

## PM needs better brand envoys

Written by Administrator

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**By Sidharth Mishra**



One can say without any qualms that Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the past few years has emerged as a strong political brand. He has also been able to lead the government at the Centre from the front. Every spectacle that the NDA government has managed to create so far has the Prime Minister's personal touch. Be it his highly eventful visits abroad or the visit of foreign heads of state to India, Modi has managed to hold the centre stage. The next in these series of carefully orchestrated public manoeuvres would be the Yoga performance on the Rajpath. These events have certainly provided the Prime Minister ample space on television screens. As a result he has been able to win the battle of eyeballs with his political adversaries. Be that as it may the larger question is whether Brand Modi was having any electoral impact beyond the confines of these mediums of information.

Moreover, the government is certainly displaying remarkable ineptitude in head hunting competent talent to take over

the reins of important offices. The latest case in point being the appointment of Gajendra Chauhan as the Chairman of the Governing Council of Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune. Chauhan, who is remembered for playing the role of Yudhistir in BR Chopra's magnum opus Mahabharat, was selected by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting ahead of much celebrated and internationally acclaimed film personalities like Gulzar, Shyam Benegal and Adoor Gopalakrishnan. It's difficult to digest that a pygmy like Chauhan was approved by I&B Minister Arun Jaitley.

No wonder that when a non-personality is hoisted over the head of eminent rivals, it invites vociferous protests. The students pursuing courses at FTII have launched an indefinite strike against what they term as a blatant political appointment. The tranquil campus is suddenly abuzz with sloganeering with students boycotting classes and forcefully shutting down administrative offices on the campus. They perhaps have a valid take that Chauhan has been appointed because of his affiliation with the Bharatiya Janata Party.

There isn't anything in Chauhan's lackluster resume to suggest that he has the vision, intellectual bent of mind and stature in film-making to match the credentials of past chairpersons like Girish Karnad, Shyam Benegal and Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Given this the students are right in claiming that Chauhan lacks the requisite experience, stature and pedigree of his predecessors to merit the appointment.

Chauhan's is not the sole case in this regard. It's true that every political establishment has its own preferences but it's also important for the government to make appointments which enhance the reputation of centres of excellence rather than install political appointees who usher these hallowed institutions into the metaphorical dark ages.

If the BJP felt compelled to appoint somebody from the right-wing stream to this office in Pune, there were several eminent film personalities who have openly expressed support for the BJP. Some of them have even fought elections and won them on BJP tickets. Others have openly canvassed for them. If a Hema Malini or an Anupam Kher were to be appointed, there would not have been the kind of hue and cry, which the left-liberal students, who look to be non-sympathetic to right wing ideology, have been able to raise. Both these aforementioned film personalities could not have been faulted for the reasons for which Chauhan is being taken to task.

This lack of due diligence in recruiting talent for the right positions was

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also evident in the appointment of a pompous Ashok Pandit as the member of the Central Board of Film Certification, also known as the censor board, and again a comparative pygmy like Pahlaj Nihalani as its chairman; a decision which has given enough of a headache to the government. It must be noted that Pandit and Nihalani fought in the open over certification issues with Pandit going as far as to call Nihalani a tyrant. It's another matter that Pandit himself later courted controversy on another issue.

Jaitley's deputy Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore had to fly down to Mumbai to soothe industry feathers ruffled by the shenanigans of both Nihalani and Pandit. A strong pitch was made by industry members for the removal of Nihalani over his autocratic ways and his censorious attempts to stifle the creative freedom of the film industry. Nihalani had introduced a long list of cuss words to be banned from films, instantly making him unpopular with artists and viewers alike. In the meeting Rathore held with board members, he outlined the need to have a regular forum of an interaction of the Board with the industry.

While the Prime Minister has been extraordinarily cautious in choosing the officers of his government putting every resume through close scrutiny, I wonder why such a rigorous mechanism was not being applied in the appointment of quasi-government positions. It's to the credit of Modi that he retained Cabinet Secretary Ajit Seth for nearly a year beyond his date of superannuation to allow a smooth transition at the Central level.

As to why such rigorousness was not applied to the appointment of competent people to head autonomous bodies responsible for promoting soft skills is inexplicable. While the need for political accommodation is understandable, the Prime Minister should ensure that the person being appointed to the job does not bring any disrepute to the office and consequently besmirch the image of the Prime Minister or sully Brand Modi.

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