



## COAL BLOCK SCANDAL

### Blackens democracy's processes

OF greater relevance than its "disputable" contents is the fact that it was on the floor of Parliament that the Prime Minister made, or at least attempted to make, his statement on the coal blocks controversy. The locale is significant, because few of the charges the BJP has levelled have been made in that forum ~ unless slogan-screaming has come to be accepted as debate. The principal party's virtual rejection of that forum for managing national issues is reckless. It has not learnt from its disruption fiasco over the 2G Spectrum allocation ~ that only yielded a non-performing JPC. In its arrogance the BJP demands the resignation of the Prime Minister, but its reluctance to move a no-confidence motion is tacit acceptance that it does not command a majority, and is using foul means to try and force an election at a time when the nation can least afford one. Aware that its principal demand was fanciful it switched tack: calling for a SIT, proceeding to accuse the Congress of raking in *mota maal*. By rejecting the parliamentary route the BJP has confessed that the much-vaunted debating power of Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitely, LK Advani, Yashwant Sinha... add up to nothing.

Not that the new-found assertiveness of the UPA leads the nation or Parliament forward. Was it tactically sound for Mr Manmohan Singh to have waited for days before joining his minions in "taking on" the BJP? And since few accept the hair-splitting spin from the PMO his statement is nothing short of questioning the competence (motivation too?) of the Comptroller & Auditor General. So will political attacks now become "legitimate" should actions of the UPA run foul of the Election Commission, the Supreme Court? The saving grace of Mr Singh being personally "clean" has lost force, he presides ~ helplessly ~ over the most corrupt government ever. The BJP may have no moral right to demand the resignation of Mr Singh (it has its own scandalous folk) but surely the nation is entitled to ask itself if the incumbent Prime Minister has the right to lead the alliance ~ at least nominally ~ into the next election?

What of Parliament's future? Can it negate its duties and responsibilities as envisaged by the Founding Fathers? Can it allow itself to remain disrupted: the rules provide for suspending members who persistently misbehave, having them "marshalled out". Unpleasant certainly, yet better than accepting uselessness. For should Parliament "opt out" who will fill the vacuum? The likes of Team Anna, or more violent protesters? The Chief Justice has rightly cautioned against judicial governance, but when the legislature and executive flop is there any alternative? A coal mine is sometimes referred to as a pit, recent events confirm that Indian politics is now "the pits".