

## Stated losses

The electoral pounding in Andhra Pradesh couldn't have come at a worse time for the Congress

**A**FTER the insurrection by its own allies over the presidential election, by-elections in Andhra Pradesh have underscored the Congress's real vulnerability — waning influence in key states. For all its efforts to contain Jagan Mohan Reddy, his YSR Congress has won 14 of the 18 assembly seats, and the one Lok Sabha seat in Nellore that went to polls. Parkal in Telangana has also rejected the Congress.

The elections were forced by the fact that many Congress legislators had defected to the YSR Congress. Just as Jagan's juggernaut was picking up speed, he was arrested by the CBI and charged with money-laundering. Jagan's business interests and assets swelled suspiciously in value when his father Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was CM — but the Congress was then willing to suspend judgement, as long as it gained from YSR's extravagant populism. After YSR's death, Jagan set out to claim his political patrimony when it became clear that the Congress was not prepared to hand it to him. These elections

have made it clear that voters too don't care about this fabled corruption, and that Jagan has the upper hand in the tussle with the Congress. The Congress had 16 of these 18 seats in 2009 — after the confrontation with Jagan, it now has two. It came third in 10 seats, fifth in one and lost its deposit in five seats. Telangana has also cost it — after an impulsive intervention in 2009, its reluctance to act caused slow-burning regional tensions to become an unmanageable conflict. In sum, the Congress is a depleted husk of its former self in AP — a state that was once its anchor.

The Congress's visible straining to push its own candidate for president is because of these weakened bases in so many large and important states, from UP to West Bengal. It lacks political heft in these states, and relies on symbiotic relationships with regional partners. That's a losing game, because these partners place their own interests first when they can, and deny the Congress the ability to chart its own policy course. Its loss in AP couldn't have come at a worse time.