

3 senior IAS officers vying for CAG's post

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With the present incumbent C.G. Somiah's retirement at the end of March, the ball has been set rolling to fill up the position of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). Three senior IAS officers — the home secretary K. Padmanabiah, the planning secretary N.R. Ranganthan and the information and broadcasting secretary Bhaskar Ghose — are in the running for the position, say highly placed sources.

Although in the last 25 years IAS officers have held the CAG position, many in the government's decision-making hierarchy do not seem to favour an IAS officer for the position this time round. Sources say that the finance minister Manmohan Singh is amongst them. The CAG appointment, however, has to be made by the President of India, since the the post is a constitutional one.

The Indian Audit and Accounts Service (IA&AS) officers who man all the other positions in the CAG office, up to the office of the Deputy CAG, are also making a bid for the post, described by constitutional experts as "the most important officer under the Constitu-

tion." The first few Indian CAGs were from the Audit and Accounts Service, but the post was later dominated by IAS officers.

"IA&AS officers are being given short shrift. Till the last few years we used to have the largest number of secretaries in the Central government after the IAS. Today there are none, except the two Deputy CAGs who are of secretary rank. There are so many fine officers in our department who fit the bill," said a senior IA&AS officer.

"The CAG is of the level of a judge of the Supreme Court. And CAG is not a mere accountant. IA&AS officers may be good accountants, but most of them are bookish in their approach. A CAG has to have a wider vision and a wider world view," counters a senior IAS officer.

The CAG whose job, according to constitutional experts, is to be "the guardian of the purse and to see that not a farthing of it is spent without the authority of the Parliament" cannot be removed except by the Parliament on grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity. The CAG is responsible not only for compiling the accounts of the Central government and the state governments, but also for auditing them.