



# POWER & POLITICS

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**M**ONEY, blackmail, lies and deception have always been the lifeblood of politics. Nowhere is this truer than in Karnataka where over the past few weeks a disgusting *natak* (drama) has been played by the country's two main political parties. A government that was supposedly sailing along smooth was overnight brought to the brink of disaster and politics reduced to the level of the cesspool.

If anything, the *natak* in Karnataka reflects the collapse of the concept of collective leadership of both the national parties—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress. While their state leaders were indulging in horse trading, naked misuse of money and violation of constitutional norms, the national leaders of the BJP were oblivious to the goings on, some seniors being on foreign jaunts while others like Shanta Kumar who ironically is the BJP's pointman for Karnataka were unaware of the impending crisis. In the Congress, the plan was hatched by a section of the High Command.

Now that the harried Yeddyurappa has won an unprecedented second vote of confidence in less than a week, everything seems to have come back to square one. He is still the chief minister and H.R. Bhardwaj who is being painted as the main accomplice, still resides in Raj Bhavan.

An inquest is bound to follow and what remains to be seen is if anyone will be made to pay the price. If so, it will be Bhardwaj who attracts controversy like moths are drawn to light. As a former union law minister and a legal eagle who has got many a VVIP off the hook, he is the last one you would expect to trip up on a matter with serious legal implications. Congress Governors have traditionally been masters at the black art of destabilising non-Congress governments and Bhardwaj's appointment in Bangalore was meant to serve a purpose.

The Congress, characteristically, was having its cake and eating it too. Union Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad who is in charge of Karnataka was the party's invisible hand whose responsibility was to save both the central leadership and the Prime Minister from direct line of fire in the event of Operation Topples backfiring.

Mercifully for the Congress leadership, the BJP reserved its ire for the governor. Under pressure, the normally unflappable Bhardwaj did several flip flops. The last of which was to ask Yeddyurappa to prove his majority after he had already recommended dismissal of the government. No one knows the fate of the Governor's recommendation of dismissal. Has the Union cabinet rejected it or has it been kept away for future use?

Now that the sordid drama is



Yeddyurappa

behind us, the pieces are slowly falling into place. If public posturing is anything to go by, the Congress has dumped the governor. Insiders at 24 Akbar Road tell me that the governor exceeded his brief.

The Congress would not have ventured into such adventurism when it knew that there would be hurdles in getting the dismissal of the Yeddyurappa government and imposition of President's Rule ratified by both houses of Parliament.

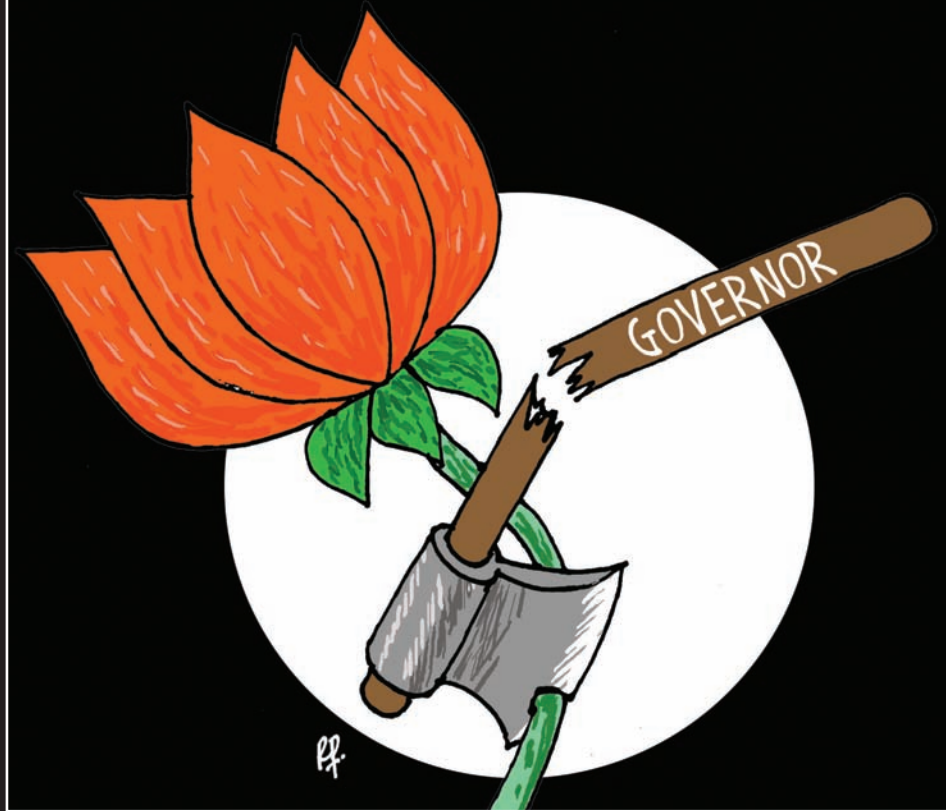
I gather that during last week's meeting with the prime minister, the BJP leaders conveyed to him that they would boycott the joint session of Parliament being

convened for President Barack Obama's address if the Yeddyurappa government is dismissed. The PMO was also told that the BJP was in possession of tapes (similar to the Moily tapes that toppled the Ramakrishna Hegde government in 1983) that had the Raj Bhawan, Janata Dal (Secular) and Congress discussing terms and the contours of the Operation Topples. Once the High Command was convinced about the fall out, it backtracked.

TV pundits have already decreed that Bhardwaj has fallen out of favour. Nothing could be farther from the truth because the Congress leader-

ship needs his legal skills in future too. But for the moment, Bhardwaj is the scapegoat. He has named two top AICC leaders as the villains of the piece and sources close to him say whatever he did was at their behest after messages were conveyed through a union minister. Bhardwaj is not known to be a quitter, but very reliable sources tell me that he may put in his papers on Tuesday.

This has set alarm bells ringing in the Congress which is now trying to placate him by swapping governors at the Bangalore and Bhubaneswar Raj Bhavans. In that case, watch out Naveen Patnaik!



## Mission not accomplished

## At least one minister is a Games hero

*AFTER all the ifs and buts and the false starts, the Commonwealth Games, arguably the costliest ever involving the former colonies, is finally over. As the athletes and delegates begin to fly out, the auditors and taxmen are preparing to move in.*

*The world media that once spewed venom on Delhi 2010 is now generous in its praise for the government and people of Delhi, though, rightly so, not for the organising committee. But if there is one organisation that truly covered itself in glory, it is Doordarshan, the broadcasting world's perennial whipping boy. Its uninterrupted coverage was world class with excellent camera-work backed by commentators and anchors with good descriptive skills and more importantly, deep knowledge of sport.*

*For a change, DD didn't have ministers and sports officials hanging around studios giving their two penny worth that nobody wanted to hear. Having known her now for close to 40 years, I have no hesitation in giving all the credit for this refreshing change to Ambika Soni.*

*I&B ministers have traditionally been known to treat the public broadcaster as private property. I recall a junior I&B minister from Kerala in the Rajiv Gandhi regime having the Onam celebrations in his Krishna Menon Marg bungalow telecast live on DD Malayalam, presumably to show his constituents back home that he had come a long way since his days as a dutiful babu in Trivandrum. During the games, I stayed tuned in for long hours and not once did I see Ambika on screen. I am equally sure many ministers bunked work to watch the games but the cameras mercifully didn't focus on them even once. Even during the opening and closing ceremonies, the cameras panned the VVIP enclosures but never to focus on Sonia, Rahul or other VIPs. In a space of 11 days, DD has regained a lot of credibility and under Ambika, I am sure the future of the public broadcaster is in safe hands.*

**TAMIL Nadu chief minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi's prodigal son M.K. Alagiri continues to give headaches to prime minister Manmohan Singh. That he has little patience for cabinet meetings and no time for his office is evident from the mound of files on his tray in his office.**

**And if you were to compare the time that the union fertiliser minister spent jetting across world capitals to that spent in his office or parliament or in attending cabinet meetings, I am sure the first will far outweigh the others.**

**In the early days of UPA2, Alagiri was known to spend more time in Chennai and Madurai. But some months ago, he showed signs of taking his job seriously and on a few occasions was even seen answering questions in Parliament in**



## Minister in absentia Alagiri is back to his old ways

**faltering English. But it appears he is back to his bad bad ways.**

**He recently went on a private visit to China with his family. This comes after similar visits to Australia, USA and Singapore in recent months.**

**As the Kailaignar's son, he probably thinks that laws are meant for lesser mortals.**

**It is not surprising therefore that many of his trips are in complete violation**

*M.K. Alagiri*

**of the cabinet norms. Seldom does he take the prior permission of the prime minister, nor does he give notice of who are traveling with him and for how long.**

**Worse, Indian embassies abroad are kept in the dark about the minister's itinerary in the country that he is visiting.**

**Protocol dictates that whenever a minister or a high government official travels abroad, the local embassy is informed in advance so that it makes arrangements for the stay and travel of the visitor and his or her entourage.**

**Alagiri's staff never does this and on two occasions in recent times, our mission heads in overseas capitals informally conveyed to South Block about the violations of norms.**

**The prime minister's office is concerned over the matter but considering that the Congress-DMK ties are too delicate a matter to be even discussed, the question that everyone is asking is: who will bell this gigantic cat?**

**HECTIC** rounds of lobbying are on for the post of chairman of the Securities and Exchanges Board of India (SEBI) that falls vacant by February end when current incumbent CB Bhavare retires. The government has set up a "Search Committee" headed by CabSec K.M. Chandrasekhar to find a successor and among those in the running are O.P. Bhatt, (SBI chairman), Usha Thorat, Deputy governor of the RBI, U.K. Sinha chairman of UTI Mutual Fund and R. Bandyopadhyay, secretary, ministry of corporate affairs, each of them as competent as the other to take up the task.

But the search committee's JOB is not an easy one considering the pressure that stock exchanges are exerting on the government. Apart from the BSE and NSE, there are 19 regional stock exchanges in the country, all of whom want bureaucrats to be kept out and someone from the private sector with first hand market experience who would not be susceptible to pressures from the bureaucratic and political class be appointed. The real reason is that powerful brokers do not want a capital market watchdog that will get tough with big business and investment banks. 70 per cent of India maybe living on less than ₹20 a day, but with India's market cap at over 70 per cent of GDP, the India Shining story should not be stopped from its continued unfolding.