

THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | ASHOK GEHLOT

‘The decisions of the last six months will be reviewed’

The Rajasthan Chief Minister on his appointment and equation with Sachin Pilot, his government’s agenda, and the Congress party’s strategy for 2019

VARGHESE K. GEORGE & MOHAMMED IQBAL

Ashok Gehlot became Chief Minister of Rajasthan for the third time after the Congress narrowly won the Rajasthan Assembly election in December. In a freewheeling interview, he speaks of Congress president Rahul Gandhi’s leadership, says he “really likes” Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot, and promises to take strong action against efforts to foment communal tension. Excerpts:

How do you interpret the mandate received by the Congress in Rajasthan?

■ The message given by Congress president Rahul Gandhi in Gujarat [during the Assembly elections] has appealed to the people in the country. He spoke about the false promise made by the NDA government at the Centre of giving employment to two crore people and its failure to do anything for farmers’ welfare despite its promise to double their income by 2022. Their mandate was till 2019, but they are talking about 2022! Rahulji kept the focus on issues related to small and medium enterprises and the unorganised sector. He raised the Rafale issue during the election campaign, but the NDA government has not been able to reply to it till today. The themes of price rise and high petrol and diesel prices in the campaign convinced the people that Mr. Gandhi wants to do something for the country. Mr. Gandhi has also been talking about waiving farmers’ loans. Farmers are the biggest sufferers under the present dispensation, and I believe that the government of any party will have to focus on farmers.

Will the same atmosphere hold till the Lok Sabha election?

■ Yes, of course. Nobody can stop this. The BJP will continue to be on the defensive, because they have no agenda to offer to the people and no achievements to show.

After appointing you as Chief Minister, what mandate did Mr. Gandhi give you?

■ Good governance is our main mandate. The agenda set by Mr. Gandhi will be taken forward. It includes farmers, youths, maintaining law and order, and eliminating hatred and violence. Politics should be based on non-violence and brotherhood. People are being lynched by mobs. Can you imagine the pain and suffering that the family members of those killed undergo? This is often done on the pretext of cow protection. Innocent people transporting cows for rearing or trade are killed just on the suspicion of smuggling bovine animals. With this atmosphere, it is no wonder if the popular sentiment turns against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A section of people argue that the atmosphere against the BJP has built up only in the States, and that the Union government is still popular. But I believe that Mr. Modi and his cohorts will soon be exposed.

The deliberations ahead of your appointment as Chief Minister went on for long. What was going on?

■ Nothing! I was appointed and I took over as Chief Minister.

But how? Why were you selected?

■ See, I think there are three factors that are taken into account for the Chief Minister’s



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was PCC president for three terms and then became the Chief Minister, after 14 years. The young generation should appreciate that its time will come. The high command will take a decision on its own. They should not offer their own candidature. The Congress doesn’t have this culture. I said this to Mr. Pilot when he became the PCC president and conveyed to him my observation that offering one’s candidature will not bring the post to him.

Until recently you were Mr. Gandhi’s right-hand man. What role would you like to play in the Lok Sabha election?

■ No, nothing. Mr. Gandhi wants all of us to work unitedly; we obviously follow his wish. Mr. Pilot is a young man. He has miles to go. I really like him. I became a Union Minister at the young age of 29 in the Indira Gandhi government and PCC [Pradesh Congress Committee] president at the age of 34. I

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of criminal cases against its workers during the agitation against the dilution of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and you acted promptly on it. Are you maintaining good relations with the BSP with an eye on the Lok Sabha polls?

■ The six BSP MLAs elected in Rajasthan met me the other day. I took no exception to the comments made by Mayawati [BSP chief Mayawati]. She has to convey her message to her cadre. Our duty is to ensure that there is rule of law and there is no injustice to anyone. We will ensure that no innocent person is implicated in false cases.

Will those who left the Congress, contested the polls and won come back to the party fold?

■ All of them have come back. Technically, they cannot become Congress members in the Assembly, but they are supporting the party. There are 11 such members; two are rebels who quit the BJP. Besides, there are six BSP MLAs, who are support-

ing the ruling party. There is no threat to the stability of the government.

What are the decisions of the previous BJP regime that you are reviewing?

■ There is a tradition in Rajasthan, whether the Congress or the BJP is elected to power, that the decisions of the last six months are reviewed. We have appointed a committee for the purpose after a Cabinet decision. There is no vendetta or prejudice involved in it. After a change of government, individuals who took decisions against public interest or worked with vested interests are punished. This is necessary for good governance.

You’re in charge of some major portfolios, including Finance and Home.

■ These portfolios are always with the Chief Minister. Other departments which are with me are minor ones, such as General Administration and Personnel. There may be a reshuffle in the State Cabinet after the Lok Sabha elections, in which some departments may be redistributed to others.

What will be your strategy for selecting candidates for the Lok Sabha election?

■ The work for this has begun. The PCC and we will select the candidates together. Mr. Gandhi will be visiting Jaipur for a farmers’ rally on January 9, when this will be taken forward. Farmers who are beneficiaries of the loan waiver decision will be coming in large numbers to show their solidarity with the government.

Will you try to form alliances with parties such as the BSP in Rajasthan for the Lok Sabha polls?

■ This will be decided by the Alliance Committee in the AICC. This work is in progress.

Do you think Mr. Gandhi will become the Prime Minister after the Lok Sabha polls?

■ Why not? Nobody from the Gandhi family has occupied the post in the last three decades, but Soniaji [UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi] and Rahulji continued their work for the welfare of the people. Mr. Gandhi has emerged as a personality who is challenging a man like Mr. Modi.

The BJP’s rule is not like what it was during the prime ministership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Only Mr. Modi and Amit Shah are ruling the country. The country, democracy and the Constitution are under threat. The people should realise how the government has been run over the last five years: falsehood promoted, marketing done with ₹5,000 crore, an atmosphere of fear created, no achievement made, and industrialists, media persons, politicians and bureaucrats frightened. The country will not forgive Mr. Modi for laying down new traditions, such as criticising the country on foreign soil and flaying an important party of the country in public meetings organised through Indian embassies. Mr. Modi has used Indian embassies as tools for his own politics. People owing allegiance to the RSS have been posted not only in the Union government’s departments, but also in Indian embassies. They take crucial decisions. Secretaries and Ministers called to the PMO are insulted. There is great frustration within the BJP. Nitin Gadkari has sounded the bugle and others may join him in the near future. In fact, they should. How long will they prevent their voice of conscience from

coming out?

You are close to both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. In the run-up to the Lok Sabha election, what should the Congress workers expect Ms. Gandhi to do?

■ Let me clarify a fact. Instead of saying that I am very close to Ms. Gandhi or Mr. Gandhi, I would say that like me, all honest, reliable, committed and dedicated soldiers of the Congress are close to both of them. This perception about my proximity to the Gandhi family is not correct. It is up to us how true we prove ourselves to the trust they repose in us. I am lucky that they have so much faith in me.

But the question was about Ms. Gandhi’s role in the Lok Sabha polls.

■ That you should ask Ms. Gandhi. Mr. Gandhi has exposed the politics of the BJP. About 40 years ago, cow protection was raised in the manner that the Ram temple issue is being raised these days. There was a march to Parliament, and several persons were killed in police firing. They forgot the cow, caught hold of the temple issue, and captured power through it. If they had been elected to power by offering a vision better than that of the Congress, I would have respected them. It is easy to set something on fire, but difficult to extinguish a raging fire.

Can we expect your government to take strong action against any attempts to foment communal or social tension in the State?

■ Obviously, yes. We will deal with such attempts without compromise. We will take strict administrative action.

SINGLE FILE

Regaining respect

Doing away with the inauguration may see reduced political interest in the Indian Science Congress

R. PRASAD



Reacting to controversial remarks made by Andhra University Vice Chancellor G. Nageswara Rao and Dr. Kannan Krishnan at the recently concluded 106th Indian Science Congress at Jalandhar, Nobel Laureate Venkatraman Ramakrishnan said in

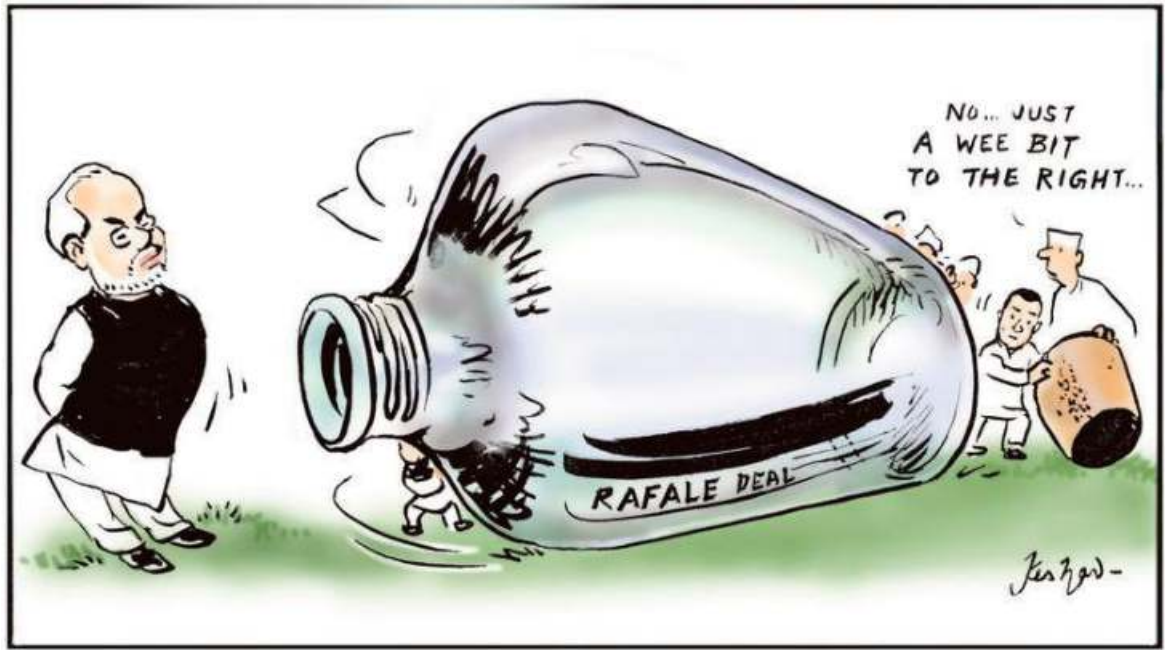
an email, “The talks need to be vetted by serious committees with the appropriate expertise. If despite the careful vetting, someone begins to spout nonsense, they should be ejected by the chair of the session.”

The Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) has finally decided to do what Professor Ramakrishnan has suggested and bring some respectability to the Congress. In a resolution, it decided to obtain in advance the abstracts of the lectures of all speakers, including those speaking at the Children’s Science Congress. “We will not vet but screen the abstracts, and not allow pseudoscience to be presented. We will also have a person from the Association at every session and remove the speakers from the dais if they go beyond the purview of the submitted abstract,” said Premendu P. Mathur, General Secretary (Scientific Activities), ISCA.

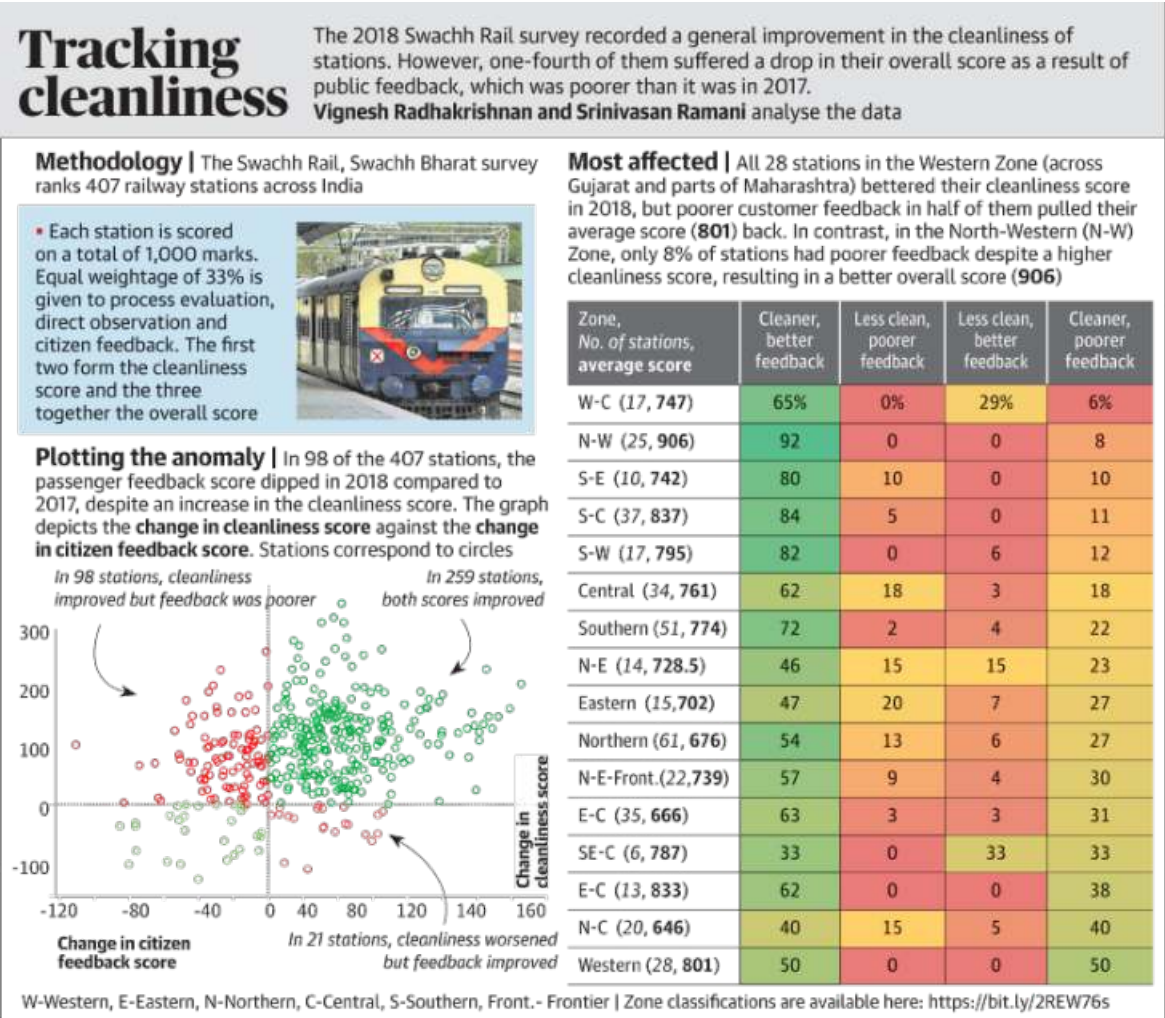
While the standard of the Congress has been in steady decline for several years, since 2015 it has seen questionable comments by speakers glorifying India’s ancient scientific achievements. The stage was set in October 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when he cited the examples of Karana and Ganesha to wrongly claim that reproductive genetics and cosmetic surgery existed in India thousands of years ago. At the 2018 Science Congress, Union Minister of Science and Technology Harsh Vardhan claimed that Stephen Hawking once said the Vedas had a theory superior to Albert Einstein’s $E=mc^2$. The credibility of science was also eroded when Union Minister of State for Human Resource Development Satyapal Singh claimed last year at an event that Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution of man was “scientifically wrong”. It might be more than coincidence that Professor Rao felt emboldened to claim that the Kauravas were test tube babies and that India possessed knowledge about guided missiles centuries ago. On his part, Dr. Krishnan rejected Einstein’s theory of relativity, Newton’s theory of gravity as well as Hawking’s theories on black holes.

The Association must take bold decisions to transform the Congress into a platform for serious scientific discussions. Professor Ramakrishnan, who called the Congress a “circus”, suggested that the meeting be “made smaller and depoliticised”. The most needed reform would be to do away with the inauguration altogether. P. Balaram, a former director of the Indian Institute of Science, said that if the inauguration were to be excluded from the agenda, the event would see reduced political interest and more genuine science. In such a scenario, serious scientists will hopefully flock to the Congress in greater numbers.

The writer is the Science Editor of The Hindu



DATA POINT



FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 9, 1969

Mrs. Gandhi’s call at Commonwealth conference

Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi to-day [January 8] told the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ conference that equality and freedom from racial discrimination were the corner-stones of this multi-racial group of countries with different points of view and problems. The Commonwealth would not only be a living association but dimensions would be added to its growth if they dealt with the problem of economic imbalance and tensions within the Commonwealth in a realistic manner. Mrs. Gandhi referred to efforts by Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Mr. Arshad Hussain, yesterday to inject bilateral issues such as Kashmir into the discussions here [London] and said there was no area of the world, not even Great Britain, which did not have some problem.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 9, 1919.

The Defamation Suit.

At the High Court to-day [Calcutta, January 8] before Justice Rankin an application was made on behalf of the plaintiff in the suit instituted by Mr. Donald James Reid against Mr. William S. Irwin for the issue of commission to examine the Hon’ble Sir F.G. Sly and Mr. G. Rainy. Both plaintiff and defendant are Indigo planters of Behar. In June 1917 Behar Government appointed a Committee known as Champaran Agrarian Enquiry Committee to enquire into the relation between landlords and tenants in Champaran Distirct. Mr. Sly was President and Mr. Rainy was a member of that Committee. Mr. Sly invited the defendant and other planters to meet a Committee with a view to an amicable settlement as to reduction of “Shoraboshi.” They attended the meeting and the Committee published its report in Government Gazette. After that the Plaintiff alleged Mr. Irwin caused letters to be printed in Calcutta papers making allegation of fraud and dishonesty against the plaintiff. Mr. Reid alleged that as a result of these statements in the Press he had been greatly injured in his credit and reputation.

CONCEPTUAL

Extreme male brain

BIOLOGY

Also known as the empathising-systemising theory, this refers to a theory of autism which states that the condition may be the result of overexposure of fetuses to testosterone from their mothers. Such overexposure to testosterone may cause the brains of people with autism to specifically adapt to analyse and construct systems while severely lacking in the ability to empathise with fellow human beings. The extreme male brain theory was proposed by British clinical psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen. It derives its name from the fact that the male brain is typically suited for systemising purposes while the female brain is built for empathising.

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