

FOR A FLOOR TEST FIRST: ON MADHYA PRADESH CRISIS

The BJP might have been morally deviant, but Kamal Nath must prove his majority quickly

Propriety and law require the Kamal Nath-led Congress government in Madhya Pradesh to prove its majority on the floor of the legislature at the earliest. Delaying tactics by Mr. Nath with more than a little help from the Speaker, who has adjourned the Assembly until March 26, go against democratic principles. Equally, Governor Lalji Tandon's position that the government will be presumed to have lost the majority unless it takes a floor test immediately is untenable. The situation in the State raises other questions of morality and legality also, as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) innovates questionable routes to power that it did not win in the election. The Congress had won a narrow victory in the State in 2018, after a 15-year gap. The resignation of 22 party MLAs has pushed its government into a crisis. These MLAs had won against BJP candidates. Their resignations, and the defection of Jyotiraditya Scindia from the Congress to the BJP, can be explained only as a high form of perfidy and shameless personal greed. That said, it is curious that the Speaker accepted the resignations of six MLAs while keeping the other 16 pending. The Speaker is expected to be non-partisan. That he has found a rather ingenious excuse, the pandemic, makes the scene a bit complicated, but not defensible.

The BJP, the Congress and the rebel MLAs have all approached the Supreme Court which has taken up the matter with urgency. The BJP is replaying the script that it has perfected in other States, most notably in Karnataka last year to unseat the Congress-JD(S) government. The Court ruling during the Karnataka crisis was that a time-frame for deciding on resignations by MLAs could not be forced on the Speaker. The Court also ruled that MLAs could not be forced to attend the Assembly session by being issued a whip by the party they belonged to, weakening the lynchpin of the Anti-Defection law. The Congress has alleged that the 16 MLAs are under duress and in detention by the BJP. While the judiciary will force some solution to end the current impasse, the larger question facing democracy is that of trust and transparency. Assemblies are elected for a five-year term, and the Anti-Defection law was brought to raise the threshold and stop the dismantling of a popular mandate through opportunistic manoeuvres, as it is unfolding in Madhya Pradesh. Engineered resignations of lawmakers have become a new tool for sabotaging mandates and camouflaging defections. When the top court adjudicates on the Madhya Pradesh petitions, this larger point must be taken into consideration. The situation demands new guidelines by the Court to deal with the now-familiar malaise, beyond setting a reasonably quick deadline for a floor test.

Meanings of difficult words:

1. **deviant** (adjective) – abnormal, atypical, strange/eccentric, nonconformist.
2. **propriety** (noun) – conformity, morality, correctness/good manners.
3. **at the earliest** (phrase) – as soon as possible, without delay, in a very quick time.

4. **adjourn** (verb) – postpone, put off, defer/delay.
5. **go against** (phrasal verb) – oppose, be contrary to.
6. **presume** (verb) – assume, suppose, judge, postulate.
7. **untenable** (adjective) – undefendable, unjustified, unacceptable.
8. **legality** (noun) – lawfulness, legitimacy, validity, rightness.
9. **defection** (noun) – desertion, absconding, decamping.
10. **perfidy** (adjective) – duplicity, double-dealing, dishonesty.
11. **greed** (noun) – rapacity, avarice; selfish desire or appetite (for wealth/power).
12. **curious** (adjective) – strange/unusual, unconventional, surprising.
13. **non partisan** (adjective) – fair, unbiased, impartial, neutral.
14. **ingenious** (adjective) – intelligent, talented, clever.
15. **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
16. **defensible** (adjective) – reasonable, rational, logical, justifiable.
17. **take up** (phrasal verb) – accept, agree to, accede to, say yes to.
18. **notably** (adverb) – especially, particularly, primarily.
19. **unseat** (verb) – remove, topple, dismiss, overthrow, oust.
20. **whip** (noun) – a written notice provided by the party (Whip) to their members in Parliament/Legislative Assembly to vote to support the act/policy. (a member of a political party who is in charge of providing that written notice is also called as “Whip”).
21. **lynchpin** (noun) – centre, focal point, central point.
22. **Anti-defection law** (noun) – The 10th Schedule to the Constitution, popularly referred to as the ‘Anti-Defection Law,’ was inserted by the 52nd Amendment in 1985. The grounds of disqualification are specified in Paragraph 2 of the 10th Schedule. A member would incur a disqualification under paragraph 2 (1) (a) when he “voluntarily gives up his membership of a party” and under 2 (1) (b) when he/she votes (or abstains from voting) contrary to the directive issued by the party.
23. **allege** (verb) – claim, accuse, charge.
24. **duress** (noun) – compulsion, force, pressure, coercion, threat.
25. **detention** (noun) – confinement/incarceration, captivity, custody.
26. **impasse** (noun) – deadlock, stalemate, stand-off.
27. **transparency** (noun) – clarity, straightforwardness, unambiguity.
28. **threshold** (noun) – lower limit, starting point, the level (to react to something).
29. **dismantle** (verb) – defeat heavily; demolish, knock down, destroy.
30. **opportunistic** (adjective) – opportunistic/selfish, egocentric, inward-looking.
31. **manoeuvre** (noun) – tactic/trick, cunning action, carefully planned activity.
32. **unfold** (verb) – occur, happen, take place.
33. **engineered** (adjective) – skillfully planned, manoeuvred, choreographed, orchestrated, masterminded.
34. **sabotage** (verb) – damage or destroy something deliberately.
35. **camouflage** (verb) – hide, conceal, cover.
36. **adjudicate** (verb) – judge, give a verdict on; decide, settle/resolve.
37. **take into consideration** (phrase) – consider, take into account, foresee, anticipate.
38. **malaise** (noun) – trouble, unease, unhappiness/depression.

EPICENTRE SHIFTS: ON CORONAVIRUS SPREAD

Global efforts to counter the virus have been uneven, with Europe and the U.S. faltering

With 1,08,394 cases reported from outside mainland China as on March 17, there are more people infected with the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in other parts of the world than in mainland China (81,058). Also, as on March 17, the number of deaths (4,279) in the rest of the world is more than in mainland China (3,226). On Monday, there was just one new laboratory-confirmed case and 12 deaths reported in Wuhan; outside Wuhan, no new case has been reported from Hubei province for 12 consecutive days. Even as Iran recorded 16,169 cases and 988 deaths so far, it is in Europe that the virus seems to be galloping. Besides four countries reporting a very high number of cases, all other European countries have recorded at least one case so far, thus shifting the pandemic's epicentre from China to Europe. Here, Italy and Spain have been the most affected, with 27,980 and 11,309 cases, respectively. On March 16, with 3,590 new cases, Italy reported the biggest jump in case load in a single day while deaths in Spain nearly doubled to 288. Germany (8,084) and France (6,664) have been the other two countries badly affected too. With 2,158 deaths, Italy has reported the highest mortality from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outside China.

There are big lessons that India and the rest of the world can learn from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea on containing the spread. Taiwan began airport screening even before China reported its first case of human-to-human transmission on January 20. Together with closing its borders by January-end, it raised awareness about the virus and the disease, and ways to minimise risk through handwashing and the use of face masks. Taiwan essentially cut the transmission chain even before the virus could gain a foothold in the country. Following the World Health Organization's guidelines to a tee, Singapore went after all suspect cases by testing all influenza-like and pneumonia cases and aggressively tracing contacts. Like Taiwan and Hong Kong, Singapore too instituted travel restrictions by early February. Not only did it make testing and treatment free for all its residents, it paid \$100 a day to self-employed people to ensure none violated quarantine. Besides closing most of the border crossings with China and contact tracing, Hong Kong had a 14-day quarantine in place from February 5 onwards and containment measures — shutting down schools and asking people to work from home — in place by the end of January. South Korea's massive community-level screening, contact tracing and quarantining after the outbreaks in two churches helped in containment. Contrast this with how the U.S. floundered for weeks on several fronts, including the use of flawed testing kits. A lesson from the pandemic is how containing an outbreak is dependent on quick public-health responses.

Meanings of difficult words:

1. **epicentre** (noun) – the main point of unpleasant or problematic situation.
2. **coronavirus** (CoV)(noun) – a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death. (Courtesy: **WHO**)
3. **counter** (verb) – combat, fight, tackle.
4. **uneven** (adjective) – irregular, differing, varying.
5. **falter** (verb) – stumble, struggle, flounder, stagger; be undecided, be indecisive, be irresolute.
6. **novel coronavirus (nCoV) (SARS-CoV-2)** (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. (Courtesy: **WHO**)
7. **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
8. **gallop** (verb) – proceed/rise at great speed.
9. **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
10. **jump** (noun) – rise, go up, surge.
11. **caseload** (noun) – the number of cases to be handled by a doctor at one time.
12. **mortality** (noun) – (in a particular time/for a cause) the rate of death.
13. **contain** (verb) – control, limit, restrain.
14. **screening** (noun) – examination, testing (of a group of people for the symptoms of a disease). The process of identifying healthy people who may be at increased risk of disease or condition.
15. **transmission chain** (noun) – the act or process by which something is spread or passed from one person or thing to another.
16. **foothold** (noun) – grip, anchorage, purchase, support, firm contact.
17. **to a tee** (phrase) – completely, perfectly, exactly, rightly, to perfection.
18. **influenza** (noun) – it is commonly known as “the flu”, is an infectious disease caused by an influenza virus.
19. **pneumonia** (noun) – pneumonia is an infection of the lungs. It is treatable and preventable. However, pneumonia is the leading cause of death among children under five.
20. **institute** (verb) – establish, put in place, organize.
21. **quarantine** (noun) – separate, set apart, segregate, detach (people, animals and things (such as plants) from others for a period of time in order to control/restrict the spread of a contagious disease).
22. **contact tracing** (noun) – it is defined as the identification and follow-up of persons who may have come into contact with a person infected with the virus.
23. **containment** (noun) – an act of keeping something (harmful) under control.
24. **outbreak** (noun) – sudden appearance/occurrence (of a disease); outburst, epidemic.
25. **on several fronts** (phrase) – in several area of activity.
26. **flawed** (adjective) – defective, faulty, distorted, inaccurate.
27. **dependent** (adjective) – conditional on, controlled by, under the control of.
28. **public-health** (noun) – the branch of medicine handling public health; public is also the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities through education, policy making and research for disease and injury prevention).
