

The hidden hand behind BJP flare-up?

Nobody quite knows how the crisis in the Bharatiya Janata Party's first ever government in Karnataka flared up to such a point that Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa had to face a no-holds barred attack from the influential Reddy brothers from Bellary.

That the Reddy brothers, who are rich mine owners and close to former Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's son Jaganmohan, is well known. Now a little bird tells us that Jaganmohan, who visited Delhi a fortnight ago to meet Congress president Sonia Gandhi, could have played a role in triggering the banner of revolt.

An insider says Jaganmohan nurtures ambitions of becoming the Andhra Pradesh chief minister after his father's tragic demise and was keen to prove his political acumen despite his inexperience in realpolitik. Whether he fanned the crisis that was at an incipient stage is still not known, but the Congress camp is certainly watching events unfold in its rival party with unconcealed glee.

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Father pays for son's misdeeds

Chandigarh-based billionaire Congress politician Vinod Sharma had set his sights high in Haryana. But it seems Priyanka Gandhi Vadra brought his dream crashing down.

The man who mopped up the third highest votes in the recently concluded Haryana elections was eyeing the post of deputy chief minister and had the approval of the party national leadership. But now it appears his name does not even figure in the list of ministers.

The reason, say Congress insiders, is Priyanka who scuttled his name at the last minute. They say this was because of Sharma's son, Manu, who has been convicted for the murder of model-turned-celebrity barmaid, Jessica Lal.

Priyanka was taught by the victim's mother and had even gone to offer condolences when Jessica Lal was shot dead by Manu Sharma at a party in 1999.

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In pipeline - India's balancing act

The Iranian pipeline may be turning out to be a pipedream, but the Iranians are not the kind to give up easily.

Barely a week before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh goes to Washington for his White House meeting with US President Barack Obama, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki will be in [New Delhi](#) to remind his Indian counterparts that Iranian gas could perhaps have more answers for India's energy security than the much-touted India-US nuclear deal.

Not that there is much enthusiasm in India about a pipeline that will pass through the terror-infested tribal areas of Pakistan. But it will be a good photo op for the Manmohan Singh government to

flaunt its ties with Iran just to tell the world that India can do business with Washington and Tehran with ease without compromising its much-vaunted independent foreign policy.

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Home ministry 'babus' back to basics

Two months ago, Home Minister P. Chidambaram was keen to usher in a culture of punctuality by introducing biometric machines in the home ministry offices. Many of the 5,500 'babus' battled hard to meet the deadline - 9 a.m. sharp - and there was marked improvement in arrivals.

But two months after the scanners were installed, data that has now been scanned show many are falling back to their old ways - coming in late. Instructions have now gone out to all departments that things need to improve. Or else?

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Praise for Tharoor's peer - sans Twitter

She may not be hogging news columns or blogs in cyberspace like her colleague Shashi Tharoor, but Preneet Kaur - the other minister of state for external affairs - has been quietly making a mark. And that too, without Twitter!

Fondly known as Maharani Sahiba, Kaur has been bestowed the 'Sikh of the Year' award by the International Sikh Forum for her contribution towards Punjab and especially to the Sikh community. She heads off to London later this month to receive the prestigious award whose previous recipients were Indian Army chief General J.J. Singh and Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

Some of the achievements cited for the three-time MP from Patiala include the setting up of special camps in Italy to help migrants from the subcontinent - mostly Sikhs from Punjab - who needed to have their immigration regularised by availing themselves of an amnesty scheme. Also, Kaur resolved the issue of mandatory submission of police clearance certificates by Indians in Spain with the authorities. Punjabis, particularly Sikhs, have heaved a sigh of relief with the move.

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Priyanka's dream house nearing completion

While Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi has been hotfooting it around the country's outback, building up the party and recruiting more youth, his sister Priyanka has been quietly overseeing the construction of her dream home in Himachal Pradesh.

Insiders point out that the four-bedroom cottage, built at a height of more than 8,000 feet in the picturesque Charabra area, is nearing completion. Last week, both Priyanka and her mother and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi made a quick dash to Shimla to see how the two-storey house was shaping up.

Kehar Singh Khachi, a Congress activist who is supervising the cottage construction, believes it will be complete by December and is working at a frenetic pace to see that it meets the deadline. Khachi, in fact, played a key role in buying the land for around Rs.4.7 million two years ago. The plot is close to The Retreat, the summer holiday resort of the Indian president, and the Oberoi Group's luxury spa Wildflower Hall.

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Chidambaram's media blitz

Articulate, workaholic Home Minister P. Chidambaram is known to be a man who brooks no nonsense from anyone, and especially from the media. Lately though, he has been seen over-extending himself on television.

Whether it is on a proposed offensive against the Maoists, the refusal of Pakistan to cooperate in investigations or the fresh terror plot unravelling in the US, Chidambaram is never lost for a soundbyte while travelling around the country. North Block mandarins maintain that is the new style of openness and transparency that Chidambaram wants to bring into the home ministry.

His critics, however, see a different side to this trait of hogging headlines and advise restraint, especially as he is dealing with sensitive matters concerning intelligence agencies. But for a person who conveys the impression that he knows it all, will Chidambaram pay heed?

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Price index woes, wholesale

The government's move to report the full data on the wholesale price index only on a monthly basis, instead of the decades-old practice of revealing the numbers every week, appears to have backfired.

The cabinet approved the move recently in a bid to curb volatility in the markets. But when selective weekly data was released a few days ago, media reports chose to highlight what is called 'food inflation' that stands at a whopping 13.39 percent on an annual basis. The fact that the annual inflation for primary articles and fuels stood at minus 6.2 percent, which the government sought to portray, was hardly highlighted.

'I think, we seem to be 'injecting' volatility, rather than 'curbing' volatility,' remarked a senior minister who, incidentally, had opposed the move when it was brought before the cabinet in February during the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

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