

BJP's Gateway To South, Or Highway To Disaster?

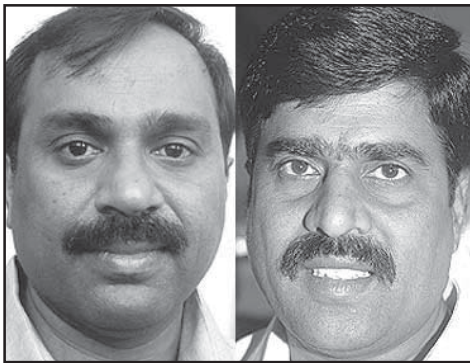
BY V.S. KARNIC

Bangalore: (IANS) The ongoing power struggle in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) first government in Karnataka threatens to shatter the party's dream to make the state a launch pad for ruling southern India.

The turmoil in Karnataka, proudly proclaimed as the party's gateway to the south, is sure to have a debilitating impact on BJP's future in the state, whatever be the compromise hammered out at Delhi to save the government from going under.

The party can ill afford to agree to the demand of the dissident ministers and legislators, led by the billionaire Reddy brothers, to throw out B.S. Yeddyurappa as chief minister.

Yeddyurappa, a veteran who joined the party via the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), belongs to the politically strong Lingayat community that makes up around 14 percent of the state's



L to R: Tourism Minister G. Janardhana Reddy and his elder brother and Revenue Minister G. Karunakara Reddy.

estimated 55 million population. A substantial section of Lingayats is believed to back BJP.

However, rejecting the demand for Yeddyurappa's removal could mean the loss of the financial clout the dissident leaders, Tourism Minister G. Janardhana Reddy and his elder brother and Revenue Minister G. Karunakara Reddy, have brought to the party.

The Reddy brothers are billionaire iron ore mining magnates from the iron ore rich Bellary district, about 400 km from Bangalore. Most of their mines are, however, in Obulapuram in neighboring Andhra Pradesh.

The Reddy brothers are believed to have bankrolled the operation to acquire a majority for the party after the May 2008 assembly polls when it won 110 out of the 224 elected seats in the 225-member assembly.

The Reddys first won over six Independents which helped installation of the Yeddyurappa ministry. Five of the Independents were made ministers as a reward.

However, eager to reduce the dependence on the Independents, the party again turned to the Reddys to ensure success of its Operation Lotus (lotus is BJP's election symbol) to lure legislators from the Congress and the Janata Dal-Secular.

Operation Lotus was launched despite stiff opposition from within the party ranks, which feared it would sully BJP's image as a party that stood for clean politics.

Seven of these joined BJP and won in by-polls.

The party's ambition of being in power on its own was realised as it now had 117

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legislators. With five Independents continuing to be ministers, the effective strength of the ruling party is 122, a comfortable majority.

The BJP now seems to be paying for the hurry to turn the gateway into an autobahn as the majority position in the assembly came with a price tag.

The Reddys expected to be rewarded with a dominant role in running the party and the government.

When that did not come through, they began fuming within months of ministry formation. The situation reached a crisis about three months ago and it needed senior leader Arun Jaitley rushing to Bangalore to pacify the Reddy brothers.

But this time they have gone for the kill.

They want Yeddyurappa out and their man installed as chief minister.

The turmoil has continued for 10 days and pleadings by Jaitley, party president Rajnath Singh and senior leader L. K. Advani have been rejected by the Reddys, who claim that the majority of the legislators are supporting them.

Even Sushma Swaraj, who is considered to be close to the Reddy brothers, has failed to make them relent.

The Reddys joined the BJP just 10 years ago, ahead of the 1999 Lok Sabha polls and canvassed for Swaraj who contested from Bellary against Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

Any compromise in this backdrop may not be more than a patchwork that would not last long, leaving governance in a shambles.

With such a tentative future ahead, the BJP cannot hope to hold its performance as an example to voters in the other three southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

BJP has no presence in Kerala. In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu it depends heavily on the whims of regional parties to be a player of some importance.

The Karnataka mess has scuttled the hopes of an early lotus bloom in the other three southern states.

China Learns That 2009 Is Not 1962

BY AMULYA GANGULI

The inscrutable Chinese are supposed to take every step after careful deliberation. Whether it is Mao Zedong's smile for an Indian envoy to open a new chapter after the 1962 conflict or the summoning of the Indian ambassador in Beijing to the foreign office at 2 a.m. to express displeasure, the Mandarins are believed to be sticklers for sign language.

The perceptible downturn in Sino-Indian relations, therefore, could not have been an unrehearsed event. It began a few years ago with the



Chinese ambassador's assertions on the disputed status of Arunachal Pradesh and Beijing's decision to unilaterally disown the 2005 agreement to leave inhabited areas out of the proposed solutions for the boundary question.

These incidents were followed by reports of an increase in border incursions by Chinese patrols, attempts to block the Asian Development Bank's loans for Arunachal Pradesh, the filibustering by Chinese delegates at the Nuclear Suppliers Group's meetings on the India-US nuclear deal, the stapling of visas on the passports of Kashmiris, the depiction of Kashmir as a separate country in Chinese-made globes, involvement in development projects in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and so on.

Arguably, the Chinese had convinced themselves that India needed to be taught another "lesson", as they purportedly did in 1962, to show who was the boss in Asia, especially to the neighboring countries, none of which matched (or hoped to match) Beijing's might. It is also possible that China believed that its expected emergence as No.2 to the US necessitated a perceptible snubbing of India, its only potential rival in Asia.

These long dormant Middle Kingdom sentiments are not entertained by the communist regime alone. For instance, Chiang Kai-shek's book, "China's Destiny", listed Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Burma and Vietnam as his country's lost territories. Well-known historian R.C. Mazumdar also noted that "if a region once acknowledged her (China's) nominal suzerainty even for a short period, she would regard it as a part of her empire forever and would automatically revive her claim over it even after a thousand years".

This attitude of aggrandisement contrasts sharply with India's benignity and lack of imperialistic ambitions. Although Southeast Asia, from Cambodia to Bali, demonstrates the overwhelming presence of Indian influence, there has never been any question of India claiming these lands as its own.

The same spirit of generosity and friendship was shown by India to Beijing when it rejected the Two China theory preferred by the US in the 1950s and 60s and strongly advocated Beijing's membership of the UN even after deterioration in Sino-Indian relations.

As a report on a conference of governors in 1959 said, late prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave the "reasons for the stand taken by India in the UN on the question of the entry of China into the organisation though there was resentment in the country about China's hostile attitude towards India".

But China never reciprocated these friendly gestures. Instead, as Nehru said after the 1962 war, "it was wrong to assume that the Chinese undertook this aggression only because they wanted some patches of territory...China did not want any country near her which was not prepared to accept her leadership; so India had to be humiliated".

Continuing, he said, "though India would not interfere with what was happening within China, yet she came in China's way by the mere fact of her separate political structure and pursuing a separate policy which was succeeding".

These factors are apparently still riling China. Not only is India emerging as a major regional power with a robust economy which has weathered the storm of recession with reasonable success, its "separate political structure" of a widely admired multicultural democracy contrasts sharply with China's obviously repressive one-party rule.

What is more, while Pakistan's degeneration into a dysfunctional state robs China of an "all-weather friend" which it could use to needle India, Beijing's own peripheries have become seedbeds of trouble. Let alone subdue its neighbours, the aspiring Middle Kingdom is not even in full control over Tibet and Xinjiang, not to mention Taiwan. Nor is it able to hide the growing rural unrest over the disparity between the rich and the poor.

It is apparently because of such restiveness that even the supposedly monolithic communist party is divided. On one side are the so-called populists, who include President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, with their preference for a level-playing field between the poor Western regions and the more affluent urban areas on the eastern coast and on the other side are the elitists, who want faster growth based on the free market.

It was perhaps to divert attention from all these difficulties by ratcheting up nationalistic fervour that China thought of provoking India. But its miscalculation was that it did not take into account the fact that India in 2009 was different from its naïve and militarily unprepared self in 1962.

The blow to its pride in that year has led to an augmentation of its military prowess, which it is no longer hesitant to display. India also seems to have realized that the Chinese misinterpret politeness as weakness. Hence it chose to ignore Beijing's objections to the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh.

It is possible that the Chinese will now pay greater heed to the second part of the advice of Sun Tzu, the military genius of 6th century B.C., who said the winner is the person who "knows when to fight and when not to fight".