

# Gill's appointment, likely next week

From Shubhbrata Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, July 8 - The announcement regarding the appointment of Dr Manohar Singh Gill as the next Cabinet Secretary is likely to be made early next week.

Dr Gill a 1958-batch Punjab-cadre IAS officer, will succeed Mr S. Rajgopal after the latter superannuates on July 31.

Dr Gill has held several important positions at the Centre as well as in Punjab and has also served abroad. He has served in the Punjab Chief Minister's office during the tenure of Mr Parkash Singh Badal.

Dr Gill is the third seniormost member of the 1958 batch. The seniormost officer of this batch, Mr Zafar Saifulla (Karnataka cadre), is at present posted as Secretary to the Minorities Commission, which is a Secretary level post outside the Central Secretariat. Mr Saifulla has not been empanelled as a Secretary to the Government of India so far. He, thus, was out of the race for the top civil service post from the very beginning.

The next seniormost officer of the 1958 batch, Ms Mira Seth (Haryana cadre), was appointed member of the Planning Commission in early June. Her present position carries the rank of Minister of State in the government, a notch higher than that of Cabinet Secretary.

With Mr Saifulla and Ms Seth thus out of the reckoning, the choice has fallen on Dr M.S. Gill, according to present indications.

Mr S. Rajgopal had taken over as Cabinet Secretary in August last year. Prior to his formally moving over to the prestigious job, he was appointed Officer on Special Duty in the Cabinet Secretariat a fortnight before the retirement of the then Cabinet Secretary, Mr Nareish Chandra, who was appointed Special Adviser on Ayodhya matters in the Prime Minister's Office later. It remains to be seen if Dr Gill, like Mr Rajgopal, will move over to the Cabinet Secretariat well before his tenure formally begins.

According to indications, the government is likely to retain the services of Mr Rajgopal in some capacity, as had been done in the case of his predecessor, Mr Nareish Chandra.

The decks had been cleared for Dr Gill's appointment as the successor to Mr Rajgopal in early June itself when an unsavoury controversy was created in the media over whether Mr Saifulla, a Muslim, or Miss Seth, a woman, should be given preference over Dr Gill. The fact that Dr Gill had served as a bureaucrat in the Chief Minister's office of Punjab during Akali regime of Mr Parkash Singh Badal was also sought to be used against him to stall the appointment.

Dr Gill had served as Secretary, Chemicals and Fertilisers, before moving to Krushi Bhavan as Agriculture Secretary. Certain business lobbies to whom he had refused to show undue favours during his tenure as Secretary, Chemicals and Fertilisers, actively worked against him over the past one month and this lobbying was

reflected in the media.

Had the Harshad Mehta "disclosures" not unsettled the Rao establishment in mid-June, then in all likelihood the announcement about Dr Gill would have been made soon after the Prime Minister's return from his trip to Oman.

Dr Gill can take some credit for the record agricultural production and procurement this year, the 25-million tonne figure set this year being substantially ahead of the 18-million tonnes achieved last year.

As Agriculture Secretary, Dr Gill

has supported the farmers cause and it was his effort as secretary which, supplemented Agriculture Minister Balram Jakhar's bid for retaining the fertiliser subsidy for one more year. The higher support prices offered to farmers was also a joint effort of Dr Gill and Mr Jakhar.

Among the schemes mooted by him, as the Agriculture Secretary which will remain unfinished by his elevation to the new job will be the export of Indian foodgrains. Dr Gill had mooted that superior quality Indian durum wheat as well as basmati rice should be exported. The sale proceeds of these superfine quality cereals, which have a limited market in the country as the common people prefer coarse and cheaper varieties of cereals which are within their reach, can be utilised for importing cheaper wheat and rice for use in the public distribution system.

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