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Bhushan, a 1994-batch IFS officer, was appointed Chicago CG on January 23, 2017. Months later, she allegedly ran into trouble with some factions of the Indian community. This came to a head just before the World Hindu Congress. As a result, Bhushan apparently stayed on the margins of the event. An ‘anonymous complaint’ sent to the MEA brass may have been the key. The complaints allege that Bhushan “insulted” Mahesh Wasnik, president of Ambedkar Association of North America, at the BR Ambedkar’s birth anniversary commemoration event at the consulate in 2017 and Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh’s Chicago chapter head Sridhar Damle at the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya birth anniversary celebration in 2018.

However, another section of Chicago’s Indian community has backed her. They even issued a joint statement in her support in August 2018, a month before her transfer. These included the American Telugu Association, NRI Sewa Foundation, South Asian Cultural Association and others. Indian Consul General (CG) in Chicago, Neeta Bhushan, won a four-month relief on Tuesday from the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) against the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), which she claimed had abruptly transferred her well before her term.

Her case had raised eyebrows as she was ordered to move barely three weeks after the World Hindu Congress in Chicago (September 7-9), where RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat was the keynote speaker.

The MEA, in a last-ditch effort, gave a curious turn to the case when it submitted ‘secret’ complaints against Bhushan in a sealed cover to the CAT bench on November 20 to justify its order. Until then, the MEA had contested Bhushan’s plea arguing it was the ministry’s administrative decision.

Rajeev Kumar, lawyer for the MEA in the case, confirmed to ET that the CAT had allowed Bhushan to stay CG until March 31, 2018. “She will have to make a representation to the MEA for an extension, if required, after that for completion of her minor daughter’s academic session,” he told ET.

While the bench did not entertain the ‘secret’ documents, sources told ET Bhushan’s sudden removal from Chicago was preceded by certain ‘anonymous complaints’ of ‘insensitive’ behaviour.

Bhushan, who was in the second year of what is usually a three-year tenure, contested the transfer on the grounds that her daughter was in Class 12 and the move would disrupt her academic calendar.

The MEA order of September 28 asked her to leave Chicago by October 20. While she first applied for childcare leave, which was promptly accepted by the MEA, on October 5, she sought an extension until May 2019 citing her daughter’s academic calendar. When that was not responded to, she moved CAT on October 9 with the plea that the transfer “would result in serious hardships to her and her daughter.”

Two days later, CAT observed while an officer can be moved in “any extreme situation or public interest that warrants immediate transfer”, it gave Bhushan interim relief from transfer saying “we prima facie do not find that there was any such extreme situation, warranting the shifting of the applicant to India, halfway through”.

The MEA then placed a counter-affidavit on October 29, stating the transfer was “an administrative order” and it was the “legitimate right of the government” to take posting and transfer decisions. It added that a fixed tenure cannot be considered “the right of an officer”. That she was allowed childcare leave also showed that her transfer was “not done with mala fide intention”, said the MEA.

This affidavit, however, never mentioned any complaint against Bhushan. Hearings followed for a month, until the ruling on Tuesday, where the tribunal gave Bhushan a four-month extension until March, asking her to make a fresh representation to the MEA for any further extension. She had earlier sought time until June.

ET sent queries to Bhushan on the issue, but she did not respond. Queries to Wasnik’s association and Damle, too, have gone unanswered.