

Roles of PM and President!

rajinder puri

THERE have been serious allegations of massive corruption related to the allotment of coal blocks to private parties during the period when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was personally heading the ministry. The report of the Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) gives details of what transpired in the coal ministry during that time. The Opposition clamoured in Parliament that the CAG report be tabled in the House. The government claimed that the report had not yet been received. "We have not received any such report," coal minister Mr Sriprakash Jaiswal told the media on being asked about Press reports that according to the CAG's final report, undue benefits accrued to private firms in the allocation of blocks. Mr Jaiswal said this on 22 May, the last day of Parliament's Budget session. The government did not table the CAG report in Parliament right up to the last day of the session despite Opposition uproar over the alleged Rs 1,00,000-crore coal scam. According to parliamentary procedure, the government is obliged to immediately table the CAG report in Parliament after receiving it. Failure to table the report implied that the report had not yet been received.

It now transpires that the government had received the CAG report 11 days before the Budget session ended. Therefore if not by word but by deed the government had misled Parliament and encroached on its rights by not tabling the CAG report. The decision not to table the report could not have been taken singularly by coal minister Mr Jaiswal. The entire Cabinet, including the Prime Minister who personally is in the middle of the coal allotment controversy would have been complicit. After such a serious cover-up, does the PM's continuance in office remain tenable? Should he not resign? How did the government's chicanery come to light? The TV channel *Times Now* is in possession of a receipt letter which reveals that the government had received the coal scam report 11 days before the Budget session ended but chose not to table it in the Parliament. From where did the TV channel obtain the copy of the receipt letter? The receipt letter was

from Rashtrapati Bhawan. Therefore either President Pranab Mukherjee's secretariat or the CAG's office was responsible for the letter being leaked. If it was the President's secretariat, it would be unlikely that his powerful and efficient aide, Mrs Omita Paul, would be unaware of the leak. Indeed, it should not surprise if even the President himself might be aware of the leak. After all, as the upholder of law and Constitution the President can act as the whistleblower. However, if such be the case, there arises a serious complication.

When the CAG submits his report one copy is sent to the President and another to the finance ministry. When he submitted his report 11 days before Parliament's Budget session ended, Mr Pranab Mukherjee was the finance minister. Therefore, Mr Mukherjee, along with the PM and other Cabinet colleagues, was fully complicit in the cover up and in the failure to table the report in Parliament. In other words if the leak emanated from Rashtrapati Bhawan, Mr Mukherjee, after colluding in the cover-up as minister would as the President have acted as the whistleblower! If this indeed is the case, would it be any more appropriate for him to remain in office as it is for the PM? All these events need to be viewed in the murky, criminal, corrupt and conspiratorial context in which the UPA government is functioning. Ministers spy on each other, bug each other's offices, hold back information about illegal foreign bank accounts for use as coercion, and in general intrigue against each other like crooks. Members of Parliament need to think deep and hard about where the nation is heading. They must rise above partisan considerations and decide whether even the Prime Minister and the President should be spared accountability when the stakes are so high. Both the PM and President can be made accountable to Parliament. The UPA government has destroyed governance. Should it be allowed to destroy our democratic system?

The writer is a veteran journalist and cartoonist. He blogs at www.rajinderpuri.wordpress.com