



Power & Politics

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WHEN the going gets tough, the tough get going, goes the saying. The UPA government seems to have total and implicit faith in this adage. The appointment of the former national security advisor MK Narayanan as the new Governor of West Bengal, coming so soon after Naraian Dutt Tewari was summarily packed off from Hyderabad for indulging in activities not generally associated with occupants of Raj Bhavans—least of all 86 year olds—leads me to just one conclusion.

This government is not going to allow governors to treat the Raj Bhavans as farmhouses in the city centre for fun and frolic and rest and recreation. For a change, it is telling them: take your jobs seriously, or here is the pink slip. In these columns a couple of weeks ago, I had written about how successive governments at the Centre had reserved the gubernatorial jobs for over-the-hill politicians who remained content being mere rubber stamps or agents of the ruling party at the Centre. In the last fortnight, the government appointed or transferred eight governors. Four of them took the oath of office on Friday and the rest are scheduled to do so soon after the Republic Day formalities are done with. Of the 28 incumbents, politicians with 16, not surprisingly form the majority. There are four retired IAS officers: former home secretary NN Vohra in Srinagar, retired Defence Secretary Shekhar Dutt in Chattisgarh, former civil aviation secretary SS Sidhu in Goa, and former Home Secretary BP Singh in Sikkim. Two more are former army men: Retd General JJ Singh and ret'd Lt Gen MM Lakhera. The rest are, you may have guessed, all retired police officers.

Never in history have six ex-police officers occupied the post of governors at the same time. And the fact that all six, whose efficiency is beyond question and integrity beyond reproach, are in charge of sensitive states is probably an indication that the government truly believes that when the going gets tough, you really have to get the tough going. Narayanan, an IPS officer, former chief of the Intelligence Bureau and the NSA, is now in West Bengal where Mamata Banerjee is not the only threat to law and order. When the Telangana strife began, the centre showed the door to ND Tiwari and asked ESL Narasimhan, then governor of Chattisgarh, to hold concurrent charge of Andhra Pradesh. Narasimhan now has been confirmed as the governor of the state, his old post in Raipur going to retired IAS officer Shekhar Dutt. Narasimhan is a 1968 batch IPS officer and, hailing as he does, from the Andhra cadre, there is no one better suited than him to understand, evaluate and tackle the situation in the state which, if handled without some amount of



Narasimhan

deftness, could turn into an inferno.

Ex Army man JJ Singh was Director General at the Military Operations Directorate. The Chinese fear none, but it still makes sense to have him as the governor of Arunachal Pradesh where Beijing loves to poke its nose. Nikhil Kumar, Gurbachan Jagat and RS Mooshahary have all had distinguished careers in police forces in different states and are posted in similarly crucial North east stations while the services of BL Joshi, who joined the police in 1957 and has

had long stints working with Interpol, Narcotics and Internal Security is just what lawless Uttar Pradesh needs.

These are proven people in sensitive posts. Take them away and who are you left with? The old style politicians whose utility dates in that rough and tumble world is long expired and who are now being used as agents and political rubber stamps in states where the threat is not to the centre, but the ruling party at the centre. This is not to suggest that none of the 16 political appointees

deserve to be in their Raj Bhavans. They were all posted as governors because they had reached the sunset of their political careers. As career politicians, they can at best play backroom politics to aid their benefactors at the centre. It is challenge that bring out the best in man. And as these increase by the day, I believe that this government—and those that follow—will think of men and women with proven administrative skills for the Raj Bhavan jobs. Governors should be made of such mettle.



Hard men for tough jobs

Mulayam's support base set to shrink

MORE and more, the Samajwadi Party is beginning to look like the Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland. The leadership's grin remains intact, but everything else has fallen apart or disappeared. The last couple of years have been forgettable for Mulayam Singh Yadav electorally and as the party now begins to resemble a family run fiefdom, the downhill slide has picked up speed. The death last week of the affable Janeswar Mishra, the Brahmin face of the SP, comes close on the heels of the palace coup in Etawah that saw the departure of Amar Singh. With both the Brahmin and Thakur leaders out of the party, its impact is being assessed. Now Mulayam has the daunting task of wooing or retaining the few Rajputs and Brahmins left in the SP.

Amar's departure just three days before the council elections created enough confusion among the higher and middle level leaders of the SP. The party had fielded only five candidates in 36 seats and managed to win just one. Rajputs are particularly angry because Amar Singh was not only one among them but also the only leader with nationwide visibility that the party had; the rest were at best, constituency-level leaders who had no say in the party affairs. With his cross party friends and vast business and other contacts, Amar Singh had given the one-state party a reach beyond the borders of Uttar Pradesh.

During the Mulayam regime in 2003-07 period, there were violent Yadav-Thakur clashes in eastern UP and when the police seemed to be working in tandem with the Yadavs, it was he who raised the issue with Mulayam and restored order. The SP currently has 14 Rajput MLAs in the assembly, three in the council and four Rajput MPs. Insiders tell me many of them are beginning to feel "uncomfortable" in the SP as they fear they will be targeted for being "Amar Singh's men". With the SP firmly in the grip of Mulayam, brothers Shivpal and Ram Gopal and son Akhilesh, its next poll slogan may well be "I Me, Mine".

FOR years, Sharad Pawar's reputation as one of the country's efficient administrators has preceded him. But with prices going through the roof despite robust agricultural growth and record procurement, they are all targeting one man: the Agriculture Minister. His reputation as an efficient Minister now lies in tatters. But Pawar's counter is this: "I have been in politics for 50 years. This is the first time I have seen that price rise is being linked only to the Agriculture Ministry".

He is intrigued why nobody is pointing fingers at the railway ministry which, because of fog over north India, has put restrictions on movement of goods trains because of which prices of everyday goods as well as materials like steel and cement have risen sharply. Pawar feels that he is a



Sharad Pawar: Under attack

victim of internal politics of the Congress which incidentally has not defended the minister on this issue. He is even upset about rumours over his health allegedly being promoted from certain Congress quarters. Recently, he excused himself from a cabinet meeting after his agenda was gone because of a bad toothache. That was enough for the rumours to swirl again. His followers want him to hit back, but the man swears by collective responsibility. So I know he won't.

Why did Mamata miss the funeral?

MAMATA Banerjee's penchant for theatricals is legendary but I am sure even the most ardent of her Trinamool supporters have been left red faced by her antics at the funeral of the Marxist veteran Jyoti Basu last week. A funeral is an occasion when even sworn enemies gather in silence and maybe keep a safe and dignified distance. Everyone knows that Mamata views a communist in the same manner that a bull looks at a red rag.

But someone ought to tell the lady that her responsibilities as a minister in the union government far outweigh the irresponsibility that come with being leader of the Trinamool Congress. Reports have it that she boycotted the funeral because she believed Prime Minister Manmohan

Singh was cosying up to Budhadheb Bhattacharjee, the man she hopes to replace at Writers Building after the assembly elections next year.

It was nothing of the sort. Protocol dictates that when the prime minister visits a state, the local chief minister must be present at all public functions. The two may have done nothing more than exchange pleasantries, but conspiracy buffs in the Trinamool seem to have convinced Mamata that they were hatching something. It now appears that the real reason was something else.

Rumours doing the rounds suggest Mamata wanted to accompany Sonia Gandhi in her car for the

funeral but the elite Special Protection Group would have nothing of it. Mamata is then said to have demanded that she be allowed to travel in one of the many cars that formed the SPG convoy but was politely told by an officer that the rulebook did not allow such free rides. She is then said to have had a running verbal feud with the leader of the commando group before finally walking away in a huff, but not before accusing the SPG of trying to keep her away from Sonia. In the months to come, Mamata can be expected to spin many such conspiracy theories that will fascinate Bengalis, at least until the assembly elections next year.

