



POWER & POLITICS

PRABHU CHAWLA

THIS Friday marks the first death anniversary of Andhra Pradesh's charismatic chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy. It will also mark one year of grandstanding by Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, YSR's 37-year-old son and Lok Sabha MP. A year ago, the Congress was faced with the prospects of a serious revolt in the ranks in Andhra Pradesh when Jagan staged serial dramas to stake his claim to succeed his father even before YSR's last rites had been performed.

A year later, nothing has changed. If anything, Jagan has become more ambitious and more reckless. Now matters are set to reach a climax and don't be surprised if a few months from now, Jagan is left with nothing but a severe hangover.

For a year now, the young man in a hurry has been indulging in activities that would have got anyone else the boot. He began by promoting YSR loyalist MLAs to ignore K. Rosaiah, the soft spoken 77-year-old new chief minister. Jagan instigated ministers, many of whom were YSR loyalists, to boycott cabinet meetings.

He also used his considerable money and media power to project himself as the only alternative. If all this were not enough to tax the Congress high command's patience, the proverbial last straw was his decision to embark on the controversial "Odarpu" (remembrance) yatra across the state to commiserate with, and compensate, those who "committed suicide" after YSR's death.

He set out on the yatra ignoring even a plea from Sonia Gandhi. She had called him to Delhi and he met her accompanied by his mother and sister. She tried to dissuade him from the yatra and instead suggested that a function be held where family members of all those who took their lives be invited and handed compensation. A stubborn Jagan rejected her plea.

Worse, after the meeting which was supposedly private, he released a statement saying the yatra was an "emotional" issue for his family. "We explained to her (Sonia) the need for the yatra to console the family members of those who died following the death of my father. She did not cite any specific reason but did not appear to be favourably inclined," Jagan said in his statement.

The high command was livid. "All loyal Congressmen must necessarily observe the party *dharma* and *laxman rekha* of propriety and party discipline," party spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi said, adding that the party would not hesitate to take a firm stand to crack down on indiscipline.

From the flurry of activity, both in the government and the party, it appears that this was no empty threat. The Congress



K. Rosaiah

may finally be readying to wield the axe. A recent secret note from an Andhra Congress MP, an ex-YSR groupie, to Sonia Gandhi recommends that the damage will be minimal and containable if action was taken against Jagan.

The note also says that far from being spontaneous, the yatra is a politically motivated gimmick where even grief is well choreographed.

Though the number of persons who committed suicide last year was said to run into hundreds, it appears now that it is considerably less, perhaps a few dozen. The MP's note echoes the inputs that the Congress has got from state

party chief, D. Srinivas.

Last Thursday, governor ESL Narasimhan flew to the Capital and met the Prime Minister. Though the ostensible reason was to brief the Centre on developments relating to Telengana, the governor is understood to have given a lowdown on the Jagan factor.

This week, chief minister Rosaiah will also be in town. Jagan's supporters say his yatra is aimed at strengthening the Congress in the manner that Rahul Gandhi's yatras into the hinterlands have revitalised the party in areas where it had been written off.

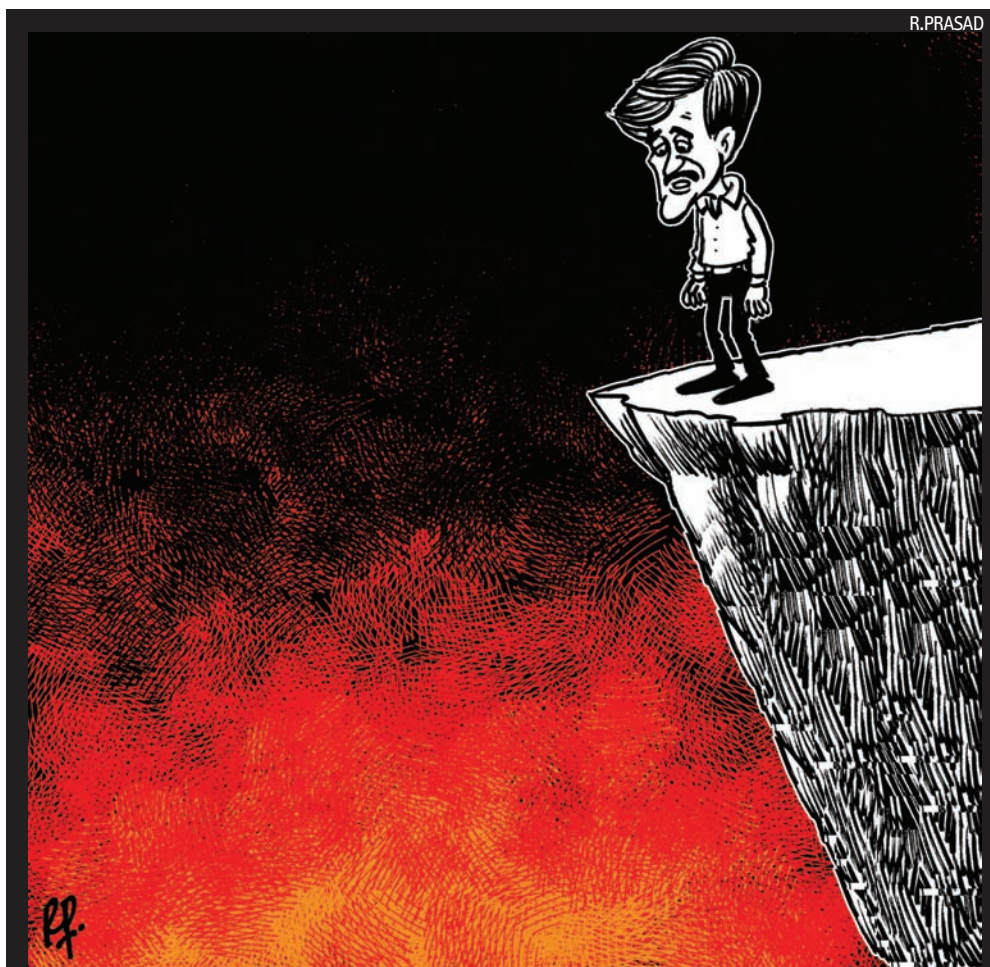
They point out that it was a similar bicycle yatra that YSR

undertook in 2004 that led to the Congress unseating the TDP in the assembly elections held that year.

Andhra Pradesh's importance in the Congress's scheme of things cannot be overstated. But for its 33 MPs, the UPA may not have come to power for a second consecutive term.

Its hopes of a repeat in 2014 depends to a large extent on how Andhra Pradesh votes.

The dilemma facing the Congress is: do we do it with or without Jagan. At the moment, only one thing is clear. Sonia Gandhi, who hasn't lost an intra-party war since taking over as the Congress chief, is not likely to surrender to a greenhorn.



Dead end for Jagan

Packages for J&K serve no purpose

THERE have been many meaningless committees and money-wasting schemes for Kashmir in the past six years. Last week, Hurriyat chief Mirwaiz Umar Farooq taunted the government when he told a gathering in Srinagar: "The youth here didn't give their lives for jobs, didn't give their lives for economic packages, they didn't give their lives to come into the mainstream of India, the youth gave their lives only for freedom."

And the government response? The Dr C. Rangarajan-led committee with N.R. Narayana Murthy, the CII's Tarun Das, among others on board, met for the first time in New Delhi last Friday to formulate an employment generation plan for the state, involving both the public and the private sectors.

By the government's own admission in June, when the Prime Minister visited the state, less than half of the 67 projects drawn up since 2004 have been completed. In his first visit to the Valley as Prime Minister in November 2004, Manmohan Singh had announced a number of plans, including providing basic services, employment generation, relief and rehabilitation to families of militancy victims. Most of these still remain on paper. In the meantime, thousands of crores continued to be poured into the state for which there is no accountability.

It may be too late for the ₹70,000 crore thrown down the drain during the last several years. But it is time to call a halt and address the real issue — the fight between the Abdullahs and the Muftis.

One has a third generation chief minister in office, the other a second generation ousted CM. The success of one necessarily means the end of the road for the other. And Mufti Mohammed Sayeed knows that whatever good Omar Abdullah may do for Kashmir is bad for his daughter Mehbooba.

If the Centre has any respect for the Indian taxpayers' money, it should stop the economic packages. Let the warring dynasties fight their battles with their own money.

AFTER months of spewing venom on each other, how refreshing it was to see the Treasury and the main Opposition benches exhibiting a kind of warmth rarely seen in recent times.

After the passage of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill, government ministers were effusive in their praise for the BJP leaders and acknowledged that the Bill would not have passed but for their whole-hearted support.

The Opposition reciprocated with Sushma Swaraj congratulating the government for "accommodating" them as far as possible. She particularly singled out finance minister Pranab Mukherjee, minister of state in the PMO Prithviraj Chavan and HRD minister Kapil Sibal for showing "flexibility" on many issues that



The Prime Minister's rare departure from etiquette

the two sides had battled over for long in recent days.

For all the bonhomie, there was something that stuck out like a sore thumb. Parliament is not only about rules but also about etiquette and conventions.

It is due to these conventions that when a Speaker is unanimously elected, the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition jointly escort the new incumbent to the High Chair.

Another convention has it that when a critical Bill is passed with the Opposition extending full support to the government, the Prime Minister walks across the aisles to thank

the Opposition benches for the support. That Manmohan Singh left the house much before the vote may mean that he had pressing engagements. Or maybe his office failed to remind him of the etiquette.

In the past, Manmohan has always given the Opposition its due. The Opposition's role is to oppose, but when it backs the government on crucial legislation, the message that goes out is that the House is one on an issue of national interest.

It was the Prime Minister who made the passage of the nuke Bill a prestige issue and sent his ministers out to woo the Opposition. The PMO should have reminded him of the courtesy reciprocation.

□ JUST as there is no better way to a man's heart than through his stomach, the government seems to think the same route must apply for bureaucrats too. In a recent circular, the government has taken a good look at the quality of food served in departmental canteens in government offices and come to the conclusion that it leaves much to be desired and is vastly inferior to the fare served in some of the offices by private parties that run parallel centres.

The circular, issued by Rajiv Manjhi, director, canteens, in the department of personnel and training, requests the authorities concerned to ensure quality of eatables in government canteens by using branded or genuine products and displaying the raw materials used so that the staff are encouraged to patronise them.

It says "the objective of setting up these canteens, as a measure of employee welfare, has been to meet the refreshment needs of employees by preparing under hygienic conditions tea/snacks, lunch etc. as per local requirement/taste etc. of the beneficiaries". The missive hasn't spared even those who serve the highest in the land.

The circular was also sent to the secretariats of the President and the Vice-President though the Rashtrapati Bhawan and the VP House which have their own kitchens with a retinue of cooks and butlers. Wonder what the state guests at the many banquets have to say about this.