



POWER & POLITICS

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IF ANYONE ran Suresh Kalmadi close on the front pages of newspapers and on TV last week, it wasn't Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee or any of the usual suspects. It was Ramesh Chandra Tripathi. Tripathi who, you may be tempted to ask. He is the 71-year-old retired bureaucrat who cited, among other things, the chances of disturbance to communal harmony while approaching the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court and the Supreme Court to seek postponement of the Ayodhya verdict which has been awaiting its denouement for over 61 years now.

Last week, the Bharatiya Janata Party accused Tripathi of being a Congress plant, set up by the ruling party that did not want to deal with the political and social consequences of a judicial verdict that, whichever way it went, was bound to pit one community against the other.

Last Friday, the BJP which had earlier decided to maintain a discreet silence on the matter till the verdict of the Lucknow bench was out, broke the silence and blamed the judiciary for failing to resolve the issue.

After a meeting of its core group, the party said it "was of the opinion that judicial delays over the last 61 years have contributed to the failure of the resolution on the issue... we hope that the resolution of this issue is not delayed any further".

Why the sudden turnaround? My instincts tell me that the BJP is as wary of an early judgment as the Congress. Both national parties have their reasons to believe that the more the issue is allowed to linger on, the less they will be compelled to take a stand.

Take the Congress. The government at the centre already had its hands full even without the near fiasco of the Commonwealth Games. A judgment either way would have forced it to display some steely resolve in dealing with an issue with immense potential to inflame communal passions.

The BJP's dilemma was no different: if the verdict went against its cause, it would have been left with no option but to take a strident stand, something that the party does not want to do at this juncture.

You can pin it all down to Bihar, where assembly elections are due to take place in the next couple of months. Electoral considerations have always dictated the agenda of political parties. But what we are witnessing now, and for the first time perhaps, is how parties are using their political convenience to cloud the judicial delivery mechanism.

The BJP turnaround came on a day that its leader L.K. Advani



R.C. Tripathi

was in Somnath from where, —exactly 20 years ago — he started the Rath Yatra. It was when the yatra entered Bihar that Lalu Prasad, then Janata Dal chief minister, ordered Advani's arrest which led to the BJP withdrawing support to the V.P. Singh government at the Centre and its subsequent fall.

The political landscape may have changed much in 20 years but Bihar remains as polarised now as it was then. The BJP is a partner in the Janata Dal-United-led coalition government of Nitish Kumar who wears his pro-minority credentials on his sleeve. As election-

eering picks up, Nitish has told Narendra Modi that he is not needed for campaigning in Bihar. But the party's central office is facing tremendous pressure from the party's state unit and RSS cadres to dispatch the BJP's most charismatic vote-catcher to Bihar.

A similar pressure is now being put on the central office from the RSS and hardcore party faithful. In the last few days, as the apex court and the high court tossed the ball back and forth, the RSS and the VHP top brass have meet several times to take stock. Both agree that the issue cannot be resolved

through reconciliation and would rather opt for an early verdict from the Lucknow bench. Both have also assured the BJP that whatever outcome will be dealt with peacefully.

While the BJP deals with its internal pulls and pressures, the message is the government is willy-nilly allowing the perception to gain ground that administrative convenience is more important than judicial pronouncements. In the process, the clear message that goes out is that a state that is scared of implementing a judicial verdict is impeding the judiciary from delivering justice.



Betrayal of Justice

Govt hands senior spies a 'RAW' deal

MORE on the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Of late, we have seen a woman official trying to commit suicide by consuming poison outside the Prime Minister's Office. There have also been cases of senior officers suddenly vanishing and ending up as citizens of other countries, both friendly and unfriendly.

Now there is more worrying stuff. The agency has recently been rattled by the protest leave of seven senior officials on grounds that they were superseded. The genesis of the revolt was when Avdhesh Mathur, a 1975-batch IPS officer from the Manipur cadre, was promoted as Special Director General. Mathur came to the RAW in 2007 from the Intelligence Bureau (IB), superseding, among others, P.M. Hablikar, Sharad Kumar and Chakru Sinha, who were all additional secretaries and from the 1973-batch of the RAW Allied Services cadre.

Seven of them have gone on protest leave

Mathur was empanelled in June this year and was soon promoted. Insiders see a pattern in this unusual move and feel Mathur's promotion could clear the decks for his elevation to secretary when the current chief, K.C. Verma, retires in January 2011.

Well placed sources tell me that four other officers who were passed over were upset enough to go on leave.

The cabinet secretariat will hold a Departmental Promotional Committee (DPC) meeting next week, but it is doubtful if it will be able to redress the grievances of everyone.

The officers will probably get a hearing but nobody can say how the crisis will be resolved. The government is planning to hold an emergency meeting to consider their case but as things stand now, only one among the seven can get his promotion and there is no way they can be brought on parity.

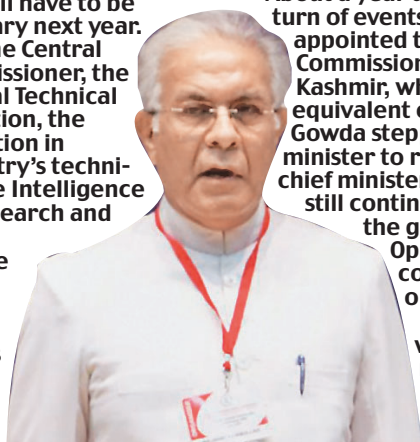
The bickering within has ended many of the myths surrounding our super spies.

AFTER the fiasco over the appointment of P.J. Thomas — a man whose name is still listed as an accused in a case of corruption in Kerala—as the new Central Vigilance Commissioner, the government seems keen to tread very, very cautiously in the matter of several crucial appointments to key posts that are likely to fall vacant in the next few months.

There are six top posts for which new incumbents will have to be appointed by January next year. Among them are the Central Information Commissioner, the chief of the National Technical Research Organisation, the super spy organisation in charge of the country's technical intelligence, the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing.

Of these, while the last three are very sensitive jobs that are shrouded in secrecy, the CIC's is

Wajahat Habibullah



UPA opts for consensus on CIC after drawing flak on CVC

all about public scrutiny and transparency. The term of incumbent CIC Wajahat Habibullah comes to an end soon.

About a year ago, in a bizarre turn of events, the CIC was appointed the Information Commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir, which is I suppose the equivalent of say, H.D. Deve Gowda stepping down as prime minister to resume innings as chief minister of Karnataka. He still continues as CIC because the government and the Opposition could not come to a consensus on his successor. In the manner in which the government rammed through corruption watchdog

Thomas's appointment earlier this month earned the government and the prime minister in particular a lot of negative publicity. It seems to have convinced the good doctor that consultation is better than confrontation. Feelers have already been sent to the BJP — whose parliamentary leader Sushma Swaraj is also on the selection committee for the CIC — to begin talks on a possible successor to Habibullah.

Given the nature of their operations, selection of heads of intelligence and counter espionage agencies should entirely be that of the government. But with four candidates in the running for the post and each of them having powerful political backers, it is to be hoped that the one who is chosen is there on merit and not because he has powerful relatives and backers.

ONE of the oldest government departments is the Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D), a central purchasing organisation that functions under the ministry of commerce. It was started in 1860 as the India Stores Department and emerged in its present form in 1951. Its primary role is to conclude Rate Contracts for common user items for the department/ministries of the government of India. Other activities include registration of vendors, formulating procurement policies and procedures and cargo clearance at major ports.

It is currently headed by M. Raman, a 1976 batch IAS officer. A new "procurement policy" that was formulated was recently approved by the committee of secretaries and is now awaiting cabinet approval. They understand that the OK from the cabinet will just be a formality since the government seems to have immense trust in Raman's instincts. It seems that as early as 2008 itself, Raman had written to cabinet secretary K.M. Chandrashekar that the DGS&D will not get into the business of procurement or disposals for the Commonwealth Games.

The reason: The DGS&D had reasons to believe that there was much in the CWG Organising Committee that was not above board. The skeletons spilling out of CWG cupboards virtually by the hour are proof that Raman's instincts were absolutely right.