

Performance pays

Irani loses, Goyal gains

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's latest rejigging of his Cabinet is a minor one, but it has had major impact. Few tears will be shed at Smriti Irani being divested of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. She has courted controversy in her 10-month tenure; lacked nuanced understanding; and displayed a remarkable lack of subtlety in discharging her duties. Her running feud with Prasar Bharati Chairman A. Surya Prakash, the ill-advised circular on 'fake news', and the mishandling of the National Film Awards, all contributed to embarrassment to the BJP, and led to her downfall. Now is the time for her erstwhile deputy, Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, to repair the damage done by his predecessor. Rathore is clearly being groomed for bigger things.

Railway Minister Piyush Goyal has proved to be an effective trouble-shooter. By assigning the Ministry of Finance to him during Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's convalescence, the Prime Minister has sought to deflect criticism that came his way when the PMO had taken over the ministry earlier. With the economy in a fragile state, the ever-expanding reverberations of the Nirav Modi scam, rising oil prices, GST implementation changes and other pressing issues, there is a crying need for a full-time minister. Now, Goyal will have his task cut out for him balancing two important portfolios.

Moving Minister of State SS Ahluwalia from Drinking Water and Sanitation to the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology is a logical reassignment of resources. The Karnataka elections have burnished the vote-catching credentials of the BJP. However, the real matrix for all governments is performance. By tweaking the Cabinet to reward performers, Modi has sent out a message to the rest of his Cabinet colleagues. The government cannot afford to falter, as it faces tough battles in the forthcoming Assembly elections and then the 2019 parliamentary poll.