

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, marshal, 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 **buck** 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.

SOME IMPORTANT IDIOM AND PHRASES

1. The icing on the cake
Example – I got MS in the University that I wished to and scholarship was like the icing on the cake.
Meaning – Something that turns good into great.
2. Jump the bandwagon
Example – When I put on few kgs, I immediately jumped on the bandwagon and join the gym.
Meaning – To join a popular activity or trend.
3. **Cost an arm and a leg**
Example – My laziness costs me an arm and a leg every time.
Meaning – Be very expensive.

4. The ball is in your court
Example – Now the ball is in my court and I will take the revenge on him.
Meaning – When it is up to you to take the next step or decision.
5. It takes two to tango
Example – The manager realizes that it takes two to tango before taking the decision.
Meaning – Actions or communications need more than one person.
6. Last straw
Example – If I complete this last straw, I will complete this level.
Meaning – The final problem in a series of problems.
7. Break the ice
Example – Always break the ice in a group discussion.
Meaning – To initiate a social conversation or interaction.
8. A bird's eye view
Example – The building gives you a bird's eye view of the whole city.
Meaning – A view from a very high place that allows seeing a very large area.
9. Be on cloud nine
Example – I will be on cloud nine when I pass the exam.
Meaning – Be very happy.
10. Eat humble pie
Example – The employee will have to eat humble pie for his misbehavior to his boss.
Meaning – To apologize humbly.
11. To show the white feather
Example – Becky showed the white feather and backed down.
Meaning – To act like a coward
12. To play fast and loose
Example – The TN reporter is known for playing fast and loose with the facts.
Meaning – To act in an unreliable way./Act carelessly or irresponsibly
13. Wear one's heart on one's sleeve
Example – Sumit always wears his heart on his sleeve, so there is no doubt who he'll be supporting.
Meaning – To make your feelings and opinions obvious to other people.

14. To make a long face

Example – Why have you got such a long face? Better luck next time.

Meaning – To look depressed.

15. In apple pie order

Example – Please put everything in apple pie order before you leave.

Meaning – Perfectly methodical arrangement./Very well organized.

16. To strain every nerve

Example – I was straining every nerve to break the code but failed every time.

Meaning – To try extremely hard to do something.

17. To have an axe to grind

Example – The best reporting is done by people who don't have an axe to grind.

Meaning – To have a selfish interest to serve.

18. To draw the line

Example – It's hard to keep young people under control, but you have to draw the line somewhere.

Meaning – To set limits/To separate one thing from another.

19. Beat around the bush

Example – Don't beat around the bush, just tell me what's happening here.

Meaning – To avoid talking about an embarrassing subject as you are worried about upsetting the person you are talking to.

20. A wild goose chase

Example – After five hours spent wandering in the city, we realized that we were on a wild goose chase.

Meaning – An absurdly hopeless enterprise./ Wasting time looking for something that you are not going to find.

21. A litmus test

Example – His performance in the Test matches served as a litmus test whether he would join the One-day team.

Meaning – An experiment that seeks to determine the state of one important factor.A method that helps to know if something is correct.

22. To cry wolf

Example – Don't pay attention to her. She is just crying wolf again.

Meaning – To cry or complain about something when nothing is really wrong.

23. To be hard up

Example – James was hard up for cash to pay his bills.

Meaning – To be short of money.

24. To take to one's heels

Example – The man took to his heels to try to get the bus before it leaves the bus stop.

Meaning – To run very fast.

25. Cry over spilt milk

Example – There is no use of crying over spilt milk, instead of being careful in the future.

Meaning – Complaining about a loss or failure from the past.

26. At the drop of a hat

Example – She is always ready to go for an outing at the drop of a hat.

Meaning – Willingness to do something instantly.

27. Afraid of one's own shadow

Example – My grandfather always had panic attacks. He was the kind of a person who was afraid of his own shadow.

Meaning – To become easily frightened.

28. A house of cards

Example – That well-reputed company turned out to be a house of cards within a year.

Meaning – A poor plan or organization that is very weak and can be easily destroyed.

29. Black and Blue

Example – The thief was beaten black and blue by the public.

Meaning – Full of bruises (Black marks caused by being hit).

30. To be in the doldrums

Example – My friend is in doldrums since a week and nothing I do seems to cheer him up.

Meaning – To feel sad and lack of energy to do something.

31. Be on cloud nine

Example – I will be on cloud nine when I pass UPSC exam this year.

Meaning – Be very happy

32. Fool's paradise

Example – They were living in a fool's paradise, refusing to accept that they were facing poverty.

Meaning – False sense of happiness or success.

33. Give cold shoulder

Example – The principal has given the cold shoulder to the proposal to arrange an inter-school dance competition.

Meaning – To ignore

34. Get a raw deal

Example – It is very sad that the backward class poor children get a raw deal in education.

Meaning – not to be treated as well as others.

35. Hit the nail on the head

Example – He always hit the nail on the head in troubled situations.

Meaning – to do the correct thing

JUST BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.
EVEN IF YOU DONT, PRETEND THAT YOU DO AND,
AT SOME POINT, YOU WILL.