

In Delhi, a crisis of governance

Who exactly is governing Delhi? This is a question that is bound to arise once again since the chief minister and four of his cabinet colleagues have been camping for three days in the lieutenant-governor's office to press him to end a protest by bureaucrats. Of course, this is only the latest bone of contention between the L-G and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, which says the Centre is trying to impede its functioning and stop development work undertaken by it. The provocation for the latest round of differences between the bureaucracy and the state government is the alleged assault on chief secretary Anshu Prakash on February 19 at the chief minister's residence. The sit-in at the LG's office is not likely to pay dividends, either for Delhi or for the AAP, which has tried these obstructionist tactics too often. Who can forget the sight of the chief minister sleeping on a pavement in protest against the then L-G during his first stint in power? Though the AAP returned to power with a huge majority the following year, the politics of sleepovers can wear itself thin, particularly when it leads to a loss of governance time.

The people of Delhi have many problems as a severe summer sets in, bringing with it water shortages and power outages. When a chief minister becomes a street-corner protestor, the line between administration and activism gets blurred. Effective policy changes are only possible in times of peace, and one of the Kejriwal's government critical flaws is that it's constantly engaged in conflict, which often ends up in theatrics replacing governance.

The Centre is not entirely without fault in the series of standoffs. There have been accusations of files pending for longer than required, several decisions being overturned on technical grounds, and AAP MLAs being embroiled in police cases that have led nowhere. At the same time, Delhi has functioned fairly well under other chief ministers who also had to work in tandem with an L-G who was appointed by an opposing party at the Centre. There are compromises that need to be made in administration, but instead of reaching out, the Delhi government has too often exacerbated the situation.

The chief minister and his colleagues, who have been elected to govern Delhi with a handsome majority, and have shown promise with an improved education programme and good health care schemes, should get back to work. Prolonging the latest standoff will only devalue the AAP and give legitimacy to the sentiment that it is more interested in scoring political brownie points than working for the people.

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