



Stress and strain

In politically charged Karnataka, words gather the power to unsettle those in authority

No relationship is free of tense moments and conflicting emotions. But the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) alliance in Karnataka seems to have more than its share of stress and strain. The pressures on the post-poll tie-up are from multiple points: the Opposition BJP that believes it was robbed of its mandate, and is looking to win over some of the MLAs of the Congress to topple the government; Congress members, especially those owing allegiance to former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who argue that the chief ministership should not have been handed over to the junior partner, the JD(S); and the leadership of the JD(S) that tries to assert itself within the alliance and expand the party's base at the Congress's expense. With the Lok Sabha election approaching, the stakes are high for all. The JD(S) wants to ensure it gets a good share of the seats as part of the alliance; the Congress realises it will have to concede ground to the JD(S) to keep the BJP out of the political turf, and the BJP knows the importance of being in power at the time of polls. After days of high drama, when the BJP and the Congress herded their MLAs in resorts to protect them from poaching, the pressure point on the government is from Siddaramaiah loyalists. Congress MLA S.T. Somashekar, on being appointed as the chairperson of the Bangalore Development Authority, claimed the city had not seen any development under the coalition government. Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy promptly offered to quit if his style of functioning was found to be unacceptable, forcing a rattled Congress leadership to rush to make amends. While Mr. Siddaramaiah signalled to his supporters and the party leadership he was not manoeuvring to be Chief Minister again, Mr. Somashekar apologised after KPCC president Dinesh Gundu Rao said he was at fault.

That a statement by one MLA can create such a storm speaks to the structural instability of the arrangement. The Congress and the JD(S) came together in a marriage of convenience; the JD(S) was allowed to head the government to prevent it from entering into a deal with the BJP. The only thing the Congress could offer the JD(S) that the BJP could not was the chief ministership. This was no gesture of magnanimity; only pragmatic deal-making. As negotiations on seat-sharing for the Lok Sabha polls begin, the strain is beginning to show. In these trying circumstances, the level of political discourse is also falling. While Union Minister Anant Kumar Hegde made personal, derogatory comments about Mr. Rao, Mr. Siddaramaiah shouted at a party worker and grabbed the mike from her when she complained about the failure of officials to redress the grievances of her townspeople. In the surcharged atmosphere now, a remark is often enough of a spark to set off a ravaging fire.

Clearer TV

New TRAI order provides for greater choice and transparency on pricing of channels

The tariff order on broadcasting and cable services issued by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is set to become effective on February 1, giving the consumer the option to pay only for those channels she wants to watch. Under the scheme, there is also a maximum price for pay channels declared by the broadcaster, which is reported to TRAI, bringing about greater transparency. Each channel will be available on an *à la carte* basis. The effect is that the consumer's subscription cost on a base package of 100 standard definition television channels is fixed in the form of a network capacity fee. And even within this group, there is freedom to choose channels, with a provision for appropriate revision for any pay channels. This is a welcome departure from a regime where combinations of free and pay channels were decided by distributors and broadcasters as bouquets that did not reflect actual demand for individual channels. Efforts to introduce *à la carte* choice were thwarted by pricing individual channels almost as high as the bouquets they were part of. Bouquets are enabled in the new scheme, but with the stipulation that at least 85% of the total price of all channels that form part of a bouquet be charged, removing the incentive to distort prices. Distributors including cable and DTH platforms, and advertisers, should welcome the order, which strengthens price discovery and eliminates inflated claims of the subscriber base.

Television in the conventional sense has changed in the era of the Internet, with the emergence of new distribution possibilities. Many broadcasters, including popular news channels, provide their content free on platforms such as YouTube and through mobile phone applications, reaching global audiences. Global Over the Top (OTT) providers such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have opened a new front and are competing for viewers who get advertisement-free programming streamed on subscription. TRAI has made clear that since broadcast licensing does not apply to such new technology platforms, these do not come under price regulation. In the fast-changing competitive landscape of home entertainment, conventional TV must now compete on the strength of transparent pricing and better programming for subscription revenue growth and viewer time that attracts advertising. Industry data show that there are about 197 million homes in India with a TV set, and 100 million more homes without one represent scope for growth. This can be achieved through regulatory schemes that empower broadcasters and subscribers alike. TRAI has done well to put up a calculator on its website to help consumers calculate bills under the new regime before signing up for a package with the operator. The broadcast industry must welcome a new era that promises to remove distribution bottlenecks and empower consumers with choice.

Think universal basic capital

A simplistic universal basic income will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy



ARUN MAIRA

India's GDP is growing quite well, though there are disputes about whether it grew faster under the present or previous governments. There can be no dispute though that India needs to do much better to improve overall human development, in which it continues to be compared with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Even its poorer sub-continental neighbours are improving health and education faster. Benefits of India's economic growth must trickle down much faster to people at the bottom of the pyramid: to poorer farmers, landless rural labour, and hundreds of millions of workers living on the edge in low-paying, 'flexible' forms of employment with no social security.

Economists seem to be offering three solutions to the economy's structural problems. One, that there is no problem. Two, more privatisation. And, three, a universal basic income (UBI) to be provided by the state.

Ground still to be covered

Many economists are juggling with statistics to prove that the Indian economy is doing quite well. It is providing enough jobs, they say. And, statistically, poverty has reduced a lot. However, even these economists admit that a lot more must be done to improve education and health care, and to address the persistent informality and small scale of enterprises that are providing most of the employment in the country.

An ideological solution, accompanied with evidence that the go-

vernment is unable to provide them, is more privatisation of public services. As U.S. President Ronald Reagan said, government is not the solution, it is the problem. However, the private sector is structurally not designed to provide affordable public services equitably. Milton Friedman, who too is often cited, said, the business of business must be only business. Businesses must be run with a profit motive. They cannot take on the burden of subsidising citizens who cannot pay for their services.

Disruption and basic income

Structural forces within the global economy have been driving down wages and creating insecure employment while increasing the mobility of capital and increasing incomes from ownership of capital. Thomas Piketty and Oxfam have also drawn attention to increasing economic inequalities around the world. 'Industry 4.0', which has not yet spread too far, is expected to worsen these problems. An economic consequence of declining growth of wage incomes will be reduction of consumption. Which will create problems for owners of capital and automated Industry 4.0 production systems. For, who will buy all the material and services that these systems will produce? Therefore, the UBI has appeared as a silver bullet solution. It will be an income provided to everybody by the very state that the capitalists say should get out of their way, and to whom they are unwilling to pay more taxes.

The beauty of a 'universal' basic income, its proponents say, is that it avoids messy political questions about who deserves assistance. It also side-steps the challenge of actually providing the services required: education, health, food, etc. Just give the people cash: let them buy what they need. Howev-



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

er, if the cash will not provide citizens with good quality and affordable education and health, because neither the government nor the private sector is able or willing to, this will not solve the basic human development problems that must be solved.

Some economists who were proponents of UBI, such as Arvind Subramanian, the former Chief Economic Adviser to the Government, have begun to dilute their simplistic concept of UBI to make it financially and politically feasible. They propose a QUBRI (quasi-universal basic rural income), targeted only at poorer people in the rural areas. Their scheme is no longer universal. First, it will exclude the not-so-poor in rural areas as morally it should. Political questions about who should be included will have to be addressed. Second, it will not cover the masses of urban poor working for low and uncertain wages. Therefore, some other schemes will have to be drawn up for the urban sector, and entitlement and measurement issues will have to be addressed for these schemes too. All the schemes, rural and urban, could be cash transfer schemes, which Aadhar and the digitisation of financial services will facilitate. However, this still begs the question about how to provide good

quality public services for people to buy.

A simplistic UBI will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy. An unavoidable solution to fix India's fundamental problems is the strengthening of institutions of the state to deliver the services the state must (public safety, justice, and basic education and health), which should be available to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay for them. The institutions of the state must be strengthened also to regulate delivery of services by the private sector and ensure fair competition in the market. The building of state institutions, to deliver and to regulate, will require stronger management, administrative, and political capabilities, not better economists.

Economic inequality matters

Some economists say that inequality does not matter so long as poverty is being reduced. In fact, some even say that inequality is necessary to reduce poverty. So long as the people have bread, why should they complain if the rich are eating more cake, they imply. However, economic inequality does matter because it increases social and political inequalities. Those with more wealth change the rules of the game to protect and increase their wealth and power. Thus, opportunities for progress become unequal. This is why economic inequality must be reduced to create a more just society.

In the present economic system, people at the top can make more profits by driving down prices and wages for people at the bottom. They may then recycle a small portion of their profits back as philanthropy, or corporate social responsibility. Or, if they were willing to, which they are not, pay the state more taxes to provide

services, and even a UBI, to people at the bottom. Tiny enterprises have very little clout compared with large capitalist enterprises; and individual workers have little power compared with their employers. Therefore, terms of trade remain unfair for small enterprises, and terms of employment unfair for unorganised workers. The solution is the aggregation of the small into larger associations, cooperatives, and unions. Aggregations of small producers, and unions of workers, can negotiate for more fair terms.

An alternative approach

A better solution to structural inequality than UBI is universal basic capital, or UBC, which has begun to pop up in international policy circles. In this alternative approach, people own the wealth they generate as shareholders of their collective enterprises. Amul, SEWA, Grameen, and others have shown a way. Some economists go further and also propose a 'dividend' for all citizens, by providing them a share of initial public offerings on the stock market, especially from companies that use 'public assets', such as publicly funded research, or environmental resources.

To conclude, three better solutions to create more equitable growth than the ones on offer are: one, focus on building state capacity beginning with implementation of the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission. Two, strengthen the missing middle-level institutions for aggregation of tiny enterprises and representation of workers. Three, the creativity of economists could be better applied to developing ideas for UBC than UBI.

Arun Maira was a member of the Planning Commission

Gandhi and the Socratic art of dying

There is a process of learning in the Gandhian act of self-suffering



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

Today is the 71st anniversary of Gandhi's death. His assassination was a great shock. But, strangely, his death unified those in India who had lost faith in non-violent co-existence. As Nehru said, "the urgent need of the hour is for all of us to function as closely and co-operatively as possible."

As a matter of fact, Gandhi's death taught everyone about the worth of civic friendship and social solidarity. Gandhi himself was well aware of this, long before his return to India and his rise as the non-violent leader of the Indian independence movement. For example, in a letter to his nephew on January 29, 1909, he wrote, "I may have to meet death in South Africa at the hands of my countrymen... If that happens you should rejoice. It will unite the Hindus and Muslims... The enemies of the community are constantly making efforts against such a unity. In such a great endeavour, someone will have to sacrifice his life."

It is interesting, how Gandhi, all through his life, talked about his death with a great deal of openness and with no sanctimony. It is as if for him the fundamental philosophical question - 'should I live or die; to be or not to be?' - had already found its answer in the idea of self-sacrifice.

An intertwining

In the Gandhian philosophy of resistance, we can find the intertwining of non-violence and exemplary suffering. Perhaps, self-sacrifice is the closest we come to ethical dying, in the sense that it is a principled leave-taking from life; an abandonment of one's petty preoccupations in order to see things more clearly. As such, there is a process of learning in the Gandhian act of self-suffering. For Socrates, to philosophise was to learn how to die. In the same way, for Gandhi, the practice of non-violence began with an act of self-sacrifice and the courage of dying for truth.

Socrates inspired Gandhi on the importance of self-sacrifice and the art of dying at a time when the latter was developing his idea of *satyagraha* in South Africa. Gandhi referred to Socrates as a "Soldier of Truth" (*satyavir*) who had the willingness to fight unto death for his cause. His portrayal of So-



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crates as a *satyagrahi* and a moral hero went hand in hand with the affirmation of the courage and audacity of a non-violent warrior in the face of life-threatening danger. Consequently, for Gandhi, there was a close link between the use of non-violence and the art of dying, in the same manner that cowardice was sharply related to the practice of violence.

Socratic aspects

Gandhi remained a Socratic dissenter all his life. Though not a philosopher, Gandhi admired moral and political philosophers, who, as a manner of Socrates, were ready to struggle for the truth. Like Socrates, Gandhi was neither a mystic nor a hermit. He was a practitioner of dissident citizenship. Gandhi considered Socrates' civic action as a source of virtue and moral strength. He affirmed: "We pray to God, and want our readers also to pray, that they, and we too, may have the moral

strength which enabled Socrates to follow virtue to the end and to embrace death as if it were his beloved. We advise everyone to turn his mind again and again to Socrates' words and conduct." Gandhi's approach to death exemplified another Socratic aspect: courage. Gandhi believed that when fighting injustice, the actor must not only have the courage of his/her opinions but also be ready to give his/her life for the cause. As George Woodcock says, "the idea of perishing for a cause, for other men, for a village even, occurs more frequently in Gandhi's writings as time goes on. He had always held that *satyagraha* implied the willingness to accept not only suffering but also death for the sake of a principle."

Gandhi's dedication to justice in the face of death was an example of his courageous attitude of mind as a Socratic gadfly. Further, one can find in Gandhi a readiness to raise the matter of dying as public policy. This is a state of mind which we can find as the background motto of Gandhi's political and intellectual life. Indeed, for Gandhi, the art of dying was very often a public act and an act of publicising one's will to be free.

There is something revealing in the parallel that Gandhi established between the struggle for

freedom and the art of dying. In a speech at a meeting of the Congress in Bombay in August 1942, he invited his fellow freedom fighters to follow a new mantra: "Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give to you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery... He who loses his life will gain it, he who will seek to save it shall lose it. Freedom is not for the coward or the faint-hearted."

Note here both the conviction in Gandhi that no other decision but dying was possible if the declaration of freedom was unachieved. Unsurprisingly, straightforward and honest. Which brings us back to January 30, 1948 when Mahatma Gandhi fell to the bullets of Nathuram Godse. One can understand this event as a variety of the Sophoclean saying: "Call no man happy until he is dead." Like it or not, it seems that for Gandhi, to be human was to have the capacity, at each and every moment, to confront death as fulfillment of a Socratic life.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Congress's promise

The promise of a 'minimum income guarantee' by the Congress party offers hope of dignity to millions of the poor in India (Page 1, "Rahul promises income guarantee to the poor", January 29). If the scheme is well designed, with the honest intention of bringing succour to the poor, it is not difficult to find the resources needed to implement it. The scheme could be started in a few backward districts in each State as a pilot study for a year before it is fine-tuned for the rest of the country. Out of the elements of the slogan '*roti kapada aur makaan*', such a scheme should at least ensure '*roti*' to most of the poor.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI, Hyderabad

Our politicians are known for their spectacular promises but Congress President Rahul Gandhi's

plan seems to be a bit different especially when it comes to helping the poor. If implemented in a water-tight way, it could spell great relief to the poor.

P.U. KRISHNAN, Udhagamandalam

Where does Mr. Gandhi expect to find resources from to provide such an income? What is the criteria to be used in declaring someone 'poor'? The promise appears to be a very fluid one. No citizen wants to thrive on a 'freebie' culture, but instead looks for free and good education, employment opportunities, good infrastructure, better health care and affordable housing. Mr. Gandhi, if voted to power, should concentrate on making an individual well enough to stand on his own feet and not make him 'poor' to avail of an 'income guarantee'.

A. JAINULABDEEN, Chennai

'Garibi Hatao' (Remove poverty) was the theme and slogan of Indira Gandhi's 1971 election campaign. Had it been implemented or fulfilled, after almost half a century, her grandson and Congress president Rahul Gandhi, would not have promised a minimum income guarantee. The people of the country have a right to know how he and his party propose to fund such a scheme. The Election Commission of India needs to look into unreasonable and unimplementable election promises.

DIWAKAR PRASAD TIWARI, Bara, Satna, Madhya Pradesh

Shrinking habitats

We are responsible for the plight of the Indian tiger (Inside pages, "India can't handle more big cats", January 29). Unbridled human activities are leaving no space for the great cat. The solutions lie in identifying and creating

more tiger reserves with the help of the *India State of Forest Report*. India should also take a leaf out of the book of Australia which has its Green Army of Australia to oversee environmental issues. There must be more aggressive reforestation so that there are more habitats for the tiger. Finally, we must sensitise young Indians on the importance of the tiger as a keystone species in the Indian environment.

DIWAKAR PRASAD TIWARI, Bara, Satna, Madhya Pradesh

Unfair characterisation

It is startling that even the judiciary appears hesitant to recognise the talent and the potential of the disabled (Editorial page, "Capable even if disabled", January 29). We may become more sensitive in identifying the disabled ("visually challenged, differently abled"), but when it comes to accepting them in mainstream society, there

still seems to be a flood of doubts. In the case that was highlighted in the article, the judiciary could have recommended a year's apprenticeship for the applicant. It was inspiring to read about the writer too, who has also demonstrated that there is no hurdle that can stop the disabled.

RADHIKA KUMAR, Bengaluru

When I began reading the article, I was sceptical at first, wondering whether this

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the story on Cognizant's 25th year headlined "Future will see man-machine managers" (Business page, Jan. 28, 2019), there was a reference to growth of 6-9% organic in constant currency and 7-9% including inorganic options. It should have been 7-11% including inorganic options"

An agency report titled "Diesel prices up by 10 paise, petrol unchanged" (Jan. 28, 2019) was erroneous. Indian Oil Corporation authorities said that there had not been any price increase in diesel since January 25.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 855 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | P.T. USHA

India should learn from Russia's doping scandal

The former sprint queen on coaching, 'Khelo India', sports administration, and steps that can be taken to raise the profile of Indian athletics

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

She may have run her last race in 1999, but P.T. Usha remains India's best known track-and-field athlete. She missed an Olympic medal by one hundredth of a second at the 1984 Summer Olympics, won five gold medals at the Asian Championship in 1985, and single-handedly lifted India's overall standing at the Asian Games in 1986. Unlike most of the country's champion athletes, Usha didn't leave sport after her retirement; she became a coach and set up the Usha School of Athletics in Kerala. In this interview, she speaks about promising Indian athletes, why Kerala produces so many sportspersons, and sports management in the country. Excerpts:

It has been nearly 35 years since you finished a close fourth in the women's 400 m hurdles at the Los Angeles Olympics. No Indian has come close to winning an Olympic medal in track and field since. When do you see this happening?

■ In 2024, I think javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra has a good chance of winning a medal at the Paris Olympics. He is the most talented athlete we have at the moment. He has progressed well, has an excellent coach in Uwe Hohn, and gets enough international exposure. And at 21, age is on his side. He seems to be a level-headed young man.

What do you think of Hima Das, the first Indian woman to win a gold medal at a World (Under-20) athletics meet?

■ She is a promising sprinter. She has improved her timing greatly. Let us see how she fares over the next year or so.

The second edition of the 'Khelo India' Youth Games concluded at Pune a few days ago. Your thoughts on this initiative by the Union government?

■ 'Khelo' Games is certainly a good idea. I am happy to see that the government is

trying to do something to improve sports at the grassroots level and that lots of money is being spent on it.

But I feel there are several areas that need to be fine-tuned. There is too much bureaucracy. They still want to 'assess' somebody like Jisna Mathew, my ward who has already competed at the Olympics and won multiple medals in international meets. In Pune, the Kerala team had to wait for eight hours after their arrival at the railway station before they were provided accommodation. Such things shouldn't happen at a prestigious meet like 'Khelo India'. And I feel the government should ensure that the huge amount of money spent on each athlete is properly utilised. There are chances of it getting misused, which would defeat the purpose of the initiative.

That takes us to the issue of sports administration in the country.

■ There are several issues. For one thing, I would like to see some new faces in all sports associations. Often you have the same people controlling a sport. They may change their designations or they may be controlling affairs from behind the curtain even when they don't have any role officially.

What about the role of the Sports Authority of India (SAI)?

■ The SAI has done some good things, but it could do a lot more, especially with the kind of machinery and infrastructure it has. I would like to see more people who have a background in sports or are passionate about sports in key roles in the SAI.

Kerala is a powerhouse in Indian sport, despite its relatively small size and population. Besides athletics, it is doing well in football, volleyball, basketball and now cricket (it played in the Ranji Trophy semifinals for the first time in history).

■ Kerala is doing well because here the kids are encouraged to compete in sports, both by parents and teachers in schools. Sport is well-run at educational institutions and clubs. Look at the way the State school athletics meet is organised. Most of our international athletes, including me, have come out of it. It is a huge event, and is covered extensively by the media. It is the Olympics of our schoolchildren.

Which are the other States that are doing a good job of promoting sport?

■ Haryana is now showing a lot of interest. Andhra, Telangana and Tamil Nadu are also encouraging their athletes. In States like Maharashtra, you will find excellent infrastructure for multiple sports.

But I am not amused by the tendency of the States to compete with one another in announcing cash prizes for a medal-winner at international

meets. In our time, we ran our races to win medals, not to get crores of rupees from the government. When a minister announces that a medalist will be given a prize like ₹4 crore, the athlete would want to win at any cost, even with the help of banned drugs. Why don't you give that medalist better training and more exposure in quality meets abroad?

In India it appears that for many, the main aim of playing a sport is to get a government job.

■ That is true, sadly. I have seen many talented athletes quitting sports as soon as they land a job. There should be a rule that somebody who is given a job under the sports quota should not be confirmed if they don't compete for a specific number of years. There are also several cases of superior officers not giving time for athletes to do sports. I have seen one of my wards suffer because she is forced to do office work in her prime years as an athlete.

You started the Usha School of Athletics in 2002 with the aim of winning India an Olympic medal.

■ That is still what I am aiming for. I want to give

an athlete whatever is required to be an Olympic champion: facilities, a synthetic track, scientific training, proper diet and international exposure. If I had all that, I could have certainly won an Olympic medal.

My school has already produced quality athletes like Tintu Luka and Jisna. But I have had to mould them. I am still waiting for a gifted, natural athlete, someone like me. I am quite hopeful about one of the youngest girls at the academy right now, though.

I am proud that my school has already contributed hugely to Indian athletics. We have won 67 international medals, besides 456 in national championships, 17 at inter-university meets as well as 499 at the State level. For a 16-year-old academy, that is an excellent record, I feel. I don't think anybody else other than the SAI has had as much success.

You have had to turn to crowdfunding for your school this past year.

■ I am glad that we did; we need something like ₹60 lakh per year to run the school. It is so overwhelming to see that so many people from all over the world have contributed. We had to look at that option because of the needless controversy I was dragged into about the non-selection of athlete P.U. Chithra for the World cham-

ionship a year ago. I was painted the villainess of the drama, without even checking the facts; I was only the observer for the Central government. Just about anyone, without the faintest idea about athletics, could appear on television channel and call me names. Could anything be more ridiculous than the suggestion that I was jealous of Chithra? It is a little sad to reflect that many people don't know the contribution I made to Indian sport, against brave odds and often all alone for such a long time. If they did, they wouldn't have put black oil on the signpost of the road named after me in Kochi. But it would not have been easy for them to destroy everything named in my honour: there is one in China, there are sports institutions in north India, and the coaching centre in Thiruvananthapuram.

Not that I hadn't been treated badly before. People from my own home town had hurled stones at my house alleging that I didn't give my best at the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

How much has Indian athletics changed since you began running as a schoolgirl 40 years ago?

■ On the positive side, we now have synthetic tracks all over the country. Before I made my Olympic debut at Moscow in 1980, I hadn't seen a single one in my life. Another big change is that the competition used to be lot more fair for women. The sex verification rules were a lot simpler. I am not sure if some of the female athletes today would have been able to compete in my time.

And yes, doping wasn't this big an issue then. There

were stray incidents, like the one involving a male Indian athlete; his urine test said that he was pregnant (his sample was apparently swapped with that of a female nurse).

For the last few years, India is among the top offending countries listed by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

■ That is a matter of shame. We should learn our lessons from Russia, whose athletes have been banned by the world athletics body. It is disappointing to find that we continue to have most of our coaches from the former Soviet Union. I had protested against the appointment of Yuri Ogorodnik, who had trained many of those who were caught for doping, but he was still welcomed back to India. Why can't we get coaches from countries that have cleaner reputations? I also wonder why our athletes are sent to European countries for training in winter.

What do you think should be done to raise the profile of Indian athletics?

■ You have to take our meets to people, with quality television coverage. We certainly could do with more publicity.

When you compete in places like Europe, you get to perform in front of packed stands. Here, our athletes are greeted by empty stadia.

Maybe athletics could also do with a professional league in India, about which there had been some talk but nothing has happened.

■ Yes, that is something we need. Look at what it has done to football and kabaddi.



SINGLE FILE

Flawed political move

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's formal entry into the Congress is more likely to hurt than help the party's poll prospects

MOHAMMED AYOOB



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's appointment as All India Congress Committee General Secretary for Uttar Pradesh East is a flawed move that could hurt the Congress in the forthcoming general election, for several reasons.

First, her appointment will give ammunition to the Bharatiya Janata Party to reinforce the idea among potential voters that the "dynasty" desires to perpetuate its control over the "family-owned" organisation that is the Congress Party. This is especially because, like her brother and the Congress President, Rahul Gandhi, Ms. Vadra lacks experience and seniority within the party as well as broader political engagement. Indian voters, who are more politically savvy than they are given credit for, could thus be expected to be further turned off by the dynasty's dominance of the Congress.

Second, she carries negative baggage owing to her husband Robert Vadra's alleged involvement in land scams. Whether true or not, most people believe he is guilty of engaging in shady deals because he felt immune from legal action as the son-in-law of the dynasty. His negative image has rubbed off on Ms. Vadra and this can tarnish the party's image in an election year.

Third, eastern U.P., which is supposed to be Ms. Vadra's turf in the run-up to the elections, is a political minefield for the Congress. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is highly invested in the region given that his constituency, Varanasi, is located here. The constituency of the State Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, which is Gorakhpur, is also in eastern U.P. Further, both the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have strong bases of support here, especially among the Backward Castes, Dalits and Muslims – a significant portion of the overall electorate of the region.

The Congress's performance in eastern U.P. has been dismal in past elections. Given that the SP and the BSP seem to have decided to have no truck with the Congress in the run up to the general election, they will perceive the Congress's attempt to poach their territory, adversely. Without a seat-sharing arrangement with the SP-BSP alliance, the party is likely to fare badly in 2019. That could further sully Ms. Vadra's image as a political organiser, dooming prospects of her future leadership.

Further, in the unlikely event that the Congress under Ms. Vadra garners a reasonable share of the anti-BJP vote in eastern U.P., it will increase the BJP's prospects of returning to power since the anti-BJP vote will be divided between the SP-BSP combine on the one hand and the Congress on the other. This will defeat the major goal of the Congress, which is to deny the BJP another term at the Centre. Either way the Congress's prospects of coming to power at the Centre at the head of an anti-BJP coalition will be frustrated.

Thus, Ms. Vadra's elevation within the party is likely to backfire as far as Congress's electoral prospects are concerned. Rahul Gandhi and his advisers should have objectively evaluated the downside of this decision before taking the plunge.

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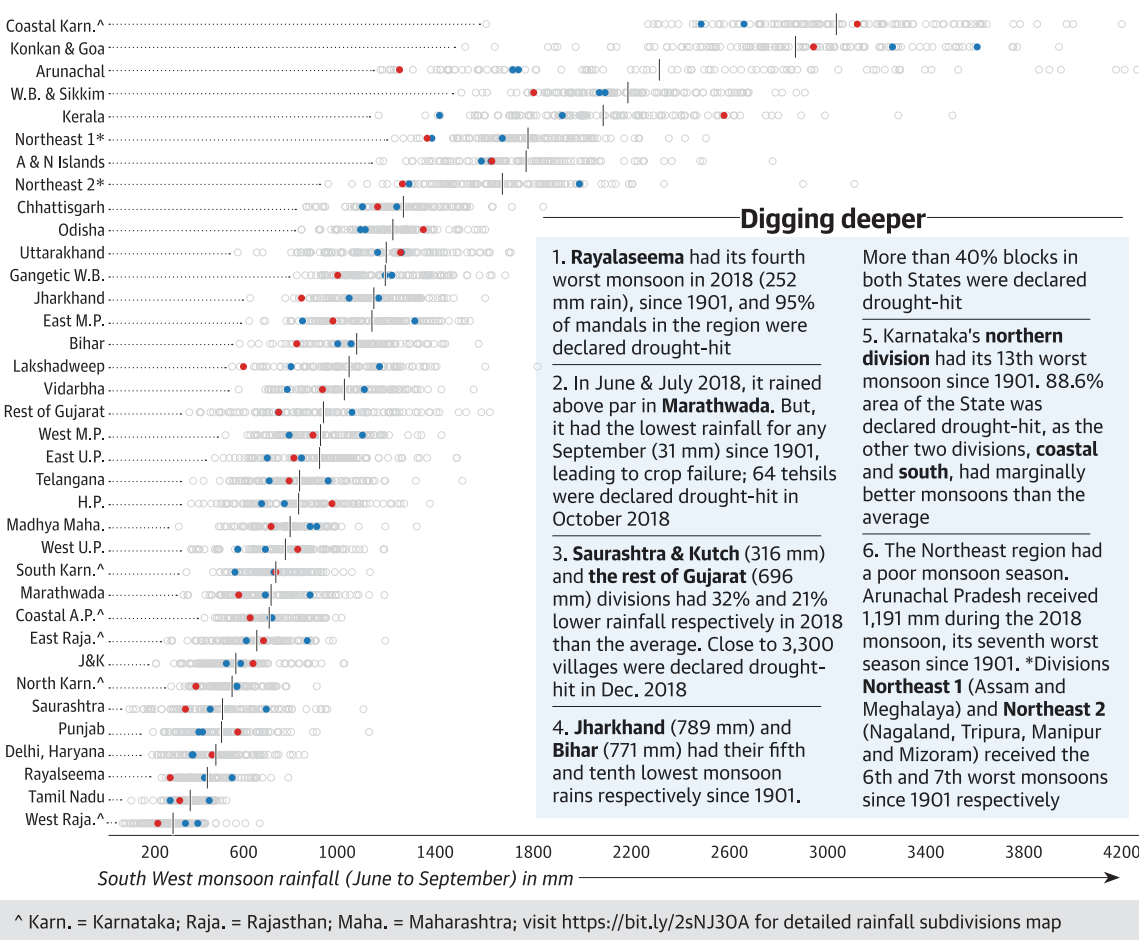
DATA POINT

Drought-hit

Of the 36 meteorological divisions in India, 25 received less rain during the South West monsoon in 2018 than the average precipitation in the last 118 years. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

There is wide variation in the average rainfall across geographical divisions. The graphic compares South West Monsoon rainfall data for all divisions historically to find where their measures for 2016, 2017 and 2018 are placed.

Graph explained | The rainfall for each division is plotted in a row. Each circle represents the rainfall in a year. The years 1901 to 2015 are in grey (○); 2016 & 2017 are in blue (●); and 2018 in red (●). The dash (|) denotes the average rainfall of each division.



Digging deeper

1. **Rajalaseema** had its fourth worst monsoon in 2018 (252 mm rain), since 1901, and 95% of mandals in the region were declared drought-hit
2. In June & July 2018, it rained above par in **Marathwada**. But, it had the lowest rainfall for any September (31 mm) since 1901, leading to crop failure; 64 tehsils were declared drought-hit in October 2018
3. **Saurashtra & Kutch** (316 mm) and the rest of **Gujarat** (696 mm) divisions had 32% and 21% lower rainfall respectively in 2018 than the average. Close to 3,300 villages were declared drought-hit in Dec. 2018
4. **Jharkhand** (789 mm) and **Bihar** (771 mm) had their fifth and tenth lowest monsoon rains respectively since 1901.
5. Karnataka's **northern division** had its 13th worst monsoon since 1901. 88.6% area of the State was declared drought-hit, as the other two divisions, **coastal and south**, had marginally better monsoons than the average
6. The Northeast region had a poor monsoon season. Arunachal Pradesh received 1,191 mm during the 2018 monsoon, its seventh worst season since 1901. *Divisions **Northeast 1** (Assam and Meghalaya) and **Northeast 2** (Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram) received the 6th and 7th worst monsoons since 1901 respectively

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 30, 1969

Army aid sought to maintain order in A.P.

Army was called in to-night [January 29] in Andhra Pradesh to help the civil authorities in the maintenance of law and order in strategic places like Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Warangal, Guntur, Khammam, Kothagudem and Kodad following violent demonstrations in some of these places. Army units had started moving and would be reaching the strategic points before dawn tomorrow [January 30], it was officially stated here [Hyderabad] to-night [January 29]. Earlier in the day the Chief Minister, Mr. K. Brahma Reddi, expressed his distress at the "acts of hooliganism" and said the Government would deal with the situation firmly to restore normalcy and maintain law and order. He appealed to the young men and women of the State "with their innate idealism and dynamism" to rise to the occasion of this juncture, and "play a positive role in bringing about complete integration." Earlier to-day, orders under Section 144 Cr. P. C. were promulgated in three major towns of the State – Guntur, Vijayawada and Warangal. Police opened fire in Kodad, a small Telangana border village on Hyderabad-Vijayawada trunk road, to-day to chase away some lorry loads of people from Vijayawada who attempted to enter the village allegedly to cause destruction, after lathi charge had failed to send them away.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 30, 1919

Aeroplane Pleasure Flights Arranged at Calcutta.

Messrs. Spalding and Company of Calcutta are now registering applications for accommodation for pleasure flights by aeroplane round Calcutta at charges of Rs. 50 for adults and Rs. 25 for children. The aeroplane which the company expect will arrive about the end of March and is one of the largest machines constructed and is equipped with four Royce engines aggregating about 1200 horse power and giving a speed of 120 miles per hour. An "Empire" representative who made enquiries says that the company hope to start shortly a daily service from Calcutta to Darjeeling and an aerodrome and landing ground on a space of 100 acres is now being prepared at Dum Dum from which flights will commence. It is calculated that the journey from Calcutta to Darjeeling will be made in 3 hours and fares when service starts will be about Rs. 80 for each passenger. Passengers will be carried from Calcutta to Siliguri in larger planes of the service and from Siliguri to Darjeeling in smaller planes.

CONCEPTUAL Unfunded liabilities

FINANCE
This refers to any future debt obligation for which no proper provision has been made in the present. A company that promises to pay pension to its employees in the future, for instance, will generally have to set aside sufficient funds in the present in order to be able to fund its future obligation. While companies and governments are mandated by law to show unfunded liabilities as a liability on their balance sheets, accounting tricks may be used to hide the true size of such liability. It is believed that the actual debt load of many governments in the developed world could be many times higher if unfunded liabilities were properly taken into account.

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