

## Raising the bar:

With Rahul Gandhi stating categorically that he would not continue as Congress president, one uncertainty that had gripped the party has ended. But this culmination does not end the disorder and chaos in the party, which is in a state of paralysis since its rout in the parliamentary election. Mr. Gandhi's letter of resignation is part self reflection, about the Congress in general and his own personal role in it, and part a critique of the state of affairs of Indian politics. Mr. Gandhi felt the need for introspection and accountability, and restated his long-held position that he was in politics not for power but social change. By sticking to his decision to quit as party chief, he has thrown a challenge at his colleagues to find a life outside the shelter of the Nehru-Gandhi family. The coterie that flourished around his mother and predecessor Sonia Gandhi had reduced politics to manipulation and turned the party into an instrument of vested interests. A small club of self-seekers who reinforce one another and don't face the electorate had taken over the Congress years before Mr. Gandhi came on the scene. His letter is an indictment of these leaders, whose personal fortunes never waned, even as the party's plummeted.

Mr. Gandhi's limitation is not in his understanding of the challenges before the party or the country, or in his vision for both. His inexact articulation is not reflective of any insurmountable weaknesses. His real failure has been his inability to free the party from the clutches of what his father Rajiv Gandhi had famously called power-brokers. In calling for accountability, he is effectively asking a group to self-destruct for the larger cause of the party, which in turn must fight for the larger cause of the country. By refusing to be the façade for their parasitical existence, Mr. Gandhi might have forced a productive churn at all levels. Any moral appeal could only have had a limited impact on the seasoned veterans, but the example Mr. Gandhi set by accepting responsibility for the defeat while reiterating his commitment to the larger cause might help inspire a resuscitation of the party. But questions abound. Mr. Gandhi himself will remain active in politics, as he has made clear, but how much authority he would want to exercise remains an open question. His insistence on stepping aside also comes from a realisation that the dynasty tag is more a drag than a booster for his politics, and the party, in the current environment. The process of reducing the Congress to a family enterprise had started with Mr. Gandhi's forbears and their supporters as much as their opponents. Only a family member could have sought to challenge the notion that the Congress cannot survive without the dynasty. If the absence of a Nehru-Gandhi at the helm was a precondition for the reconfiguration of the Congress and the formation of a viable alternative to Hindutva, Mr. Gandhi has created that situation.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Grip		grasp, clutch, hold, grab, seize
Culmination		climax, pinnacle, peak, high point
Disorder		untidiness, unrest, disturbance
Chaos		disorder, disarray, confusion, mayhem
Rout		defeat, trouncing, annihilation, debacle

Critique	analysis, evaluation, assessment, appraisal
Introspection	self analysis, introversion, contemplation
Accountability	responsibility, liability, answerability
Flourish	grow, thrive, prosper, burgeon, proliferate
Predecessor	ancestor, forefather, forebear, antecedent
Coterie	clique, innercircle, community, band
Manipulation	separation, working, palpation
Instrument	implement, tool, utensil, device, apparatus
Reinforce	strengthen, fortify, bolster up
Indictment	charge, accusation, arrangement, citation
Plummet	plunge, nosedive, dive, drop, fall steeply
Wane	decrease, diminish, dwindle, decline
Inexact	inappropriate, off key, wide of the mark
Articulation	eloquent, fluent, effective, persuasive
Insurmountable	insuperable, unconquerable, invincible
Clutch	grip, grasp, clasp, cling to
Power brokers	one who deliberately affects the distribution of political/economic power
Facade	front, frontage, elevation, exterior, outside
Parasitical	dependent, parasite
Churn	stir, agitate, beat, whip, disturb
Veteran	old hand, past master, doyen
Reiterate	repeat, iterate, re-capitulate
Commitment	responsibility, obligation, duty
Abound	beplentiful, abundant, benumerous
Insistence	demand, bidding, command, dictate
Stepaside	withdraw/resign from an important position or office
Dynasty	ancestral, bloodline, lineage, line
Drag	haul, pull, tug, heave
Forebear	refrain, abstain, desist, avoid
Opponent	rival, adversary, oppose, competitor
At the helm	in command, in control, in charge
Reconfiguration	re arrangement, redesign
Viable	feasible, workable, practicable, practical

## **Boost for Marathas**

The Bombay High Court verdict upholding reservation for Marathas in public employment and education must come as a major relief to the Maharashtra government, which has faced strident agitations from the community in the past for reservation benefits. When Maharashtra enacted special legislation to confer reservation benefits in education and public employment on the Maratha community last year, a formidable legal challenge was expected. The law created a group called 'Socially and Educationally Backward Class' and included Marathas as the sole group under the category, and extended 16% reservation outside the existing quotas for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and other tribes and backward classes. The foremost hurdle was the fact that the additional Maratha component would take the reservation up to 68%, thus going beyond the limit of 50% imposed by the Supreme Court. Secondly, there were doubts whether one particular caste group could constitute a special class. The 487-page judgment is a brave effort at answering these difficult questions. Significantly, it has ruled that there were "exceptional circumstances and an extraordinary situation" to warrant the crossing of the 50% limit. It has upheld the government's decision to accept the Maharashtra Backward Classes Commission's report on the backwardness of the Maratha community, faulted it for exceeding the panel's recommendation for 12-13% reservation and pulled back the figure to the recommended level. The failure to treat this group as backward for decades has pushed its members deeper into social and educational backwardness. Thus, it says, an extraordinary situation has been created wherein the State had to treat them as a separate category.

The High Court's reasoning may not convince many. For one thing, it is doubtful whether a politically influential and dominant community can be treated as a special category in itself, even if it is educationally backward and under-represented in the services owing to lack of reservation benefits. The uplift of the Marathas can be achieved by including it in the OBC list. If there were concerns about too large a population sharing too small a quota, the existing OBC reservation could have been expanded, instead of Marathas being given separate reservation. Further, Marathas have been classified as the only member of the newly created 'SEBC'. The court seems to have ignored the fact that being socially and educationally backward is the constitutional reason for OBC reservation. It is befuddling how 'SEBC' can be a separate category outside the OBCs. Further, whether adequate grounds have been established to make an exception to the 50% limit will likely be examined by the Supreme Court closely. Mere expansion of the reservation pool is unlikely to be a constitutionally permissible reason for it.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Boost		encouragement, inspiration, lift, spur
Strident		harsh, raucous, rough, jarring
Enact		pas, make law, legislate, ratify
Legislation		laws, law formulation, codification
Confer		bestow on, present, to, grant to, award to
Formidable		intimidating, forbidding, daunting, frightening
Hurdle		obstacle, difficulty, problem, barrier
Warrant		authorization, order, license
Influential		powerful, dominant, controlling
Dominant		influential, powerful, controlling
Uplift (n)		raise, aloft, escalation, increase
Concerns		worries, apprehensions
Befuddle		bemuse, confuse, puzzle, baffle, floor
Adequate		sufficient, plenty, plethora, plenitude