



POWER & POLITICS

PRABHU CHAWLA

IT WOULD be no exaggeration to say that if a list of all the buildings, roads, airports, stadia, colleges, universities and social welfare programmes across the country named after the Nehru-Gandhi family were to be compiled, it would be thicker than the Delhi telephone directory. A first time visitor to the capital could be forgiven if he is led to believe that the city belongs to one family. After all, he will land at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, be driven past scores of buildings named after Nehru, Indira or Rajiv. As he scans the papers, he is likely to read stories about Rahul Gandhi spending the night in a Dalit hamlet in Uttar Pradesh or the chairperson of the National Advisory Council, Sonia Gandhi advising cabinet ministers to closely monitor the implementation of centrally sponsored schemes, many of which are named after three generations of prime ministers from one family. The Indira Awas Yojana, Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water mission, Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission, the Indira Gandhi Canal project, the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, to name just a few.



Manmohan Singh

All that may now come to an end. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has issued a fiat to his cabinet ministers to exercise discretion while naming new programmes or schemes in the name of late former prime ministers Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi.

The reason is not because he feels that there already are far too many programmes to honour them, but due to the manner in which these are implemented. Far from honouring them, they are insults to their memories, he thinks.

A letter dated October 6 sent by Cabinet Secretary KM Chandrasekhar on behalf of the prime minister states that henceforth the names of leaders like Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi should be used very sparingly as the practice has become rather "widespread and indiscriminate." It further admits that the purpose of identifying government schemes with national figures is undermined by the fact that many of these do not end up achieving the desired impact.

It is not known how 10 Janpath will react to this latest diktat: will the family concur with the prime minister's assessment or do Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka believe there is scope for more?

I understand that the Manmohan missive followed periodic reviews of many of the major schemes and the mounting criticism from across the country, including non Congress leaders, to the endless naming of everything in memory of members of one family.

The Prime Minister's directive may well be an attempt to prevent alliance partners from giving their regional leaders a larger than life image. Already Mayawati is carving a larger than life image for herself, literally and figuratively across Uttar Pradesh's landscape.

The DMK is on an overdrive

to replace the giant 80 ft cardboard cutouts of M Karunanidhi with permanent structures to be named after the Kalaigiar so that, long after he moves on, his children and their children continue to benefit. Political dynasties are emerging in other states too.

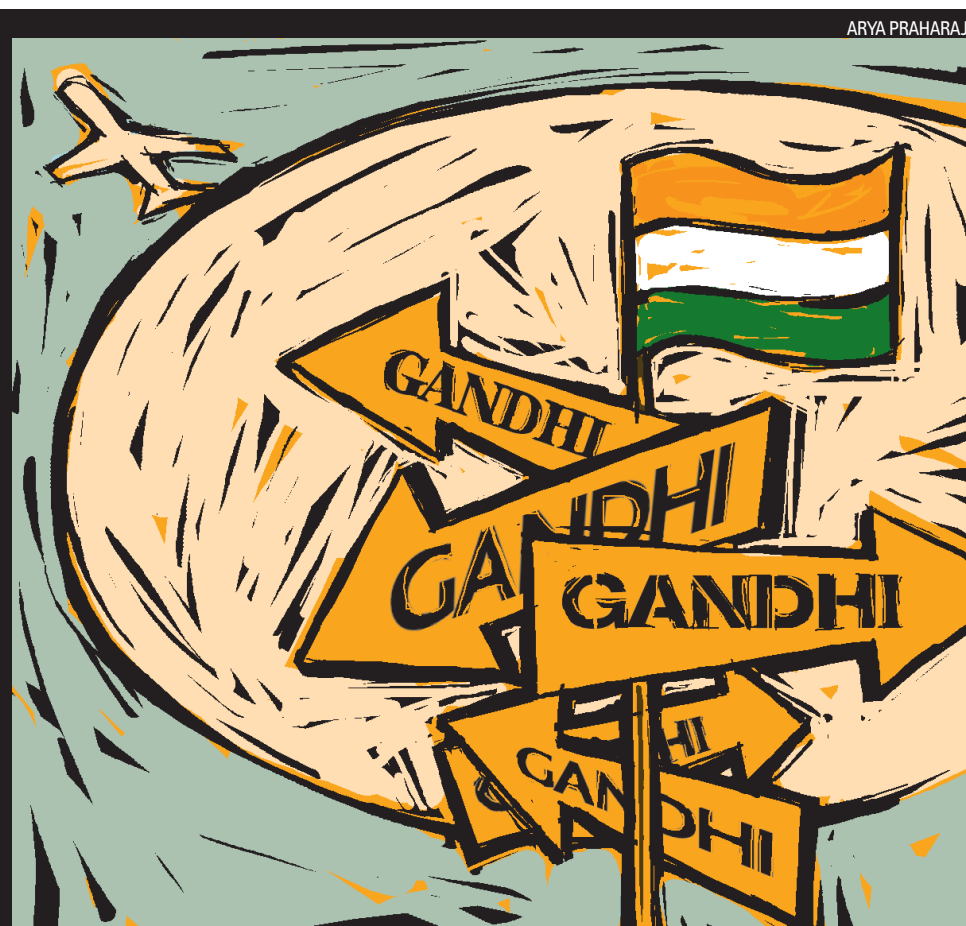
With over half the states being ruled by the non-Congress parties, some of whom are coalition partners in the UPA government, there is increasing demand from regional parties that central schemes in their respective states be named in memory of their leaders.

The naming trend began after

Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964 when some institutions were named after the late prime minister, with the JNU, which was set up five years after his death being among the biggest.

But the trend turned into a renaming frenzy after Indira's assassination in 1984 when Delhi's Palam airport was renamed the Indira Gandhi International airport.

Since then, there has been no stopping. The opposition however fears a flip side to Manmohan's directive. Don't be surprised therefore if some of the flop schemes are renamed after Deen Dayal Upadhyay or Veer Savarkar.



ARYA PRAHARAJ

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Saffron BJP loses colour due to Nitish

IS THERE a masochist streak in some BJP leaders that despite all the humiliation meted out to them by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, they keep asking for more. There is a JD(U)-BJP coalition government in place in Patna and the saffronites even have a deputy chief minister in Sushil Modi. But if Modi weren't so mild mannered, tempers would have frayed long ago and cabinet meetings may even have witnessed fisticuffs over the manner in which Nitish rides roughshod over his colleagues.

The numbers notwithstanding, all partners in a coalition are supposed to be equal stakeholders but that's not quite the way Nitish sees it. So, even in the midst of a do or die electoral contest where allies should be seen as civil to each other, Nitish tries to steamroll his way through and even dictates who among the BJP leaders can cam-

CM continues to humiliate the party

paign in the state and who all are unwelcome. So Narendra Modi, arguably the BJP's best vote catcher is not welcome nor is Varun Gandhi, though about the latter, many would tend to agree with Nitish. Advani and Sushma can campaign but should stick to issues of bread and butter and not mandir and masjid.

BJP chief Nitin Gadkari sent out a stern message to Nitish last week by saying that his party will not surrender its right to choose its campaigners, but BJP leaders down the line seem eager to grovel before Nitish. LK Advani once famously said of journalists during the emergency that when asked to bend, they chose to crawl. Now one of his own partymen is doing the same. Sanjay Jha, a MLC is so keen to prove his loyalty to the JD(U) chief minister that he is busy sending Nitish's latest post on his blog "nitishspeaks.blogspot.com" to hundreds of mediapersons in the capital.

FOR the new Chief Election Commissioner SY Quraishi, the Bihar assembly elections are his first major test and it seems he is determined to do one better than the redoubtable TN Seshan.

Last week in these columns I had written about the Election Commission taking stern measures to check the menace of "paid news" in these elections. Now comes news that the EC is keeping a hawk's eye on all chartered helicopters and aircraft used by political parties and candidates to prevent transportation of huge money that is pumped in to rig the elections.

A top secret order from Nirvachan Sadan to the Bihar chief election officer has directed expenditure observers to check all aircraft and helicopters chartered for the election campaign and seize it if huge amounts of cash are found. Well placed sources in the commis-

CEC's bid to ground the high-flying politicians



SY Quraishi

that black money used in the elections is mostly transferred by political parties and their leaders in chartered flights.

As a former income tax officer, Das knows from experience that it is difficult to carry huge amounts of cash in commercial flights as there is a cap on personal baggage weight and because baggage, both cabin and check in, are put

sion said the order was issued on the basis of a submission by PK Das, Director-General of its newly constituted Expenditure Monitoring Division,

through a thorough check by airport security. But chartered flights are not subjected to such rigorous checks and politicians have always taken advantage to carry the cash for misuse in the elections.

Polls rules state that the Commission's permission must be taken for every chartered flight and as such observers will have no difficulty to plan search operation when the planes land. This is in addition to a recent EC rule which asked candidates to open a separate election bank account and conduct all poll expenditures only through it to enable an audit by the expenditure observers. I am sure many would say the fun has been taken out of the campaign.

THE Akalis and the Congress in Punjab have as much love for each other as, say, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Jamat-e-Islami have for one another. Who else could bring the two together than Jairam Ramesh, the IIT-MIT educated Hebbur Aiyengar from Karnataka and Rajya Sabha MP from Andhra Pradesh who is the Union Minister for Environment and Forests?

Last week, the Akali and Congress MLAs in the Punjab assembly, otherwise kirpans drawn perpetually, set aside their differences and passed a unanimous resolution which read "This house thanks the Central Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh for his whole hearted support to the scheme to make the state of Punjab pollution free". State governments routinely send thank-you notes to cen-

tral ministers, even if they are from opponent parties for their help in sorting out prickly local issues but it is seldom that the assembly is convened to put on record their gratitude.

Since taking over as environment minister, Jairam has earned the wrath of many state governments for cancelling sanctioned projects, especially in the mining and road sectors, which the states maintained were essential for growth.

That it was Punjab, a high growth state ruled by an opponent party which acknowledged his contribution perhaps carries the twin message: the minister is not the "green fundamentalist" that he is made out to be and that with a little bit of give and take, he is ready to work with anyone.

Jairam Ramesh