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## Pranab's failing memory



Symptoms such as loss of memory become dangerous when they occur in persons in power or at least in power brokers and troubleshooters on whom the all-powerful rely. Seeing the NDTV interview of Pranab Mukherjee, one suspects that problems are in store for Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and her young (actually 40-year old) son and heir, Rahul.

Pranab has gone over 400-500 years of history and, in more detail, over the period 1956-73 to deal with the question (which he did not answer) over what he thinks about the December 9, 2009 Government of India declaration in favour of a separate state for Telangana.

He said all this was complex and complicated and suggested that if only people were sensible and kept quiet something could be done sometime. Apparently, the fact that Telangana has "besieged itself" in a "General Strike of All the People" since 13th September has escaped his (short-term) memory.

Again he has forgotten what Lalu Yadav wrote to him: "We earnestly feel that the creation of Telengana State cannot be delayed any longer. The people of the region have been fighting for it for more than a half-a-century. It is a people's movement in real sense.

This movement has always been solidly backed by every section of the people of the region. Intellectuals, government employees, students remained all through, as the backbone of the movement. And now, it has percolated down to the agrarian sector and the working classes....

The people of this region strongly feel and they have every reason to feel so - that they can no longer live in the integrated state of Andhra Pradesh with self respect and dignity.....The electoral verdict of 2004 is of great significance in this regard. ....

There cannot be a clearer verdict than this in favor of creating a Telengana State. Any interpretation given the contrary to it will amount to subverting the people's verdict. In a democratic polity, we cannot escape from honoring the people's wishes."

Well, this was on 20th May 2005, so Pranab need to consult his files He may then discover that Mayawati also said something similar about the same time: "The demand of the people of Telengana for a separate state is not a new or sudden development.

It has been there for the last five to six decades.... The UPA government has rightly taken up on its agenda the proposal for the formation of Telengana state. .... the Bahujan Samaj Party suggests that the state of Telengana be formed very soon."

It can be said that these were old friends and who needs them now. But what about the Great Maratha ally, who wrote to him saying: "The grievances of the people of the region are real and their demand for a Telengana State is genuine. The NCP is, therefore, of the opinion that the state of Telengana should be created without further loss of time."

And Prakash Singh Badal, a much older man but whose memory is better, wrote some history too: "It would be in the fitness of things to recall that the merger of Telengana with Andhra to form the present state of Andhra Pradesh was done ignoring a categorical recommendation made by the States Reorganization Commission. It was also much against the wishes of the people of Telengana and contrary to the views of the tallest leaders of the time Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru....



The merger of Telengana with Andhra was however, not unconditional. ...No less a person than Jawaharlal Nehru himself compared it to a matrimonial alliance with the provision of divorce."

"The demand of the people of Telengana for a separate state has many dimensions – economic, political, cultural, linguistic, social and so on.

Deprived of their legitimate share in the fruits of development, marginalized in the political process and administrative set-up, looked down on the cultural and linguistic fronts, they feel that they have been reduced to a status of second rate citizens in their own homeland.

In fact, it is not just a problem of economic development. It is essentially a problem involving self-respect of the people of the region...It is already one year since this promise was made and it is high time to redeem forth the assurance given to the people."

Four former prime ministers -- Chandrasekhar, V P Singh, Inder Gujral, Deva Gowda -- also took the same line in favour of Telangana statehood. All this is on Pranab's file.

As for the BJP, L K Advani explained in his memoirs how public policy worked with regard to Telangana when he was the Deputy Prime Minister in the NDA Government:

"We had also backed the formation of separate Telengana, to be carved out of Andhra Pradesh and Vidharbha, to be formed out of Maharashtra. Indeed the formation of these (five) states was an important commitment in our party's election manifesto in 1998.

peculiar situation has arisen in the case of the demand for a separate Telengana, a demand that is as old as the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956.

The BJP has backed this demand. However, we could not do anything in this regard since Telugu Desam, which supported the Vajpayee government between 1998-2004 was opposed to it. ....As soon as the Telugu Desam severed its ties with the BJP, our party has unequivocally reiterated our support to the formation of a separate Telengana."

And if 2005 is far too long for Pranab's memory to reach, perhaps he remembers that he announced in the Rajya Sabha on 10th December 2009 that the Government would commence the process for according statehood to Telangana.

Pranab has forgotten the 600 youths who committed ritual suicide for the cause of Telangana. He does not seem to realize that the month-long general strike in the region has paralyzed all services.

It involves government employees, teachers, students, doctors, nurses, coal miners, bus drivers, industrial workers - even temple priests - and other sections of society.

Coal supplies, power availability and transport services have been affected both in and outside the State. The losses to the state exchequer alone are estimated at Rs 300 crores a day – and to those on strike, many times more.

The NDTV interview had Pranab saying that granting statehood for Telangana would have other repercussions and that needs to be thought of. This is what was reported on December 12, 2009 from Barasat, West Bengal.

“Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee rubbished any kind of ‘domino effect’, categorically stating that the UPA government’s decision to look into the demand for a separate Telangana state to be carved out of Andhra Pradesh doesn’t mean it has agreed to demands from other states too.”

"The demand for Telangana is 60 years old. This does not mean everywhere new states are to be created," Mukherjee told reporters after inaugurating a new hospital here in North 24 Parganas."

“Is old age a hurdle for the Congress Party leadership”, he was asked in part of the same interview broadcast a day earlier. Not at all, he said, the Congress always had young leaders – only the Opposition has old ones. Is this not the time for Rahul to take over, before the old fogies mess things up completely?