

Course correction – Star War**Kamal Haasan will soon find that Rajinikanth and he are vying to fill the same political space**

All these years, the Tamil film industry had enough space for both Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, two stars with wide fan bases who could deliver one **blockbuster** after another. But Tamil Nadu's political **arena** is likely to be too small for both of them. With their entry into politics, the actors will realise sooner than later that each can only succeed at the other's expense. Both Mr. Rajinikanth and Mr. Haasan are **vying** to fill the same political space, the **vacuum** created by the death of Jayalalithaa. They are hoping to take over the AIADMK's vote bank on the assumption that the party will not survive another election. While Mr. Haasan has indicated he is not **averse** to political alliances, Mr. Rajinikanth has **insisted** he will contest all 234 Assembly constituencies. **Inevitably**, the two will find themselves in opposite camps. Despite the age-related ill-health of its president M. Karunanidhi, the principal opposition party, the DMK, remains in serious **contention** for power with its organisational structure and cadre base. The actor politicians will therefore have to fight for their share from the rest of the **pie**.

It is true that voters in Tamil Nadu are tired of the electoral choices before them, having voted in and out one of the two major Dravidian parties, the DMK and the AIADMK. A huge chunk of the AIADMK's vote bank is actually an anti-DMK vote bank; the converse is true for a large section of the DMK's vote bank. Mr. Haasan, like Mr. Rajinikanth, can try to tap into this negative sentiment as a third alternative. Indeed, Vijayakanth, a contemporary of Mr. Rajinikanth and Mr. Haasan who joined politics in 2005, won more political supporters than he did film fans precisely because he offered an alternative to the two Dravidian parties. But he could not attain the critical mass needed to mount a serious challenge and ended up as a **spoiler**, not a king maker. Unlike Mr. Rajinikanth, Mr. Haasan has been more forthright in expressing his political views, through tweets, press conferences, public speeches and columns. As the very least, Mr. Haasan appears willing to articulate a political programme with a vision and stated goals, in marked contrast to Mr. Rajinikanth who did not go beyond **vague** generalities while announcing his entry into politics. But Mr. Haasan will be mistaken if he assumes his star status in the film world will automatically open doors for him in politics. Winning over voters in different regions with different livelihood concerns and social identities is no easy task. His **stardom** may have earned him immediate attention, but he will need to **mobilise** people around their own interests if he wants to be a **credible** alternative. Otherwise, a Rajini-Kamal Joust might be no more than an interesting sidelight in the next Assembly election.

WORD LIST

1. **Blockbuster** : (depth charge)
Synonym : ashcar, depth bomb
2. **Arena** : (area of activity) (building or enclosure for entertainment or sports)
Synonym : fields, gym, gymnasium, park, ring, rink, square, stage
3. **Vie** : (complete)
Synonym : contend, strive, buck, challenge, contest, counter, oppose, match, play, rival, struggle
4. **Vacuum** : (emptiness)
Synonym : gap, void, exhaustion, nothingness, free space.
5. **Averse** : (opposing)
Synonym : hostile, loath, reluctant, allergic, hesitant, unwilling, afraid, antipathetic, contrary, inimical, nasty, perverse
6. **Insist** : (order and expect; claim)
Synonym : assert, contend, demand, hold, maintain, press, repeat, request, urge, vow, persist, require, swear.
7. **Inevitably** : (unavoidably)
Synonym : necessarily, sure, inescapably
8. **Contention** : (an idea or opinion that is put forth in a discussion or debate)
Synonym : argument, assertion, conjecture, hunch, speculation, hypothesis, theory, proposal, proposition, assumption, supposition, rationale, reason.
9. **Pie** : (as in dessert, duck soup, eye, feasible, pastry) (sweet treat)
Synonym : Cake, candy, confection, fruit, pastry, tart
10. **Spoiler** : (a person who blunders)
Synonym : blockhead, blunderer, bonehead, bumbler, clod, dolt, duffer, dunce, fumbler, idiot.
11. **Vague** : (not definite or clear)
Synonym : ambiguous, dubious, equivocal, faint, fuzzy, hazy, lax, nebulous, obscure, uncertain, unclear, unsure
12. **Stardom** : (fame)
Synonym : acclaim, celebrity, glory, greatness, immortality, popularity, prominence, recognition, renown, distinction, esteem, honor, nobility, prestige.
13. **Mobilise** : (ready for action, movement)
Synonym : assemble, marshall, organize, prepare, activate, animate, catalyse, circulate, drive, gather, impel, propel, ready.
14. **Credible** : (believable)
Synonym : creditable, conceivable, conclusive, dependable, honest, plausible, rational, reasonable, reliable, satisfactory, sincere, trustworthy, valid, logical

Course correction – Saving Lives**It needs political will for India to bring down its shamefully high new born mortality rate.**

A new country wise ranking of **neonatal mortality** rates – the number of babies dying in their first month for every thousand live births – gives India cause for both hope and shame. Shame, because the report, produced by the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef), ranks India behind poorer countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Rwanda. Hope, because the ranking shows that financial resources are not the biggest **constraint** in improving this health indicator; political will is. According to the report, titled “Every Child Alive”, while average newborn mortality in low income nations is nine times that of high-income ones, several countries **break** the trend, showing a way forward for India. For example, Sri Lanka and Ukraine, which like India are categorised as lower middle income economies, had a neonatal mortality of around 5/1000 in 2016. In comparison, the U.S., a high income economy, did only slightly better with a rate of 3.7/1000. Meanwhile, Rwanda, which falls in the lowest income group of less than \$1005 per capita, has brought down its mortality rates from 41/1000 in the 1990s to 16.5 through programmes targeted at poor and **vulnerable** mothers. Money matters, but intent matters more.

India saw the 31st highest newborn mortality rate, at 25.4 deaths per 1000 in 2016, while Pakistan had the highest. Coming in after 30 countries is no comfort, however, because a small mortality rate can translate to **numerous** deaths when the birth rate is high. This means India lost 640,000 babies in 2016, more than any other country. How can we **chip away** at this staggering number? The report points out that the most powerful solutions are not necessarily the most expensive. The 10 critical products that hospitals must stock to save newborns include a piece of cloth to keep a baby warm and close to the mother to encourage breastfeeding. The list also includes antibiotics and **disinfectants**, the use of which can stave off killers like sepsis and meningitis. But other solutions will need greater investment. The biggest cause of death is premature birth, while the second is complications like **asphyxia** during delivery. Preventing these would mean paying attention to the mother’s health during pregnancy and ensuring she delivers in a hospital attended by trained doctors or midwives. India has programmes such as the Janani Suraksha Yojana for this, but must expand its reach in laggard states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Then there are factors outside the healthcare system, like female literacy rates, that make a big difference to healthcare seeking behaviour. But changes in education levels will come slowly. Despite these challenges, progress is within reach. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu shows that by focussing on these factors outside the healthcare system, like female literacy rates, that make a big difference to healthcare seeking behaviour. But changes in education levels will come slowly. Despite these challenges, progress is within reach. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu show that by focussing on these factors, newborn deaths can be brought to fewer than 15 per 1000 in Indian settings. It’s time for the rest of India to follow suit.

WORD LIST

1. **Neonatal** : (relating to newborn children or other mammals)
Example : we must give special attention to the mortality in the neonatal period.
2. **Mortality** : (death)
Synonym : fatality, bloodshed, carnage, deadliness, destruction, dying, extinction, killing, lethality.
3. **Constraint** : (force)
Synonym : pressure, restraint, restriction, coercion, compulsion, repression, spur, suppression
4. **Buck** : (n) male animal (v) resist, kick off
Synonym : bull, stag, resist
5. **Vulnerable** : (open to attack)
Synonym : accessible, defenceless, exposed, liable, ready, sensitive, susceptible, unsafe, weak, assailable
6. **Numerous** : many, abundant
Synonym : big, diverse, great, large, plentiful, various, copious, infinite, legion
7. **Chip away** : (phrasal verb) (to gradually make something weaker, smaller, or less effective)
Example : The company's dominance of the market is gradually being chipped away.
8. **Disinfectants** : (antiseptic) (decontaminating agent)
Synonym : preservative, bactericide, germicide, detergent, preventive, purifier.
9. **Asphyxia** : (daze, unconsciousness)
Synonym : coma, slumber, trance, anaesthesia, apathy, bewilderment, dullness, hypnosis, inertia, languor, lethargy, sleep, spoor, numbness.
