



RACE COURSE ROAD

PRABHU CHAWLA

Scam-Hobbled UPA to Take War to Opposition

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is gearing for a stormy five-week session of Parliament, from August 1. The Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs headed by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has already shortlisted the issues on which the Opposition would like to grill the Government. The Prime Minister expects the session to be disrupted for the first few days on various issues like inaction on black money, CWG scams, CAG reports on various ministries; a strategy to deal with the trouble is in place. The PMO is particularly elated by corruption charges against Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yeddyurappa and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati. The Bihar government has been accused of doling out huge industrial plots to the relatives of ministers belonging to both the BJP and the Janata Dal (United). The UPA is determined to make use of report of Karnataka Lokayukta Santosh Hegde against Yeddyurappa and his predecessor H D Kumaraswamy. Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is also on the list of the UPA's attention-diverting targets. The PMO has instructed various agencies to collate and compile complete information on scams involving non-Congress governments. All the members of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on media briefings have been instructed to deal with corruption in states and avoid talking about civil society-led agitation for which it was constituted. It is rare for Union ministers to publicly attack Opposition chief ministers directly as they have to deal with them on a regular basis. The UPA has, however, decided to sacrifice such niceties and go for the jugular. Spokespersons seem to have been forgotten as the confrontationist mood of the Opposition and UPA leads to yet another round of dirty politics.



Manmohan Singh

Congress Keeps an Eye on its Ally

There was no threat to the stability of the UPA government, but the PMO and various intelligence agencies were closing monitoring the proceedings of the two-day DMK conference in Coimbatore. The PMO was particularly concerned over the DMK's decision to send its new nominees to replace A Raja and Dayanidhi Maran. As part of the understanding between the DMK and the Congress, both the ministries—Communications and Textiles—have been given to the Congress ministers as additional charges.

While the Congress is willing to return Textiles, it has refused to surrender Telecommunications. The DMK leadership is equally determined to get it back even if it has to wait for few more months. But the PMO was more interested in gauging the mood of the DMK cadres. In the absence of any trustworthy insider, it was left to the IB to infiltrate into the venue. So worried was the UPA leadership that IB director Nischal Sandhu, who had gone to Thimpu for the meeting of SAARC home ministers, was personally keeping track of the deliberations and making a dossier for his bosses, including the prime minister.

Vasundhara Prepares for Round 2

Come summer and most of our rich and mighty, famous and infamous, idle or busy elitist politicians make London their rendezvous for either dining and wining or oblige a few think tanks by delivering lectures on Indian politics, business, and even governance. Last month, over 50 top social climbers,



Vasundhara Raje

a few politicians, relevant and otherwise, and a couple of drawing room debaters descended in London for an exchange of views. Some of them were staying in their own houses while others made a hotel owned by Taj Group the meeting point. One exception, however, was former Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje. She is also a frequent visitor to the UK, for medical check-ups. But Raje

made the best use of her presence in British capital; she delivered lectures on good governance. In fact, Raje has been avoiding Rajasthan politics for the past few months. Despite her popular support, she was asked to quit as Leader of the Opposition. She was later appointed one of the general secretaries of the BJP at the Centre, a post she has never taken seriously for her heart is always in Rajasthan. When the BJP failed to find an equally credible leader to replace her, she was sent back as Leader of the Opposition. After making her triumphant comeback, she took up an extensive tour of the state. She, however, chose to keep a low profile and let Ashok Gehlot run the state without any opposition. She seems to be recouping her strength before a fresh charge against the Congress government.

Manmohan Devises Another Swap

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh strongly believes in the principle of swapping positions—both political and administrative. His Cabinet reshuffles during the past few months have led to some of the ministers swapping departments with each other. For example, Law Minister Veerappa Moily was moved to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs which was once held by new Law Minister Salman Khurshid. When it came to changing the face of his all-powerful office, the prime minister seems to be following the same formula. According to insiders, Manmohan Singh has made up his mind to replace his secretary M N Prasad with Pulok Chatterjee, India's executive director on the board of the World Bank. Chatterjee, a Gandhi family loyalist, is yet to complete his three-year tenure. Prasad will be sent to Washington to Chatterjee's post. Prasad, however, would get less than a two-year term as against a three-year term as he turns 65 in 2013, retirement age for top World Bank executives.