



RACE COURSE ROAD

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Whose Governors are They Anyway?

Do governors report to the president or the prime minister? According to protocol, no governor can travel out of his state without the president's prior approval. They also have to put down in writing the purpose for which they are leaving the state. If any governor makes frequent journeys to Delhi, the visits come under closer political scrutiny.

When Karnataka Governor H R Bhardwaj landed in the capital on Saturday and drove straight to 7 Race Course Road, many eyebrows were raised. Many other governors such as M K Narayanan of West Bengal and E S L Narasimhan of Andhra Pradesh have also been



Bhardwaj (top); Narasimhan

visiting Delhi quite often for covert reasons. They hardly call on the president though they don't miss an opportunity to visit 10 Janpath and 7 Race Course Road. Both Narayanan and Narasimhan have one thing in common—both are former intelligence czars and police officers who have worked closely with each other. As governors, both were dispatched to troubled states to monitor political developments and report to their political masters instead of their constitutional boss. What was intriguing about Bhardwaj's arrival in the capital was that it was a few hours after a Supreme Court judgment which restored the House membership of 16 MLAs

who were disqualified by the Speaker on the eve of last year's trust vote. The BJP has charged the governor with destabilising a duly elected state government. Bhardwaj's unplanned visit to the prime minister's house has bolstered the BJP's claim that governors are acting as Congress agents. The recently concluded conclave of BJP chief ministers in Delhi warned the Central government against misuse of the gubernatorial office to paralyse governance in Opposition-run states. The Congress is concerned about the growing erosion of its popular base in the southern states. It won Kerala by a whisker, its survival in Andhra Pradesh is threatened by the rise of Mother and Son power in the state versus Mother and Son power in Delhi, and it has been reduced to a non-entity in Tamil Nadu. Since it can't do much in other states, the party expects to push the BJP on the backfoot in Karnataka with a governor who is a Gandhi family loyalist and a master of manoeuvres.



Manmohan's Southern Discomfort

Though he hardly played any role in the Assembly elections, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has to deal with the results. Both Jayalalithaa and N Rangasamy—the chief ministers-in-waiting of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry—have made it clear that they wouldn't like to work with the existing occupants of their respective Raj Bhawans. Tamil Nadu Governor Surjeet Singh Barnala has overstayed in Chennai, thanks to his proximity to both M Karunanidhi and the Prime Minister. Puducherry Lt Governor Iqbal Singh has been linked with Hasan Ali. In fact, Rangasamy had hinted that he would not take the oath if it is administered by Iqbal. Since appointing a governor involves consultations with the chief ministers, the prime minister is in dilemma. There have been many instances where chief ministers were informed about the appointment of new governors only after the deed was done. For Manmohan Singh, the problem is that in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, the Congress would like to appoint governors who can open a dialogue with the new chief ministers. After all, with Andhra Pradesh expected to go out of Congress control, Tamil Nadu may be instrumental in formation of the next Union government in 2014. The search for yet another set of pliant governors has begun.



Antony's Talking Heads

When it comes to Pakistan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh believes in freedom of expression. That Union ministers such as Home Minister P Chidambaram, Defence Minister A K Antony or Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee speak in different voices is known. Now even secretary-level officers have started delivering sermons on Pakistan. Recently, V K Saraswat, scientific adviser to Antony, said India was capable of duplicating an Osama-type operation in Pakistan, but “our democratic



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system and policies do not allow us to go into another country and start killing people”. Was he speaking for Antony or is he simply a loquacious peacenik? Antony has many such talking heads in his ministry who he hasn't been able to rein in.



Defence Deals Are the Biggest Pie

While the 2G scam and CWG contracts are under the glare of the Opposition parties and investigative agencies, a few highly motivated individuals are quietly working on the role of middlemen in various defence deals. So far, no credible evidence of direct corruption has surfaced in any of the deals, but the wealth and political power acquired by the usual defence dealmakers have attracted more than their fair share of attention. The government has signed defence deals worth over Rs 100 crore in the last four years. According to a rough estimate, India will be spending over Rs 450 lakh crore—almost 500 times the estimated scope of the 2G scam—during the next 10 years on defence purchases. Surprisingly, none of the big deals are being probed, though many indirect beneficiaries are under the scanner. Under the new guidelines, any foreign company that is awarded a defence deal has to plough back at least 50 per cent of the tender amount into Indian companies engaged in defence-related manufacturing. Investigators are now locating these firms and their owners to find whether any of them also represented defence suppliers directly or indirectly during the dealmaking. Most are situated either in Delhi or Mumbai.