

Power & Politics

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THE job of governor has always been seen as a sinecure. Over-the-hill politicians who needed to be "accommodated" were dispatched to Raj Bhavans across the country where at best, they were content being mere rubber stamps, at worst, agents for the ruling party at the Centre. Long before Narain Dutt Tiwari came along, most of us knew that the salubrious environments of the gubernatorial estates can make even workaholics lazy. Of course it was Tiwari who showed us how really laid-back the job was. When large parts of Andhra Pradesh burnt over Telangana, Tiwari was busy quelling the fire within his 86 year old frame.

Tiwari is the rule, but there are exceptions. Years ago, there was Garry Saxena, the former RAW chief who had two stints as governor of the troubled Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s. His role in reviving the government machinery when insurgency was at its peak in the state can't be minimised. It is perhaps no coincidence that the most proactive governor now is another retired IPS officer, ESL Narasimhan, the former IB chief and governor of Chhattisgarh. Last week, I had written about Narasimhan creating a history of sorts when he asked the Centre to restrain home minister P. Chidambaram from visiting the Naxal-hit districts of Chhattisgarh.



ESL Narasimhan

After Tiwari quit the Hyderabad Raj Bhavan in shame, Narasimhan was concurrently assigned the Hyderabad job and in less than a week, the results are there for all to see. Last week, the Centre summoned him to Delhi for consultations. This has raised eyebrows since, when a state government is in office, it is the chief minister that New Delhi interacts with. The call to Narasimhan is a sure sign that the Centre thinks he has started well. Repulsive as their efforts were, the TV channel that did a sting operation on Tiwari's alleged romp may have done the people of Andhra Pradesh a favour by forcing him to quit.

There is no better replacement than Narasimhan who has got the confidence of 10 Janpath and shares a good rapport with the national security advisor M.K. Narayanan. Narasimhan got down to work right away, and spent New Year's Eve not in Raipur but in Hyderabad. In less than a week that he has been in charge, the stand-in governor has initiated a series of measures that have raised confidence levels in the ruling establishment. On his first day at work, he met with a cross section of the political leaders in Hyderabad. Shortly after he met the TRS's Chandrasekhar Rao, Narasimhan spoke to Narayanan, the Prime Minister's secretary T.K.A. Nair and home secretary G.K. Pillai. The feed-

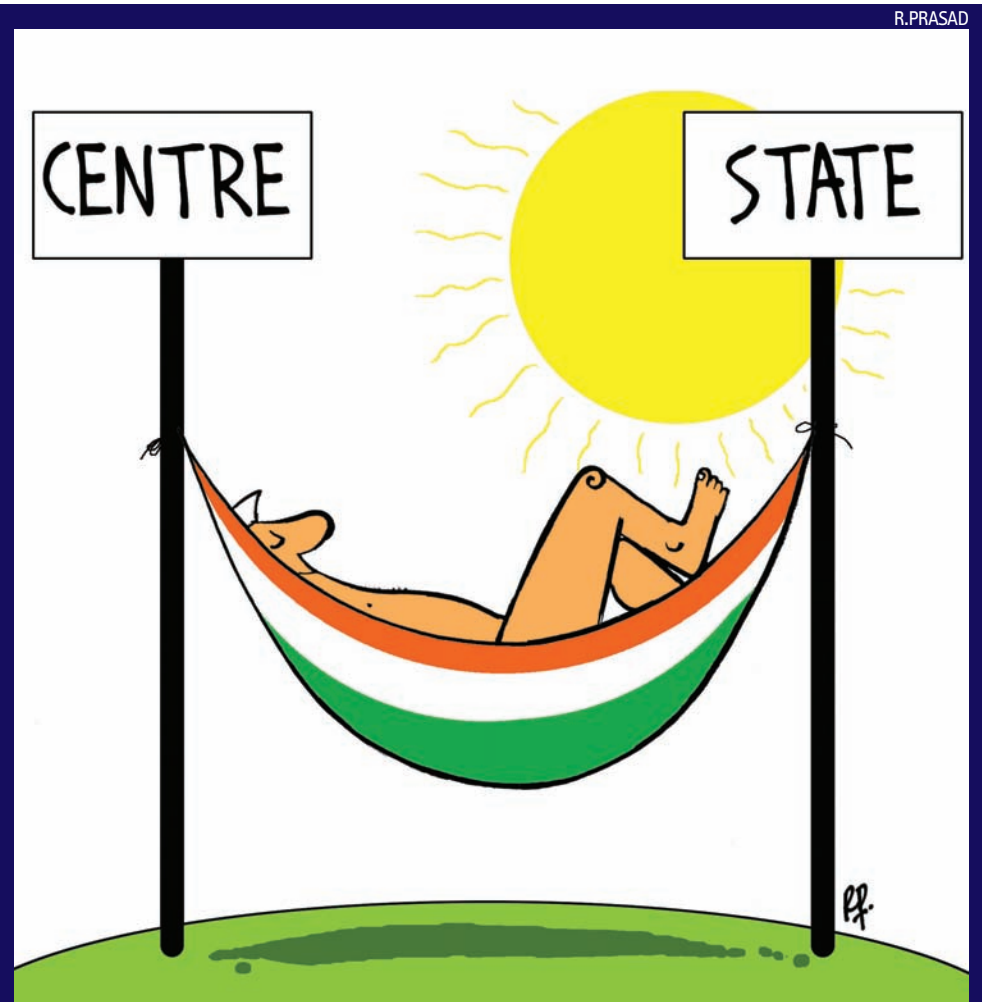
back from him was in line with the initiatives that the Centre had in mind for the state. As far as creation of the new Telangana state was concerned, his advice was that "nothing need be done in a hurry".

Another document marked "Top Secret" dispatched to New Delhi last Wednesday had detailed minutes of his interactions with leaders of 14 political parties in the state ranging from the Congress, the TDP, the Left and the BJP besides details of his meetings with chief minister K. Rosiah and members of his cabinet. He

made independent assessments of the likely impact that the impending bandh called by opposition parties would have on various parts of the state. The Joint Director of IB posted in Hyderabad was asked to send twice daily reports on the law and order situation, especially the safety and security of the many central government installations spread across the state. His impeccable credentials as an officer give him the right to pick up his mobile phone and talk directly to the Home Minister and senior officials in the PMO as well as sum-

mon senior Central and state officials for discussions.

The lure of a long stint in the Raj Bhavan is too irresistible for politicians whose best days are behind them. Andhra Pradesh has shown that a governor's job is not a time-pass occupation. In the few days he has been in charge, Narasimhan has already made a difference. There is a moral in this. If a pesky retired politician has to be accommodated, give him a PSU chairmanship or some such thing. The company will already have been milked so dry, there will be nothing left to be lost.



Not for the laid-back

The new governors sweepstakes

MORE on governors. With Gopal Gandhi packing up at the end of his tenure and leaving the Kolkata Raj Bhavan without even waiting for the formal appointment of his successor and N.D. Tiwari's term in Hyderabad brought to a premature climax by a spy cam presumably hidden in a masseuse's bosom, the Centre is fast-tracking the process of selection of worthies for various Raj Bhavans. ML Fotedar, the Family loyalist was approached, but he has reportedly declined the offer.

I assume he likes active politics more than being caged in a Raj Bhavan. The AICC general secretary Mohsina Kidwai, 66, who retires from Rajya Sabha in July, is a frontrunner to succeed Gandhi in Kolkata while the 65-year old Ronen Sen, India's ambassador in United States until last year, is tipped to become Rajasthan governor. Sen is a former IFS officer who was considered among the most powerful bureaucrats in the PMO during the Rajiv Gandhi era though he was just a joint secretary then. He has also been ambassador to Russia and Germany and our high commissioner in London.

Other names being considered include Arjun Singh. The 79 year old is still smarting from his exclusion from the UPA II cabinet and has two more years left of his term in the Rajya Sabha. His mischief potential as a rebel is enormous and a move to the Chennai Raj Bhavan will be reward for not realising his potential. Santosh Mohan Deb whose dream run of eight consecutive Lok Sabha victories was brought to an end last May is the likely replacement for S.F. Rodrigues whose tenure as Punjab governor has come to an end. And then there is Shivraj Patil.

He was the Union home minister who fiddled when Bangalore, Jaipur, Hyderabad and so many other places burned and hundreds died. He was finally shown the door after 26/11 but I gather that the gates of one of the Raj Bhavans will be thrown open for him.

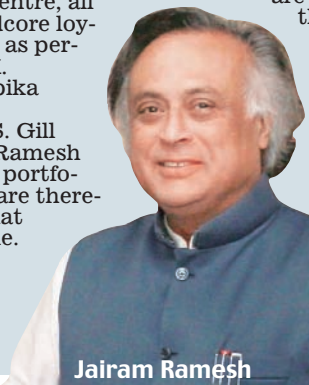
□ The very nature of a coalition implies that its leading partner often walks the tightrope to keep the many junior alliance partners happy. It's a balancing act that the Congress will be called upon to perform at frequent intervals during the first half of the year. 66 members of the Rajya Sabha are due to retire and biennial elections to the Upper House to fill the vacancies must be held between April and July.

Five of the 66 are ministers at the Centre, all of them hardcore loyalists as well as performers. A.K. Antony, Ambika Soni, Anand Sharma, M.S. Gill and Jairam Ramesh all hold vital portfolios too and are therefore somewhat indispensable. Antony is among the three MPs from Kerala who are

due to retire in April, but the current composition of the state assembly can send only one UPA nominee back to the Rajya Sabha. Antony's choice for another term is a certainty, but ally Muslim League will be miffed at being denied a seat.

Sharma, Gill and Ambika Soni too retire in April and July and the breakup of the Punjab and Himachal assemblies ensures that the troika will be returned. Jairam Ramesh may not be so lucky. Six MPs from Andhra Pradesh are retiring in June, among them the junior minister for environment.

Jairam is as much an Andhraite as I am, say, Assamese. With the Telangana brigade in a rebellious mood, it remains to be seen if the UPA will risk fielding him from the state. No statehood for Telangana, but Jairam may get a new state.



Jairam Ramesh

THIS is a government that waxes eloquently about austerity and cutting flab but its actions suggest it is doing exactly the opposite. With 83 members, the Manmohan Singh council of ministers is the largest ever. One out of seven Lok Sabha MPs is a minister and so is every third MP occupying the treasury benches in the Lower House. Worse, there are more people outside the ministerial council and bureaucracy who enjoy the status of a cabinet minister, minister of state, or at the very least, a secretary rank posting. Now plans are afoot to add to the already bloated establishment. I understand that six posts which are currently at the rank of additional or special secretary are to be upgraded to secretary's rank.

On Thursday night, the government presented a perfect New Year's eve gift to R.Gopalan and Bhupinder

Don't take the austerity talk too seriously

Prashad, who were special secretaries. Till now, Ashok Chawla, secretary finance held additional charge of secretary financial services and Gopalan was a special secretary in the department, but he has now been elevated as secretary. Bhupinder Prashad, who served as the special secretary, department of justice in the ministry of law & justice has similarly been elevated as secretary, department of justice, a post which until now was being looked after by home secretary G.K. Pillai.

Prashad thus becomes the first secretary in the department of justice. More job creations are on the way and I understand that among those

who are waiting in anticipation of enjoying the pay and perks of secretary are the director general of foreign trade, the secretary of the Central Vigilance Commission and the secretary of the Central Information Commission.

In the early 1980s, there were around 80 officers and others who held Secretary rank posts. Today, there are over 200. The government's energies should have been spent creating jobs at the lower levels. Instead it is doing it at the top of the pyramid. If the government pursues its job creation spree, the austerity drive and flab cutting will be nothing less than a cruel and expensive joke.