

SOUND AND FURY: ON THE CONGRESS AND THE GANDHIS

The Congress leadership seems unwilling to engage in honest introspection

The sound and fury at the seven-hour long virtual meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Monday signified a lot. The orchestrated tirade by CWC members against party colleagues who raised valid concerns regarding the functioning of the party lent credence to a charge the Congress often faces — that it exists for the Gandhi family. A letter signed by several senior leaders had demanded an “active, full-time and visible” leadership. Their intent, timing and motivation were questioned by Rahul Gandhi, who continues to influence decisions in the party though he resigned as president last year. While former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shored up support for Mr. Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, who holds charge as interim president of the party, another senior leader, A.K. Antony, termed the letter “cruel”. Swinging between the senile and the juvenile, arguments at the CWC appear to be an attempt to gloss over the substance of the letter — the entire text of which, incidentally, is not public yet — and vilify its signatories. In seeking to deflect the issue by questioning the character and loyalty of those who raised it, the Congress did exactly what it often accuses its principal opponent, the BJP, of doing. The signatories to the letter might include opportunists too, but many of them such as Kapil Sibal, Manish Tewari and Shashi Tharoor have been staunch defenders of the party. There was no reason to hastily conclude, as many at the CWC did, that the letter was leaked to the media by its senders and not its recipients.

The degenerative affliction crippling the Congress party is a concern not only for its members but for all who are invested in India’s democracy. The Gandhi family that commands the loyalty of the entire party has a special duty to ensure that this cry for reform within the party is not reduced to a question about itself. The Gandhis have expressed their desire to remain active without leading the party. Such a role will be seen as a disingenuous scheme to exercise authority without accountability — something that Mr. Gandhi claims to deeply detest. He is fortunate, and must be thankful, that the Congress party in its entirety still supports him and even the reformists, mislabelled rebels by his self-styled loyalists, are not questioning his authority. They have only expressed frustration over his selective interest. It was Ms. Gandhi’s remarkable accommodative skills and magnanimity that paved the way for the creation of the United Progressive Alliance that lasted in government for two full terms between 2004 and 2014. Ms. Gandhi’s legacy faces a serious threat — not only from her political opponents but also from within the household. If Mr. Gandhi is unwilling to give up his obduracy and overcome his bitterness towards colleagues, the responsibility falls on Ms. Gandhi to ensure a transparent election to find a successor along with a new CWC and a parliamentary board.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **sound and fury** (phrase) – used to refer an action or argument that attracts a lot of attention but futile (useless/pointless).
- ❖ **introspection** (noun) – self-observation, self-analysis, self-examination; contemplation.
- ❖ **virtual meeting** (noun) – (interactive) online meeting.
- ❖ **meeting** (noun) – gathering, assembly, conference, summit.

- ❖ **orchestrated** (adjective) – organized, arranged, choreographed (secretively).
- ❖ **tirade** (noun) – attack, verbal onslaught, rant; a long talk of criticism/accusation.
- ❖ **lend/give credence to** (phrase) – to make something (opinion/idea) seem correct.
- ❖ **visible** (adjective) – prominent, distinguishable, transparent.
- ❖ **intent** (noun) – aim, purpose, objective.
- ❖ **influence** (verb) – affect, have an effect on, persuade.
- ❖ **shore up** (phrasal verb) – bolster up, buttress, strengthen, fortify, support.
- ❖ **hold** (verb) – occupy, have (a position).
- ❖ **interim** (adjective) – provisional, transitional, temporary.
- ❖ **swing** (verb) – sway, oscillate, move back and forth.
- ❖ **senile** (adjective) – aged, old, elderly.
- ❖ **juvenile** (adjective) – young, teenage, underage.
- ❖ **gloss over** (phrasal verb) – conceal, cover up, hide.
- ❖ **substance** (noun) – significant subject, important matter/content, valid message.
- ❖ **incidentally** (adverb) – by the way, by the bye, coincidentally; by chance, accidentally.
- ❖ **vilify** (verb) – censure, insult, criticize.
- ❖ **signatory** (noun) – the person who signed an official document/agreement.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) – try, aim, work towards.
- ❖ **deflect** (verb) – deviate, divert, distract, change.
- ❖ **opponent** (noun) – rival, enemy, nemesis, contender/opposer.
- ❖ **opportunist** (noun) – a person who is selfish, self-centred, self-seeking, egocentric.
- ❖ **staunch** (adjective) – loyal, committed, reliable, dependable, strong.
- ❖ **hastily** (adverb) – swiftly, rapidly, quickly.
- ❖ **degenerative** (adjective) – deteriorating, weakening, declining.
- ❖ **affliction** (noun) – misfortune, hardship, suffering, pain, trouble.
- ❖ **cripple** (verb) – impair, hamper, impede, weaken, put out of action, disable, paralyze.
- ❖ **invest in** (verb) – confer on, grant to, vest in, entrust to (a right or power or faith).
- ❖ **command** (verb) – receive, be given, get/gain, obtain.
- ❖ **cry** (noun) – urgent request, demand, appeal, entreaty.
- ❖ **disingenuous** (adjective) – dishonest, deceitful, double-dealing.
- ❖ **exercise** (verb) – use, employ, make use of, utilize.
- ❖ **accountability** (noun) – responsibility, liability, answerability.
- ❖ **deeply** (adverb) – seriously, intensely, strongly.
- ❖ **detest** (verb) – hate, dislike, disdain.
- ❖ **fortunate** (adjective) – lucky, favoured, blessed.
- ❖ **in its entirety** (phrase) – as a whole, completely, entirely/totally.
- ❖ **reformist** (noun) – a person who supports reformation of a system; groundbreaker, pathfinder.
- ❖ **mislabel** (verb) – label incorrectly.
- ❖ **self-styled** (adjective) – so-called, self-appointed, avowed, professed.
- ❖ **selective** (adjective) – discriminatory, discerning, particular.
- ❖ **selective interest** (noun) – interest shown on certain things only and not others; Selective interest leads to a concentration of attention on partial data.
- ❖ **accommodative** (adjective) – accommodating, cooperative, helpful.
- ❖ **magnanimity** (noun) – big-heartedness, generosity, kindness.
- ❖ **pave the way for** (phrase) – clear the way for, create a situation to do something, precede, make provision for.
- ❖ **last** (verb) – continue, go on, remain, exist.
- ❖ **legacy** (noun) – something received from a predecessor or from the past.
- ❖ **household** (noun) – family, house.

- ❖ **give up** (phrasal verb) – abandon, forgo, renounce, relinquish.
- ❖ **transparent** (adjective) – open/candid, forthright, straightforward, honest.
- ❖ **obduracy** (noun) – stubbornness, dogged determination, relentlessness.
- ❖ **successor** (noun as modifier) – inheritor, next-in-line, descendant.

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT: ON ISLAMIC STATE

Political instability in parts of West Asia and North Africa is allowing the IS space to operate

The U.N. counterterrorism chief's statement to the Security Council on the continuing presence of Islamic State (IS) terrorists in West Asia, Africa and elsewhere should be seen as a serious warning by the countries in these regions. Two years after the Sunni jihadist group was declared defeated, more than 10,000 IS fighters remain active in Iraq and Syria, said Vladimir Voronkov. IS-driven terror attacks are on the rise. Besides these two countries, where the IS had established a proto-state in 2014 — destroyed by multilateral war efforts that lasted four years — the terror outfit has a "province" in West Africa with nearly 3,000 fighters, according to the UN. In war-torn Afghanistan, it continues to stage attacks, targeting ethnic and religious minorities. The IS may no longer control any big city, but its rise from a breakaway faction of al-Qaeda in Iraq to one of the world's most potent terrorist groups should be a lesson for all stakeholders. Ever since they lost territories, IS fighters withdrew from the front lines and started operating in cells in the deserts, mountains and hinterlands of conflict-ridden countries.

Iraq and Syria are particularly vulnerable to the IS's resurgence as these countries are yet to be fully stabilised after the wars. In Syria, the Bashar al-Assad government has practically won the civil war. But Syria is now a divided country. While the government controls most of the territories, a coalition of jihadists and rebels is running the Idlib province. In the northeast, the Kurdish rebels have declared autonomy. On the Syrian-Turkish border, Turkey, backed by pro-Turkish rebels, has carved out a buffer and has been in permanent conflict with the Kurds. Though there is an uneasy quiet in Syria, the situation is inflammable. Iraq, after months of protests and instability, has finally got a government. But Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi is torn between the U.S. and Iran. Pro-Iran Shia militias continue to target U.S. troops inside Iraq, which could turn the country into a battlefield between Washington and Tehran. The story is not very different in Africa. Libya has two governments, which were fighting each other till last week's ceasefire. The Libyan conflict has spilled over into Mali and Burkina Faso, where jihadists have established a solid presence. Chaos breeds militancy, and as the main group here is the IS, it would remain active as long as these countries remain unstable. The IS has its roots in the U.S. invasion of Iraq. It started growing by exploiting the civil war in Syria. The regional governments as well as their international backers (and rivals) should be mindful of this fact. If they fail to address the regional fault-lines and continue to fight each other, the jihadists could emerge winners once again.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **down, but not out** (phrase) – temporarily disabled but not permanently defeated.
- ❖ **elsewhere** (adverb) – somewhere else, at another place, at a different place.
- ❖ **counterterrorism** (noun) – anti-terrorism; actions taken to combat or prevent terrorism.
- ❖ **Sunni** (adjective) – relating to Sunni branch/sect of Islam.
- ❖ **jihadist** (noun) – an Islamic militant.
- ❖ **driven** (adjective) – operated/controlled by someone.

- ❖ **on the rise** (phrase) – increasing (in number).
- ❖ **besides** (preposition) – in addition to, apart from.
- ❖ **proto-state** (noun) – quasi-state; the term proto-state has most often been evoked in reference to militant secessionist groups that claim, and exercise some form of territorial control over, a specific region but lack institutional cohesion.
- ❖ **multilateral** (adjective) – involving many different organisations.
- ❖ **last** (verb) – continue, go on, remain, exist.
- ❖ **outfit** (noun) – group, organisation.
- ❖ **province** (noun) – territory, region, state.
- ❖ **war-torn** (adjective) – (of a place) devastated, ruined, wrecked (by war).
- ❖ **ethnic** (adjective) – relating to a population subgroup (cultural, national, traditional/folk) with a common national or cultural tradition.
- ❖ **breakaway** (noun as modifier) – separatist, secessionist, dissenting, splinter (group/party).
- ❖ **faction** (noun) – group, division, sector.
- ❖ **potent** (adjective) – strong, powerful, mighty, dominant.
- ❖ **stakeholder** (noun) – a person with an interest in something.
- ❖ **the front line** (noun) – the front and most important position.
- ❖ **cell** (noun) – a secret, small group.
- ❖ **hinterland** (noun) – remote areas of a country away from the coastal areas/the banks of major rivers.
- ❖ **conflict-ridden** (adjective) – dominated/divided by conflict.
- ❖ **vulnerable** (adjective) – unsafe, unprotected, ill-protected, unguarded.
- ❖ **resurgence** (noun) – reoccurrence/recurrence, reappearance, reemergence.
- ❖ **kurdish people/Kurds** (noun) – Kurds or Kurdish people are an Iranic ethnic group native to a mountainous region of Western Asia.
- ❖ **autonomy** (noun) – independence, freedom; self rule.
- ❖ **back** (verb) – support, endorse, approve, advocate.
- ❖ **pro-** (prefix) – supporting.
- ❖ **carve out** (phrasal verb) – create, establish, take out (something with effort).
- ❖ **buffer** (noun) – cushion, protection, bulwark/barricade.
- ❖ **quiet** (noun) – a peaceful state of affair.
- ❖ **inflammable** (adjective) – unstable, volatile; incendiary/agitational.
- ❖ **tear** (verb) – torment, torture, harrow, trouble (by two conflicting parties).
- ❖ **militia** (noun) – armed forces, military unit, soldiery (from the civil population to support main forces).
- ❖ **ceasefire** (noun) – a negotiated agreement that will be accompanied by other associated commitments to de-escalate the fighting; a temporary stoppage of a war, truce, armistice.
- ❖ **spill over** (phrasal verb) – (something like an emotion/bad condition) spread out or fan out & reach to an uncontrolled level.
- ❖ **chaos** (noun) – disorder, turmoil, mayhem/disruption.
- ❖ **breed** (verb) – cause, produce, bring about, give rise to.
- ❖ **militancy** (noun) – belligerency, combativeness, contentiousness/defiance (usually to support a cause).
- ❖ **root** (noun) – source, origin.
- ❖ **invasion** (noun) – attack, assault; violation, infringement, breach.
- ❖ **exploit** (verb) – take advantage of, make use of, utilize.
- ❖ **backer** (noun) – supporter, upholder, defender.
- ❖ **rival** (noun) – opponent, adversary, contender, competitor.
- ❖ **mindful** (adjective) – aware of, conscious of, heedful of.
- ❖ **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
- ❖ **fault-line** (noun) – a divisive issue; a difference of opinion.