

Youngest Uttarakhand CM Dhami's tightrope walk with older colleagues



Kapil Sikka





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- Pushkar Singh Dhami has been given the responsibility of leading the BJP into Assembly elections that are now only months away in Uttarakhand.
- Adding to the formidable political task before the new Chief Minister is the fact that he is only 45 years old — the youngest to occupy the post in the state — and
- Faces the challenge of taking along a large number of older, entrenched leaders, many of whom are disappointed and unhappy.

- As the Assembly elections approach, Dhami will also have to ensure coordination with the BJP's five Lok Sabha MPs and two Rajya Sabha MPs from the state.
- Prominent among them could be Haridwar MP and former Chief Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' (62), who was relieved of his position in the Union Council of Ministers on Wednesday (July 7),

A balancing act

- Of the 56-member BJP legislature group,
- at least five are above the age of 70 years, 17 are in the age group of 60-69 years, 23 are between 50-59 years, and 10 are in age group of 40-49.
- Only one MLA is in the thirties.
- In all, 49 BJP MLAs — 87 per cent of the legislature party — are older than Dharmi.
- To a large number of these MLAs, “Pushkar” — the energetic two-term head of the BJP Yuva Morcha’s state unit and the leader of aggressive earlier agitations on the issue of jobs — has unexpectedly become “Mukhyamantri ji”.

- Among Dhami's 11 Ministers, only one — Rekha Arya (42) — is younger than him.
- But even Arya has more experience in government than the state's eleventh Chief Minister, having served in the governments of both Dhami's predecessors Tirath Singh Rawat and Trivendra Singh Rawat.

- The most prominent among the ministers who are older and more experienced than Dhami are:
- * **Satpal Maharaj (69)**, a first-term MLA but a two-term Lok Sabha member who was a Minister in the governments of Prime Ministers H D Deve Gowda and I K Gujral.
- * **Bansi Dhar Bhagat (69)**, a six-term MLA who entered politics in 1975, the year Dhami was born. By the time Dhami became the state president of the Yuva Morcha in 2002, Bhagat had already served three terms as MLA.
- * **Bishan Singh Chuphal (70)**, is five-term MLA and a former BJP state president.
- **Maharaj, who had chief ministerial ambitions of his own, was among the senior leaders who were said to have been upset after Dhami was elected leader of the BJP legislature party.**

- Before the oath ceremony, Dhami visited Maharaj's residence to seek his blessings.
- Less than a month previously, on June 19, Maharaj had chaired a district planning meeting in Rudrapur where Dhami was present as MLA to discuss the projects of his constituency, Khatima in Udham Singh Nagar district.

- Another Minister, **Harak Singh Rawat**, had expressed his **disappointment to reporters**. Dhami invited Rawat to dinner on Monday (July 5), and the two leaders are **learnt to have had discussions**.
- The Chief Minister had separately met his predecessors in the post, **Tirath Singh Rawat and Trivendra Singh Rawat**, before Sunday's (July 4) oath ceremony.
- On Monday evening, **Dhami visited the residence of the BJP state president Madan Kaushik (56), a four-term MLA and a former Minister, for a "courtesy meeting"**.

- **Looking ahead**

- Eight-term MLA and oldest member of the BJP legislature party, Harbans Kapoor (75), said that while there might possibly be a certain lack of coordination in the beginning, everything was likely to be sorted out subsequently.
- “Time will tell. He (Dhami) is young in age, but he is a senior party worker and has had a long association with the party.
- The youth should be given an opportunity (in leadership positions),” Kapoor said.
- We will respect the dignity of the post,” he said.

- Four-term MLA [Harbhajan Singh](#) Cheema (74), who has represented the Kashipur (Udham Singh Nagar district) seat in the House continuously since 2002, said Dhami was like a son to him.
- “...If I ask him for some work like a son, and it is not done, I will not ask him again,” Cheema said. However, since the CM was young, he (Cheema) would place only “genuine” issues before Dhami, Cheema said.
- “But he (Dhami) will have to take control of the bureaucracy to ensure that the works requested by the MLAs are implemented on the ground,” he said.

- Devprayag MLA Vinod Kandari (39), who is the youngest lawmaker in the Assembly, said: “I don’t think that ensuring coordination with senior (older) MLAs and Ministers will be a problem for Pushkar Singh Dhami as CM.
- He is taking good decisions in the interest of the people.
- His decision to fill 20,000 vacant posts has sent a positive message.”



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