Resignation dramas

There have been different kinds of quitting a beloved post in the past by bigwigs across the globe.

■ by Wg Cdr DP Sabharwal

It has been in the news recently. N Srinivasan, president of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), in blatant disregard of morals and public sentiments, remained glued to his official position and the chair. Even when virtually pushed to the wall, he did not resign. Instead of stepping down, he stepped aside, hoping for things to cool down. Finally the things cooled down and Srinivasan is back on the seat of president of BCCI.

This year, in the month of May, dramatic incidents led to the resignation of two central government ministers. Ashwani Kumar, the law minister, was literally forced to submit his resignation days after the Supreme Court said that the government had substantially changed a report by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), about alleged irregularities in the awarding of mining rights of coals worth billions of rupees to private companies.

Pawan Bansal, the railways minister, too, had to resign under pressure from the Cabinet in the aftermath of a bribery case involving his nephew. The latter is alleged to have been operating from the minister's official residence and was allegedly caught accepting a bribe of Rs 90 lakh. The minister, however, maintained that he had done no wrong in the entire episode. Both of the above are out of the government now.

Resignations abroad

A resignation is the formal act of giving up or quitting one's office or position. A resignation can occur when a person holding a position – gained either through elections or appointment – steps down. Technically, whether a person is forced to resign under pressure or resigns voluntarily, based on his conscience, is immaterial. However, morally and ethically, it makes a lot of difference. Politicians the world over have been involved in situations which lead to their resignations.

United States President Richard M. Nixon had to resign from the office of President in 1974, following the Watergate scandal. He did not offer to resign on his own but opted to resign only when it was imminent that he would be impeached if he did not resign. Just consider the words he used, while making the resignation speech, "I have never been a quitter. To leave office before my term is completely opposed to every instinct in my body. But, as President, I must put the interests of America first. Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow."

In the early 1990s, Britain was led by the Conservatives. Prime Minister John Major had many success stories to his credit, including the revival of economic growth and the beginnings of the Northern Ireland peace process. The party, however, was embroiled in many scandals termed by the press as 'sleaze scandals' that involved many party MPs and even Cabinet Ministers.



Richard M Nixon

Criticism of Major's leadership reached such a peak that he resigned as a leader of the Conservative Party, with the aim of silencing his critics within the party and reasserting his authority. He was successful in his mission and was re-elected leader of the party.

Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's longest-serving post-war prime minister, had to resign in November 2011 from the post, after being in the saddle for 17 long years. He resigned only after he lost his majority. His long stint ended in a disaster. As a reporter put it aptly, "His last journey as Prime Minister was an undignified one."



Silvio Berlusconi

His premiership was marred by many scandals and he was personally involved in several trials for fraud, corruption and having sex with an underage girl. He had also attracted adverse media attention for so-called 'bunga-bunga' parties, which young women were allegedly paid to attend.

Great Indian examples

The Indian democracy, by world standards, is still young. Yet, in terms of notoriety, it has already beaten the veterans. It has registered in its name all the ill-doings that can accrue to power and politicians alike. There have been all types of scams and scandals, of all hues and cries and of all dimensions, from big to biggest.

However, things did not start that way. Let us recount a few glorious incidents, where politicians in the past stood by their guns and set standards as to how political leaders should behave.

Subhash Chandra Bose was elected president of the Indian National Congress at the Haripura session, in 1938. During his one-year term as Congress President, he talked of planning in concrete terms, and set up a National Planning Committee. At the end of his first term, he was re-elected at the Tripuri session, defeating Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, who had been backed by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee.

Since the clouds of World War II were already on the horizon, he brought a resolution to give the British six months to hand India over to the Indians – failing which, there would be a revolt. There was much opposition to his rigid stand in the highly conservative Congress high command, and situations were created to make his working difficult. Sensing the way the wind was blowing, he resigned from the post of president gracefully.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel has been one of the tallest among the tall political leaders this country has ever produced. In 1946, there was an election for the Congress presidency. This particular election was really important because of the fact that the elected president would lead free India's first government.

Mahatma Gandhi asked all representatives of the 16 states to elect the right person and Sardar Patel's name was proposed by 13 states representatives. Gandhi, however, wanted Jawaharlal Nehru to be made Congress president. It was the graciousness and magnanimity of Sardar Patel that he respected Gandhi's request and voluntarily stepped down in favour of Nehru. He knew well that he was relinquishing the coveted post of the first Prime Minister of independent India.



Subhash Chandra Bose



Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

Lal Bahadur Shastri, before he became the Prime Minister of India, served as the Minister for Railways and Transport in the Central Cabinet, from 1952 onwards. In September 1956, there was a train accident that led to 112 deaths. Citing moral responsibility, he submitted his resignation. However, it was not accepted.

He pressed for his resignation a second time, three months later, citing 'moral and constitutional responsibility' for another train accident, that resulted in 144 deaths. While speaking in the Parliament on the incident, Nehru stated that he was accepting the resignation because it would set an example in constitutional propriety and not because Shastri was in any way responsible for the accident.

Present scenario

Things are totally different today – as one can see for oneself. Issues like laid-down norms, conventions, rules and regulations are flouted and flogged endlessly. In such a grim public-domain scenario, I am reminded of two interesting and amusing incidents from private life.

My friend Ashok had to resign the job since he got a better job and that, too, closer home. He went to the boss's cabin to inform him in person, instead of sending the customary resignation letter. Maybe, the boss was over-worked and taxed; but that is beside the point. The fact is that he behaved in an absolutely ungraceful manner and even used foul language, asking my friend to get lost.

Normally a calm and composed person, a visibly disturbed Ashok, while leaving the room, wanted to bang the door. His effort, however, was not successful since the door had a pneumatic door closure. Undaunted, he turned back and, pulling the door with all his might, said loudly, "Mr Lal, I resign."

Another acquaintance loved his job — and his boss as well — but there was pressure on him to leave the job and join the family business. He decided to leave, but was not able to face his boss with the resignation letter. He kept thinking and then an idea struck him.

Keeping in mind his boss's love for sweet things, he handed over his application to the boss with a cake on which were scripted the words in icing, 'Relieve Me, Please.' Do you think anyone on Earth could turn down such a sweet request? ■



Clinging to his chair:
BCCI president N Srinivasan.