

Advani's birthday gift: a power struggle in Karnataka?

Bharatiya Janata Party's supreme leader L.K. Advani would have liked a better birthday gift as he turned 82 Sunday. Instead what he had to deal with was a bitter power struggle in the party's first government in Karnataka and south India.

With the dissident Reddy brothers, both state ministers, unwilling to give up their demand for Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa's ouster, Advani faces the grim prospect of seeing an enfeebled party chief minister ruling Karnataka after a compromise formula is worked out.

The Yeddyurappa ministry has been in a limbo for two weeks now following the dissidents' campaign, led by Tourism Minister G. Janardhana Reddy and his elder brother and Revenue Minister G. Karunakara Reddy, for his ouster.

The Reddy brothers, mining barons from Bellary, claim the support of about 70 legislators, including some Independents. The BJP has 117 members in the 225-member assembly and has the support of five Independents, all of whom are ministers.

Yeddyurappa has already bowed to the dissidents and shunted out one of his trusted officials, senior IAS officer V.P. Baligar as his principal secretary. That was the first appointment Yeddyurappa had made on taking over as BJP's first chief minister in Karnataka and south India on May 30, 2008.

He has also agreed to drop his close associate and the lone woman minister, Shobha Karandlaje, who holds the rural development and panchayat raj portfolio.

The chief minister is also ready to make assembly speaker Jagadish Shettar, whom the dissidents are propping as alternative leader, a cabinet minister.

The Reddy brothers, however, are not satisfied.

They are insisting that Yeddyurappa sack several more ministers considered close to him, give the brothers decisive say in posting officers in areas where the two wield influence and set up a panel which will have a final say on the decisions of the chief minister.

Realising that this would leave him a nominal chief minister, Yeddyurappa Saturday shed tears publicly at his plight during an interview to a TV channel.

The BJP central leaders are hopeful of ending the crisis Sunday as both Yeddyurappa and the dissident leaders are in [New Delhi](#) continuing the hard bargaining.

Advani may be wishing his expected last birthday Sunday as Leader of the Opposition had begun and ended on a better note instead of seeing partymen locked in factional fights.

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