



RACE COURSE ROAD

PRABHU CHAWLA

UPA's Nuclear Push Morphs into Shove

As protests against proposed nuclear plants in India continue, the UPA has decided to brazen it out—both at home and abroad. The same team that bulldozed opposition to the 2008 nuclear deal has roped in commercial and academic interests to create a pro-nuclear climate among political, social and economic groups in India and overseas. Hostile leaders will be persuaded not to incite local populations against land acquisition for N-plants. Refusing to learn a lesson from the Fukushima disaster, the Indian government



People protesting against proposed N-plant in Jaitapur

is, unwittingly, becoming a stooge of nuclear businessmen. Next month, a high-powered Indian team will participate in the ministerial-level meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. According to government sources, a nexus of US, UK and India will hardsell civil nuclear power with additional safeguards. India wants to maximise nuclear energy production by 2030 and is the biggest market for nuclear reactors—spending over \$25 billion in the US and France. Atomic reactor-makers are facing a major crisis, following Switzerland, Germany, Italy and even Japan abandoning plans for new power plants and phasing out existing ones. But India has signed up for two big N-projects in Gujarat and Maharashtra. While all other major manufacturing proposals for steel, cement, thermal and hydro power plants as well as highway construction languish, nuclear stations are being cleared at jet speed—the impact on marine life, underground water pollution and their ability to withstand tsunami-type natural disasters ignored. Obviously, UPA II's success lies in pushing expensive and unsafe nuclear energy to the *aam admi*.



Due Diligence on Vigilance Now

The Union Government has finally realised that it can't delay the appointment of the Central Vigilance Commissioner further. Last week, the PMO finally decided to compile the details of over 90 probable candidates. Following a Supreme Court judgment, the department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) invited applications from both serving and retired civil servants and the corporate sector. Bitten by the P J Thomas fiasco, the twice shy PMO is not willing to take risks. It has referred all applications to the intelligence agencies and the Income Tax department. For babus who have served in the states, reports from state governments are being sought. What is baffling the PMO is why senior corporate executives—over a dozen—are willing to give up lucrative jobs to become CVC at less than 10 per cent of their current salary. A corporate executive, if selected, will enjoy enormous clout over the selection of all senior civil servants, PSU chiefs and directors and supervise the CBI. The prevailing post-scam animosity towards corporates has made the DoPT cautious. The PMO will shortlist 15 candidates, of which five names will be put up before the selection committee. The PMO expects a unanimous decision but the current hostility with the UPA may force it to present a list of aspirants without political baggage.



What is Sharad Pawar up to?

When Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar sneezes, Congress leaders catch a cold. The massive political attack on his integrity had forced him to lie low for the past few months. Last week, he met Telugu Desam Party chief Chandrababu Naidu for over an hour in Delhi—their first meeting after the Assembly



Pawar (top), Naidu

polls—flustering senior Congressmen. Since Naidu had earlier visited Chennai to attend Jayalalithaa's swearing-in ceremony, his sudden arrival in New Delhi created a flutter in Congress circles. Pawar maintained that Naidu's visit had no political overtones, but TDP leaders dropped enough hints suggesting otherwise. Pawar is assessing the Andhra Pradesh government's stability; with the DMK in a sulk, a split in the Andhra Congress will rattle the UPA. Pawar's annoyance with the Congress was obvious when he arrived late for the UPA's second

anniversary celebrations at the PM's residence. While other allies shared the dais with Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh, Pawar chose the first row, deputing Praful Patel to join them. After the speeches, he sat with Singh while others kept Sonia company.



Ministries at War Over Natgrid

In the UPA, the turf war is not confined to alliance partners. Ministries controlled by Congress ministers are at war on national security. Recently, the prime minister sent out the file on the National Intelligence Grid (Natgrid) for further debate. A brainchild of P Chidambaram, the Rs 2900-crore Natgrid was conceived to ensure connectivity and collectivity of information regarding the suspicious activities of many Indians to be shared with other security and intelligence agencies. Raghu Raman, a senior Mahindra & Mahindra executive, has been chosen to set it up, and is paid Rs 1.5 lakh a month with the rank of secretary. Both the foreign and finance ministries have raised questions about the safety and reliability of information collected by a corporate honcho. Raghu Raman's visits to the US without clearance from the RAW and the foreign ministry have been questioned. The finance ministry believes Natgrid is a colossal waste of money and will create confusion. Undeterred, Raghu Raman has mounted a massive PR exercise on Natgrid, which, he claims, will make India safer. Can he get away with it?