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Karnataka politics in transition. But to where?

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The BJP central leadership has finally cracked the whip and effected a change in leadership of its only government south of the Vindhyas. The curtain comes down, ending one tumultuous phase of state politics. As the principal actors get ready for the next scene, the audience watches with bated breath as to who would be the new hero.

What are the implications for politics of the state? It would firstly, depend on whether the outgoing chief minister accepts the decision of the central leadership with grace or prefers to go down fighting. If he falls in line with the party decision, the transition would be smooth, with minimal visible changes. If the handover is messy, the transition would see many dramatic developments with several unanticipated twists and turns. Any tran-

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sition is fraught with uncertainty.

However, the transition that Karnataka is going to witness does not involve a change of party in power but merely a change of leadership within the ruling party. The new leader to head the government will have a tightrope walk. The central leadership would need to keep in mind that Yeddyurappa's successor will have to carry along all sections of the faction-ridden state BJP. Very few among the existing leaders would have the stature to meet this requirement. The new leader would need to be seen as giving a new sense of direction to the government and consciously projecting a fresh, clean image, without

in any way disowning what happened in the past. The remaining two years of the current assembly would need to be used by the state leadership to refurbish the image of the party and government. To be fair, the government's achievements on a few fronts have been placed on the backburner with the focus more on periodic political convulsions in the party.

The decision of the BJP central leadership to act swiftly may have been triggered by a range of factors. It may have wanted to strengthen its capacities to attack the UPA government in the monsoon session. The fear of the governor acting against the government may also have hastened its decision. Finally, it became difficult for the leadership to 'defend the indefensible'. It's interesting that the central leadership did not accept recommending dissolving the state assembly as an option. It may neither have found favour with ruling party legislators nor have



been a politically astute move.

There's another dimension of the transition that needs to be focused on. The Congress has sat in the position of the principal opposition for a while now. Many would argue the dissensions and squabbles within the party have prevented it from discharging its role as a responsible opposition.

If the party wants to make a bid for power in the next elections, it cannot rely merely on anti-incumbency. It would need to make a concerted effort to speak in one voice and take on the government in a more cohesive and effective manner. The JD(S) would need to deal with the charge of its leadership being named by the Lokayukta too and broaden its support base. This phase of transition is critical in shaping the future course of state politics.

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