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Premium

Decode Politics: 100 years after Mahatma Gandhi event, why Cong is going all out for Belagavi session

The Congress's 1924 conclave was the only session presided over by Gandhi as the party chief; Cong leaders now claim its current fight is similar to the struggle it had led against the British.

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Decode politics

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It was during this session in the erstwhile Bombay state that Gandhi laid down his ideas of non-violence, communal harmony as well as "swaraj (self-rule)". (Wikimedia Commons)

The Congress is holding an extended session of its highest decision-making body, Congress Working Committee (CWC), and a rally in Belagavi (previously Belgaum) in Karnataka on December 26-27 to commemorate the centenary of Mahatma

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Gandhi presiding over the Congress's historic Belgaum session as the party president in 1924.

The Congress' top brass including party chief [Mallikarjun Kharge](#), Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha [Rahul Gandhi](#), [Wayanad](#) MP [Priyanka Gandhi](#) Vadra along with [CWC](#) members and senior party leaders from across the country, including its chief ministers and state unit presidents, will take part in the two-day event, where discussion over the party's "short and medium-term action plans" are likely to be taken up.

What was the backdrop of Cong's 1924 session?

After his release from prison in February 1924 following a surgery, Mahatma Gandhi was unhappy over the lack of unity between Hindus and Muslims during the freedom struggle. He went on a 21-day fast from September 18 to October 8 that year to "bridge" this divide. He also wanted to address the issue of rampant factionalism in the Congress.

Why is the Belgaum session considered historic?

It was the only Congress session which was presided over by Gandhi as the party chief. Gandhi had held the post of the Congress president between December 1924 and April 1925.

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It was during this session in the erstwhile Bombay state that Gandhi laid down his ideas of non-violence, communal harmony as well as "swaraj (self-rule)".

What was Gandhi's message to the Cong conclave?

Referring to the non-cooperation movement, Gandhi elaborated on his idea of non-violence and said it may not have panned out as expected (the non-cooperation movement was called off in the wake of the [Chauri Chaura](#) police station incident in February 1922) but stressed that it was an effective way forward (towards Independence).

"At the special session of the Congress at Calcutta in 1920, the boycott of government titles, law courts, educational institutions, legislative bodies and foreign cloth was resolved upon. All the boycotts were more or less taken up by the parties concerned... Though not a single boycott was anywhere near completion, every one of them had undoubtedly the effect of diminishing the prestige of the

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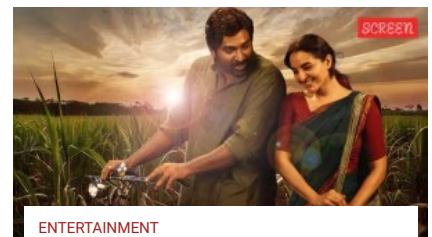


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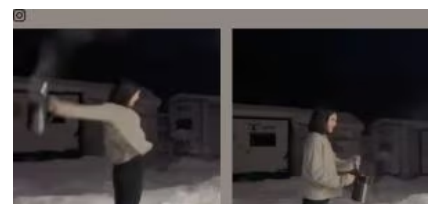
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particular institution boycotted. The most important boycott was the boycott of violence....” Gandhi had said.

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Pointing out that acts like personal abuse, irritating conduct, lying, causing hurt and murder are symbols of violence while courtesy, inoffensive conduct, truthfulness, etc. are symbols of non-violence, Gandhi said: “And so to me, a boycott of foreign cloth is a symbol of (choosing) non-violence cloth. Revolutionary crime is intended to exert pressure... I contend that non-violent acts exert pressure far more effectively than violent acts, for that pressure comes from goodwill and gentleness.”

On Hindu-Muslim unity and fighting untouchability, Gandhi said untouchability was another hindrance to swaraj. “Its removal is just as essential for Swaraj as the attainment of Hindu-Muslim unity. This is an essentially Hindu question and Hindus cannot claim or take swaraj till they have restored the liberty of the suppressed classes,” he had said in his address.

On self-rule, Gandhi suggested that the final court of appeals be moved from London to Delhi and the official language of provincial governments, legislatures and courts be Hindustani, among others.

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He also called for people to become “perfect satyagrahis”. “I have repeatedly stated that satyagraha never fails and that one perfect satyagrahi is enough to vindicate the truth. Let us all strive to be perfect satyagrahis. The striving does not require any quality unattainable by the lowliest among us for satyagraha is an attribute of the spirit within. It is latent in every one of us. Like swaraj, it is our birthright. Let us know it,” he had said.

Urging the masses to take up weaving and spinning of khadi, Gandhi said swaraj cannot be attained till people take up spinning and wearing the fabric.

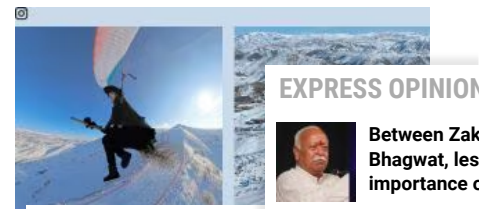
Who were the participants in the 1924 Congress session?

The session was attended by several senior Congress leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu, and Khilafat movement leaders Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Shaukat Ali, among others.

What was its impact on the freedom movement?

Historians believe that the session was a step towards the promotion of peasant consciousness. This resulted in the spread of khadi with village industries getting traction in Karnataka and other parts of the country. It also saw increased participation of peasants in the Congress-led initiatives.

What are Cong plans for the 2024 Belagavi session?



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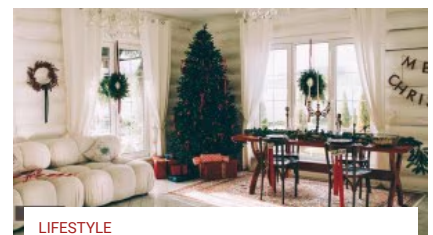
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The first day of the session would be held at the Veera Soudha, the same venue of the 1924 session, while on the second day, a statue of Mahatma Gandhi sanctioned by the Karnataka government will be unveiled at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha – the state Assembly in Belagavi.

According to a Congress leader, a rally will also be held by the party in Belagavi to mark the occasion. He said the rally, “Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan”, will be addressed by Kharge, Rahul, Karnataka CM [Siddaramaiah](#), and state Congress chief D K Shivakumar, among others.


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What is its significance for Cong?

A senior Congress leader said the party’s current situation is similar to 1924. “The Congress needs a resurgence like it did in 1924. We are hopeful that it makes some important functional changes and gets back to winning ways,” the leader said, adding that the party was doing some “serious introspection”.

All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge of Karnataka, Randeep Surjewala alleged that “[BJP](#)’s style of functioning is similar to the East India Company”. “Both party president and LoP in the Lok Sabha have described the BJP as the kin of the East India Company. The BJP’s style – concentrating wealth in a few hands, exploiting the poor and looking down upon oppressed classes like SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities – is similar to what the East India Company did. They also segregate classes and build a unified order with a unitary chain of command. Hence, the fight is similar,” he said.

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Asad Rehman

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Asad Rehman is with the national bureau of The Indian Express and covers politics and policy focusing on religious minorities in India. A journalist for over eight years. [... Read More](#)

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