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Under the influence

Oh shit. It turns out that there is a bad, bad person in the new clean government. Or is there?

Thankfully, nothing's been confirmed. And frankly, the last time I put my finger out in the breeze, there wasn't much of a flutter from the story, let alone a flurry of protests outside Jantar Mantar — barring, that is, a strong front-page piece in the Pioneer (which professionally hates the Congress-led UPA anyway) last Sunday by former Attorney General Soli Sorabjee.

Ex-rumour (now that no one's talking about it) has it that a Cabinet Minister from the UPA government got in touch with Justice R. Reghupathy of the Madras High Court to 'influence' him about a case involving two nasty people being investigated by the CBI. This piece of infotainment was reportedly spread by the same Justice R. Reghupathy publicly in court. (J. Jayalithaa named a certain gent in the Central government, but since it was impolite to conjecture only on the basis of her possibly biased information, everyone just looked up and kept whistling.)

Then, a few days down the line, Reghupathy made a swift C-turn saying that it wasn't the Cabinet Minister who actually called him on the phone, but a lawyer who said that the minister was 'interested' in the case involving a marksheet forgery. Huge difference, that. This came around the same time the Chief Justice of India (CJI) stated that all this talk of a nose-y Cabinet Minister was bakwaas. That, as you may well realise, threw the whole matter out of the window.

It would be safe to assume that since Reghupathy is yet to name either the shadowy minister (who may or may not have been on the telecommunication device himself) or the shadowier lawyer who supposedly played go-between, Justice Reghupathy is either a big, overweight liar and is cooking the whole thing up because his life has taken a particularly boring turn. Or he received a subtle message from the Cabinet Minister — or the minister's lawyer friend or any other of his other friends and admirers — that to name the person who 'preferred' the accused being given bail would have 'consequences' that would disrupt the politico-judicial landscape of the country.

So shouldn't Reghupathy now be made to publicly apologise for suggesting that there is a corrupt Cabinet Minister in the squeaky clean government? Not so fast, it seems. There is a terrifying taboo of saying anything remotely disrespectful (read: negative) about the judiciary in this country. I once nearly told an advocate friend of mine, "Boss, I think you are putting on some weight." Thankfully, I kept the observation to myself lest I was slapped with a 'contempt of court'.

Judges can do no wrong. Not even when they say that Amitabh's finest movie is *Lal Badshaah*; not even when they publicly state that some bigwig is trying to elbow into a judgement and then scamper away without naming the rule-bender.

Take the new law being considered that will make it mandatory for judges to disclose their assets. (Yay!) Such a disclosure will be only to the CJI and beyond the reach of the public. (Oh.) One school of thought wants anyone other than the CJI getting hold of such classified information prosecuted. (Oh.) Another school also wants this info to be kept away from the public but without the non-CJI person, who somehow has got this info, being liable for prosecution. (Yay? Oh?)

If that has got you thoroughly confused, then the judiciary has been successful yet again in bamboozling you. And what you don't understand, you worship. 1 Of 1

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