the wrist watch and the bunch of keys had been deposited in the police station.

## Reddy expresses grief

**NEW DELHI, June 23 (PTI)—President Sanjiva Reddy, in a telephone communication from Tirupati to Mrs Indira Gandhi, said he was shocked to learn about the sudden and sad demise of Sanjay.**

The President said Mr Sanjay Gandhi's passing away at a young age was a great loss to the country.

He said "my wife and I send our heart-felt condolences to you, Maneka and other members of your family in this hour of sorrow. May God give you the strength to bear this irreparable loss."

## 'Nation loses a dynamic force'

**NEW DELHI, June 23 (PTI)—Mr K. N. Modi, president of FICCI, said in a condolence message to the Prime Minister that in Mr Sanjay Gandhi's death, the youth has lost a dynamic force and the country a leader of great promise.**

"Your loss is incalculable and irreparable," he added.

## K. K. Birla's homage

**NEW DELHI, June 23—On the hearing of Mr Sanjay Gandhi's death a grief-stricken Mr K. K. Birla said:**

"I heard the news of Mr Sanjay Gandhi's sad and tragic demise with great shock. The news was unbelievable. I had the good fortune of knowing Sanjay closely for many years. He was just like a member of family to me. He was a dynamic leader with a great vision. A leader in his own right, he was the future hope of the country."

"His unexpected and untimely passing away has come as a stunning blow to the entire nation. The void left by him will never be filled."

"Our sympathies go to the Prime Minister, Maneka and the entire family in this hour of great tragedy. May God grant peace to the departed soul and courage to all of us—his countrymen, to bear the loss with equanimity."

## Plane engine 'stopped' on the dive

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—The engine of the red plane carrying Mr Sanjay Gandhi had apparently stopped while it was swooping down near the crash site behind Willingdon Crescent this morning.**

According to the engine suddenly stopped and the plane spun and nosedived to the ground. It appeared to the persons occupying the plane were trying to crashland.

The plane had narrowly missed hitting the occupied barracks a few yards from the crash site. Seen earlier doing aerobatics, the plane crashed into a small cluster of trees and cut a big branch of a "neem" tree as it forced its way through. In the process it turned into a small mass of twisted metal which gave little indication that

## Engine 'stopped' on the dive

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

its occupants could have survived.

Soon after the accident three fire tenders and two ambulances accompanied by police officers reached the spot. The area was cordoned off. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who was informed about the crash at 8-20 a.m. rushed to the site. With tears in her eyes she reached the place as the bodies of the deceased were being placed in an ambulance. She accompanied them to the Lohia Hospital where the two were declared dead.

As the news of the crash spread, around 9 a.m. large contingents of the armed police arrived on the spot to check the crowds trying to reach the area from all directions. However, despite the heavy



Mrs Indira Gandhi standing below a portrait of Sanjay Gandhi as his body lies on a raised platform in a room of the Akbar Road annexe of the Prime Minister's house in New Delhi on Monday afternoon.—Sondeep Shankar

## Dazed silence, moist eyes

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—As the dark blue police van carrying the remains of Sanjay Gandhi slowly moved up the annexe of 1, Safdarjung Road a lone voice quivering with emotion called out "Jab tak Suraj Chand rahega Sanjay tera naam rahega."**

The silence that followed brought stinging tears to the eyes. The slogan raiser made another attempt but broke down mid-way. "Sanjay, Sanjay" the voice wailed

## Safety limits over city not heeded

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—The two-seater Pitts (S-2A) plane which crashed this morning is specially designed for aerobatic sports, but as a measure of caution its flying below 5,000 feet and above residential areas is prohibited under Indian Aircraft Rules and international flying regulations.**

These precautions were not apparently heeded. Also, according to aviation circles, neither Mr Sanjay Gandhi nor Capt. Subhash Saxena had had any experience in flying this type of aircraft which was the only one to be brought into India.

The plane was imported by a leading businessman in January 1977, but the customs had not cleared it until last month.

It was assembled here and the first person to fly it was Mr Kamender Singh, a Delhi Flying Club instructor, about 10 days ago. Even at that time Mr Gandhi was very keen on flying it, but he was dissuaded from it.

Pitts received the certificate of air worthiness only on Saturday last, and that afternoon and on Sunday Mr Gandhi had flown it. The plane had logged 10 hours when it took off for the ill-fated flight this morning.

As the plane is meant for aerobatics, its flying over high-rise

## Parliament adjourns

**Hindustan Times Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, June 23—Both the Houses of Parliament adjourned for the day today after paying glowing tributes to Mr Sanjay Gandhi, the young parliamentarian, from whom many things were expected by the ruling Congress-I and the Opposition alike.**

Speaker Baisram in the Lok Sabha and Vice-President Hidayatullah in the Rajya Sabha spoke with choked voices of the passing away in tragic circumstances of the young man with great promise.

The adjournment of the Rajya Sabha was a rare gesture, for Mr Sanjay Gandhi, was a member of the Lok Sabha. Normally, the House does not adjourn for the day if a member of the other House dies.

The mood of the members was different today. In the Lok Sabha, of which Mr Sanjay Gandhi was a

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## Glimpes of a restless life—pictorial tribute on page 9.

member since the last January elections, extraordinary tributes were paid to him.

Former Prime Minister Charan Singh, for instance, saw in him the centre of hopes for millions' while, for former External Affairs minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Sanjay's death was "darkness at noon."

As the news of Sanjay's death in an air accident this morning had spread all over the city sufficiently early, members from all sections of the two Houses had gathered in strength as also the party leaders to pay their homage.

Only one figure was missing from them—that of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi—who is also leader of the House. Normally on such occasions, the leader of the House associates with others in paying tributes to a fitting member of the House. Today she was busy elsewhere, presumably making arrangements for the last rites of her beloved son.

Mrs Gandhi's absence from the

## Weather

**Outlook:** Partly cloudy sky. Mainly clear night. Not much change in day temperature.

**Max. Temperature:** 37.5 deg C (minus 2 deg C).

**Min. Temperature:** 27.5 deg C (minus 2 deg C).

**Sunset on Tuesday:** 7.22 p.m.

**Sunrise on Wednesday:** 5.25 a.m.

**Moonset on Tuesday:** 3.02 a.m.

**Moonrise on Wednesday:** 3.37 p.m.

**Relative Humidity:** Max. 88 per cent; Min. 43 per cent.

## Maneka Gandhi grieving for her husband.—HT



Maneka Gandhi sitting close by near the body of her son, was a picture of fortitude. Dark glasses hid her eyes and her cotton sari "pallav" covered her head. The two alighted from the van and she surged forward to lend a hand in carrying the body of Sanjay into the room. The single

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