

# BJP'S CUP OF WOES OVERFLOWS



*The party's cup of woes has increased with the Supreme Court ordering a probe by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) into complaints against former Chief Minister Yeddyurappa >>>*



BY GEORGE PLATHOTTAM SDB

The three Karnataka Ministers caught watching porn on a cell phone in the Legislative Assembly have brought disrepute to themselves and to the country. The Speaker has now constituted a House Committee to look into the incident but the Congress and other Opposition parties have refused to be part of the Committee saying the matter is so self-evident that there is no need for any investigation.

In our jumbo democracy we have all kinds of characters from bona fide political leaders with values and principles to crooks

and criminals who are suited for prison cells. Then we have had Parliamentarians and members of Legislative Assemblies indulging in violence, rushing to the well of the House, snatching mikes and tearing papers, being absent during important debates, boycotting sessions, doing walk-outs, sleeping or not paying attention during the sessions. But this is probably the first time that a portal of democracy is tainted with ministers indulging in porn watching. One can only imagine what kind of thoughts flash through the minds of the average citizens when leaders elected and entrusted with the responsibility of legislation and governance demean themselves to this extent.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party which prides itself in calling it 'a party with a difference' is now red-faced. No doubt the Party was prompt to act against

the erring members. But will the BJP and its parent organizations, which claim to be the patrons of Indian culture and moral guardians, have the courage to show zero tolerance to the three ministers by removing them from the primary membership of the party? Or will they too wait for the public memory and the media attention to fade out before they are back on centre stage? We are not accustomed to probing into the private lives of our political leaders as the Americans and other westerners are wont to do. Our democracy is more concerned with demanding good governance and clean administration. But the 'porngate', as the issue is now being referred to, can take a heavy toll on the BJP. The incident has only added to the woes of a party and its government in the State which have been accused of corruption, communal violence and bad governance.

As for the 'porn gate' we may blame the general deterioration of the moral conduct of society and the invasion of media prying into the lives and conduct of people. Educators and parents are often concerned about the growing tendency of the young to pornographic addiction. The internet and the new technological devices easily available to young people have increased access to pornography. Some have estimated that about one-third of internet content is pornographic. Today there are many new devices like the cell phones to make access to porn easy. There is a huge industry that earns millions of dollars in profit as a result of pushing pornographic materials. We are witnessing an alarming increase in sexual crimes like rape to lewd behaviour involving youth and even children. It is not uncommon for children to develop attraction toward pornography from the adults, including their parents.

But the conduct of the three ministers is like the crop eating the fence. Those who are supposed to be guardians and role models for good and decent behaviour have fallen victims of the malaise of indecency and misconduct. The question being asked is, can guardians of the law and Constitution be excused for such misdemeanor? What is more shocking is that one of the ministers holds the portfolio of women and child welfare. The issue is not only about the indulgence of political leaders in conducts that call into question their moral ineptitude. The matter assumes greater seriousness because the trio used the hallowed precincts of the Assembly to indulge in such offensive act. What is further shocking is the fact that the kind of debate among the guilty now is on who owned the phone and who prompted or instigated

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them to watch the porn than on more substantial issues like that of morality or guilt.

The incident has shocked the RSS and other affiliate bodies of the Sangh Parivar who usually act as the self-appointed moral guardians of the nation. The anger among the party cadres is strong as the three ministers hail from the coastal belt of Karnataka, considered a BJP-stronghold. The Sangh activists in the coastal belt are concerned about the impact of the incident on the forthcoming Udupi-Chikmagalur by-election to the Parliament. The party is also conscious of its image as elections to the Assembly is due over a year from now, and nothing short of a clean image and good governance can see the party thorough in the hustings. The party had a series of downward swings with the running conflict between B.S. Yeddyurappa, the former Chief Minister and the Governor and the Lokayukta. BSY had to relinquish office in spite of all out efforts to stay on in power.

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only increased with the Supreme Court ordering a probe by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) into complaints against former Chief Minister Yeddyurappa. His successor Sadananda Gowda rules by proxy with the BSY calling the shot. Gowda, beset with a series of scams and corruption charges against his cabinet colleagues, have no easy time. In fact, eleven of his ministers have stepped down or were forced to do so within a short span of time. At the moment Gowda himself holds 22 portfolios. Though he has promised a Cabinet expansion soon after the budget session, at this point of time it entails a lot of risk as it is likely to evoke revolt and dissention within the party and invite the ire of his predecessor. Earlier, the BJP also had to face a lot of embarrassment on account of the powerful Bellary Brothers against whom there are several charges of corruption. With such a heavy backlog of corruption charges involving ministers and political leaders, the BJP has a tough time to spruce up its image before the

State goes to the polls again.

As for strategies to deal with the 'porn gate' scandal the BJP has launched a campaign to support the three ministers and bring up allegations against the Opposition parties. The party has been distributing pamphlets in support of the trio and urging party units to work together to establish the "innocence of the ministers and expose the sex scandals of the Opposition parties". The list of charges against the Congress in the BJP kitty are escapades of former Andhra Pradesh governor N.D. Tiwari, former Rajasthan minister involving in the disappearance of Banwari Devi, Youth Congress leader Sushil Sharma who has been convicted and is behind the bars and Congress leader Venod Sharma's son Manu Sharma's involvement in the Jessica Lal case. The party is also targeting Janata Dal (S) leader and former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy. The party's campaign organisers have trained party cadres and armed them with 'researched data' and statistics on the misdemeanors of the Opposition leaders.

The incident involving the three ministers in Karnataka has also brought to the limelight the question of immunity given to the legislators and Parliamentarians against prosecution. The option of taking action against elected representative for what they say or do on the floor of the House rests with the presiding officer and not with any agency outside the legislature. This provision was put in place to ensure that the elected representatives are able to articulate the grievances of the people and represent their interests without fear or favour and is in no way inhibited from exercising their duties and obligations. While no one doubts the intention of those who built

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this provision of privileges into our Constitution, there have been increasing voices in favour of codifying the privileges enjoyed by the law makers.

Clear codifying of privileges of legislators, they feel, will ensure that those who indulge in misconduct or criminal activities do not take shelter under the privilege of immunity which is provided as a tool to enable effective legislation. Political leaders, of course, feel that the system is perfect and there are provisions within the system to prosecute offenders. They feel that the privilege of immunity is not unbridled as the Speaker or the presiding officer has the power to decide on what is right and what is wrong and act against erring members.

The writing on the wall is clear for all political parties. This time round it may be the already beleaguered BJP that has to deal with a crisis like the porngate. But all political parties must deal with the misconduct of their leaders as well as cadres. As is being proved again and again, today it is not easy for any of them to indulge in immoral and corrupt practices and get away. The media is now on the



prowl with its new technological devices. The citizens are more watchful and alert about the conduct of their leaders. There is an increasing sense of frustration on the part of the public regarding politicians of all hues who fail to ensure good governance and address the legitimate grievances of the people who elect them.

There is a huge trust deficit between the people and their leaders. It is in the light of these that political parties must lay down clear rules and guidelines for their legislators and those in positions of power. Parties must also act decisively against those who flout accepted norms of conduct. An electoral victory or cabinet berth is not licence to act without any rules of behaviour or sense of responsibility.

In another disgraceful incident, the St Mary's Island at Malpe in Udupi district, considered a sacred place, was disgraced

with a rave drunken party. The usage of drugs, liquor and free indulgence in sexual activities there deserve to be condemned by all. Former Judge of the Mumbai and Karnataka High Court, Justice M F Saldanha described the incident a disgrace and called for the dismissal of the minister in-charge of the district and local MLA.

The State has also the dubious distinction of having the highest number of attacks on the Christian minority community ever since the BJP came to power. Hindu extremist groups led attacks on churches, schools and homes of Christians and physically beat hundreds of people. Minorities have been feeling insecure as they were attacked even in cities like Mangalore which has a strong Christian presence, and has a long tradition of inter-faith and communal harmony.

Justice Saldanha, who conducted an independent People's Tribunal Inquiry to investigate the violence, visited over 400 places and examined almost 3,000 witnesses and victims in addition to forensic evidence and media reports. The report said that the violence was covered up by the BJP government in the state. Instead of restraining the attackers, the administration colluded with the perpetrators of crime and violence or looked the other way when complaints were made. The former Chief Minister B. S. Yeddyurappa, and former Home Minister Acharya, who died recently, have been accused for lending tacit support to criminal elements who indulged in such acts of vandalism. Christian leaders have blamed the State administration for using even the armed police,

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and the lower judiciary against Christians, their institutions and personnel to create "an atmosphere of anarchy."

As in other BJP-ruled States there is also a systematic attempt to saffronise education

and the party are seriously working on a major image makeover. The Chief Minister has announced a programme to educate his ministers and legislators on morality and discipline. The BJP, nay all political parties, need lessons in good governance, ethics, social responsibility and accountability. It is not that they lack knowledge of what is right and wrong, but once elected, they are carried away by the lure of power and riches and forget the salutary lessons of life. At a time when political leaders are facing a serious erosion of credibility before the public, it should be the task of those in the profession to do everything to restore the confidence of the people.



by introducing biased lessons in the social sciences of Class V and VII from the next academic year. Several organizations like the Karnataka Komu Souhardha Vedike (Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum) are fighting against the government which is going to spend a whopping Rs 14 crore to print new textbooks. Several secular organizations as well as litterateurs like U R Ananthamurthy, and Chandrashekar Kambhar have expressed their support to the protests against the government's move to saffronise education.

Following the disgraceful incident of porn watching by the ministers, the government

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in Karnataka which is facing high level of corruption charges, communalism and attacks on minorities, will need to work very hard if it is to build up its image. The party needs to convince the voters of its integrity and competence to provide corruption-free governance. Karnataka was the first state in South India where the party came to power. But the dismal record of the party and its government in the state raise serious doubts whether the lotus will bloom again when Karnataka goes to the polls next year.

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