

THE VISIBLE HAND

BJP must not stake claim to form a Ministry in Karnataka without an absolute majority. The political crisis in Karnataka that has been brewing for months has boiled over, threatening the congress-Janta Dal (S) coalition government. With 13 of its MLAs resigning from the Assembly in phases, and one independent withdrawing his support, the coalition's original strength of 118 in the 224-seat House appears to have come down to 104. If all the resignations are found valid and accepted by the speaker, the halfway mark will drop from 113 to 106. The BJP has 105 MLAs and the support of independent MLA Nagesh, who has resigned as a Minister. All the congress and JD (S) Ministers have resigned to allow the leadership the space to lure back the dissidents. With allegations of bribery, and abduction and confinement of lawmakers, what is unfolding is a mockery of democracy of lawmakers, what is unfolding is a mockery of democracy and a shameful disregard for the 2018 verdict. Though there are contradictions in the coalition and both parties had fought last year's election separately, post-poll coalitions are a legitimate and honourable route to the formation of a government in a hung Assembly. The legislators driven by nothing more than their greed are not setting a good example. Even if the congress and the JD (S) manage to quell the rebellion and save the government, the truce will be dubious and tainted.

The BJP's hand in the crisis is not invisible. In fact, its imprimatur is unmistakable in the turmoil. The party, which emerged as the single largest in the election but short of a majority, has not been able to accept the verdict and play the role of a responsible Opposition. The BJP's maximalist approach of seizing power by all means and in all places may have served it well in terms of expanding its footprint. But this approach does not conform to its claimed adherence to democracy. In Arunachal Pradesh and Goa, the BJP had acted on its philosophy that the pursuit of power justified all means. In Karnataka, the party has used the strategy of engineering resignations of MLAs to force by-elections several times over the last decade, given this pattern, and considering the BJP state unit's relentless attempts to destabilise the coalition from the word go, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's protestations in Parliament on Monday that the BJP had nothing to do with the current crisis in Karnataka carries little credibility. The party has meanwhile said that it would seek to form an alternative government, should the coalition crumble. The BJP must resist that temptation and instead wait for the results of the by-elections caused by the resignations. If the coalition collapses under its own weight, any alternative arrangement that is short of an absolute majority of the total strength of the House will be shaky and lacking in political legitimacy. That situation is best avoided.

THE VISIBLE HAND

Brew – develop, loom, impend, be imminent

Bail over – uncontrolled

Threaten – menace, frighten, intimidate, cow down coalition, alliance, union, partnership, bloc

Lure – attract, woo, lurate, court

Dissident – objector, dissenter, protestor, rebel

Allegation – claim, charge, accusation, contention

Bribery – subordination

Abduction – kidnapping, carrying off, seizure

Mockery – ridicule, derision, jeering, contempt

Shameful – disgraceful, deplorable, despicable

Contradiction – conflict, disagreement, opposition, inconsistency

Legitimate – legal, lawful, according to law

Quell – suppress, censor, putdown, bottle up

Rebellion – mutiny, revolution, contumacious, insurgent

Truce- ceasefire, armistia, peace

Dubious – doubtful, uncertain, unsure, hesitant

Tainted – traced, suggested, hinted

Turmoil – mayhem, disorder, turbulence, walkout

Adherent – follower, supporter, upholder, defender, advocate

Pursuit – striving towards, search for, quest after

Engineer (v) – organize

Relentless – continuous, prolonged, incessant, perpetual

Protestation – declaration, announcement profession.

Credibility – believability, plausibility, tenability

Crumble – dis-integrate, fall apart, fall to pieces

Avoid – circumvent, shun, abstain, evade, refrain

Seize – appropriate, confiscate, impound, commander

Crisis – difficult, fis, light, muddle, predicament

Greed – avarice, cupidity, acquisitiveness

Absolute – complete, total, utter, out and out

A REGRETTABLE CONVICTION

Mr. Vaiko being found guilty of sedition strengthens the case to scrap Section 124A. The conviction of prominent pro-LTTE politician Vaiko on the charge of sedition, based on a typically impassioned speech he had made in Chennai a decade ago, is a worrying development. Even though Section 124A, the IPC section that makes sedition an offence, attracts either a three-year term or imprisonment for life, the trial court sentenced him to a somewhat lenient one-year jail term. Yet, it is a matter of concern that political speeches are criminalised to the point of being deemed an offence against the state. Further, the timing of a political leader being found guilty of sedition is quite inopportune. In recent years, there has been an alarming rise in sedition charges being used to quell political dissent. This conviction will needlessly send out a message that such provisions are necessary to protect the government against being brought into hatred and contempt. Also, it comes at a time when demands to scrap the section is gaining momentum. There is greater recognition now than in the past that section 124A is neither relevant nor needed today. The Law Commission released a consultation paper highlighting arguments for its reconsideration. There is a body of opinion that a modern democracy does not need a free speech restriction based on political concepts such as disloyalty and disaffection towards the state. Britain, which introduced the offence of sedition in India in 1870 to check the use of speech and writing to criticise its colonial administration, has abolished it.

It is true that Mr. Vaiko had unleashed a diatribe against the Union government by accusing it of betraying the Sri Lankan Tamil cause, and holding it responsible for the death of Tamil civilians in large numbers. However, whether his harshly worded indictment amounts to incitement of violence against the government is debatable. The speech was made at a function to mark the release of the Tamil version of a book that accused the Congress-led regime of complicity in Sri Lanka's military campaign. The court ruled that his allegations would sow the seeds of disaffection and hatred towards the government. Here is where the real mischief of Section 124A lies. Its definition of sedition as anything that excites disaffection against the government, or brings it under hatred and contempt, is too wide and can take in its fold not only incitement to taking up arms but also harmless, even if strident, criticism. In 1962, the Supreme Court limited its scope to acts that show actual intent or a tendency to create disorder or foment violence. Regrettably, the court has held that anyone who heard Mr. Vaiko's speech would develop hatred towards the government; that "mere advocacy" is the essence of the crime, and there need not be actual violence as a consequence. Higher courts will have the final say on whether he was guilty, but the case for abrogating Section 124A just became stronger.

A REGRETTABLE CONVICTION

Conviction – declaration of guilt, sentence, judgement

Regrettable – undesirable, remorseful, sorry, contrite, rueful, woeful

Sedition – rabble rousing, incitement to rebel, subversion, rebellion

Scrap – quarrel, argument, row, fight

Lenient – merciful, clement, forgiving, tolerant

Deemed – considered, regarded as, judged

Inappropriate – inconvenient, unfavourable, unfortunate

Quell – suppress, censor, bottle up, put down

Dissent – differ, disagree, demur, take issue

Contempt – scorn, disdain, disrespect, scornfulness

Arguments – verdetta, run-in, squabbling
Disloyalty – unfaithfulness, infidelity, inconstantly
Unleash – loose, release, let out, untie, untether
Diatrife – criticism, stricture, broadside
Indictment – charge, accusation, arraignment
Incitement – charge, accusation, arraignment
Incitement - encouragement, instilling, instigating
Mischief – naughtiness, bad behaviour, pranks
Allegation – claim, charge, accusation, contention
Excite – thrill, exhilarate, animate, enliven
Hatred – loathing, hate, detestation, dislike
Strident – harsh, raucous, rough, grating
Foment – instigate, incite, provoke, agitate
Violence – brutality, ferocity, savagery, cruelty
Consequences – results, upshots, aftermaths
Guilty – culpable, blame, delinquent
Abrogate – abolish, do away with

PHRASAL VERBS

LAY

Lay something aside – save money
Lay something aside – abandon
Lay something aside – defer, suspend
Lay something bare – reveal
Lay something down – putdown, relinquish, formulate, keep
Lay down the law – order someone what to do
Lay eyes on – see
Lay hands on – catch/obtain/obtain/obtain
Lay something in – store
Lay into – criticize
Lay it on thicke – exaggerate
Lay off – give up
Lay someone off – dismiss
Lay something on – provide
Lay someone out – knock down
Lay something out – spread out / out line
Lay waste – devastate
Lay about (n) – good for nothing
Lay off (n) – temporary dismissal