

ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: Other State Matters

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THE HINDU

Mumbai muckraking

Impartial probe of allegations of extortion against Maharashtra Minister is a must

Former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh's allegations against Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh are sensational, and threatening for the State government. The nexus between crime, politics, policing and business is an old story. In that sense, Mr. Singh's charge that the Minister was forcing police officers to extort money from businesses is not surprising; it is nevertheless an extremely serious one that needs serious investigation. However, Mr. Singh's credibility is hardly inspiring, and he raised the allegation only after he was removed as Commissioner. The circumstances leading to his removal were inglorious. Sachin Vaze, an officer arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in connection with the discovery of explosives near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house, was perceived to be close to Mr. Singh. The Minister sought to put Mr. Singh on the mat over the case, who made a retaliatory move by accusing the former of trying to use Mr. Vaze as a henchman. Mr. Singh approaching the Supreme Court for a CBI inquiry against Mr. Deshmukh is intriguing and self-implicating. As Commissioner he could have – and should have – acted upon the allegations that he is now raising.

The muckraking by Mr. Singh cannot be seen disconnected from the ceaseless political manoeuvring in the State. The formation of the unlikely coalition of the Shiv Sena, Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 2019 was a setback to the storied managerial skills of the BJP. Speculation of an impending collapse have loomed over the Maha Vikas Aghadi government since its formation. The BJP, with the active help of Central agencies, has been trying to unsettle the State government. In the tug of war, Mr. Singh has been an active instrument of the MVA, and the Shiv Sena sprung up to his defence immediately after he was removed. Now the leaders of all three parties have termed his allegations as a conspiracy to topple the State government. After the initial panic, the parties have closed ranks behind the embattled Minister. The lure of power is universal, but in Maharashtra, which is home to India's economic capital Mumbai, it is even more intense. The ideological mismatch of the alliance partners is evident, but the State government has matched up to the BJP's challenge several times in political combat. All three parties are united by a strong survival instinct in the face of the BJP onslaught. The BJP's impatience to reclaim power in Maharashtra is more than usual considering the bruised egos involved. The chances of a politically motivated investigation are high, given the context. Only an independent, transparent investigation can separate the wheat from the chaff in this sordid tale. Unfortunately, a probe by either the State police or a central agency is not a reassuring option.