



**RACE COURSE ROAD**

**PRABHU CHAWLA**

## *Gadkari Courts Rajini to Forge South Alliance*

As the BJP's telesavvy leaders continue to cater to their favourite constituency, which is limited to the size of a TV set, party President Nitin Gadkari is looking beyond drawing room coalitions. The overtures he is making to civil society leaders, mega filmstars, and honchos of smaller parties in various parts of the country certainly make it seem so. Gadkari is shunned by his talking-head colleagues; nevertheless he wants to prove that he can bring in more allies for the party by making the right moves. Recently, he advised various BJP chief ministers to accord state guest status to Rajinikanth,



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the powerful 61-year-old southern filmstar whose origins are, however, in Maharashtra. The World Cup final held in Maharashtra offered a chance to bond; Gadkari chanced to come across the actor who was stuck in a

traffic jam, and graciously took him to his hotel. He met Rajinikanth again in Chennai later. Gadkari refrained from discussing politics with the actor, but he left no one including the superstar, in doubt about his motives. Having come to know the deeply religious Rajinikanth is involved with some *mutts* in BJP-ruled Uttarakhand, Gadkari, it is learnt, has advised Chief Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal to provide special security to the premises and to Rajinikanth when he visits. Gadkari is convinced Rajinikanth is nursing political ambitions, and would be tempted to enter politics directly again, once he gets a little older. His calculation is that unless the BJP acquires powerful allies in states like Tamil Nadu, Orissa, West Bengal, Assam and Andhra, it has very little chance of capturing power at the Centre in 2014. During the past seven years, the BJP has failed to attract a single new ally, while it has lost many. Gadkari wants to relaunch L K Advani's politics of arithmetic additionality, by adding newer allies who have significant vote shares in their respective regions. The catch is that Gadkari's success is dependent on the failure of those who successfully sabotaged his predecessor.



## *Linguistic Demarcation of Babus*

The heat and dust generated by the Assembly elections is yet to settle. But Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is facing heat from his ministers regarding the selection of babus to fill up vacant posts. Predictably, the first salvo was fired by none other than the DMK. Soon after his return from Tamil Nadu, M K Alagiri, Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers, sent a strong message to the PM and the cabinet secretariat, that he would accept only a Tamil-speaker to replace secretary M Raman, who retired on Saturday. Alagiri has always insisted that one of his three secretaries should be a Tamil. The two others are Mukul Joshi (a Punjabi), Secretary, Petro-Chemicals and Shantanu Bahura (an Oriya), Secretary, Fertilisers. In fact, the Department of Personnel hasn't been able to process the appointment of a new secretary because Union Minister of State in PMO V Narayanasamy, to whom Alagiri had conveyed his opinion, was busy with state elections. The DMK Minister's continuing clout is evident from the fact that the post hasn't been filled until the last day. Following in the steps of DMK Ministers, other UPA allies are demanding that only babus who speak their language be appointed in senior positions. Once the steel frame of the bureaucracy was divided along caste lines. Now they are seeking reservation on the basis of language.



## *Big Business Dreams of West Bengal*

Mumbai has lost out to Kolkata in corporate lobbying. Though most business houses failed to get concessions from a market-friendly Marxist Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya, they now smell a golden opportunity to capture Bengal, if Mamata forms the government. They hope Amit Mitra,



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a Delhi School of Economics alumnus and former secretary general of FICCI, will take over as Didi's finance minister. Elements in India Inc. feel that Mitra and other pro-industry elements that have infiltrated the Trinamool Congress can influence not only state fiscal policies but can also be used to dictate economic policies at the Centre, as the Marxists did during UPA I. All big industrial houses have deputed

their representatives, including private PR agencies, to ensure that Mamata and her party get full publicity and resources.



## *And Never the Twain Must Meet*

The sudden and unceremonious departure of Timothy Roemer, US Ambassador to India, has sent a strong signal to the diplomatic community that the Congress party would not like envoys to mix diplomacy with commerce. Stung by the charge of being pro-US, Sonia-loyalists like Defence Minister A K Antony have initiated serious scrutiny into all deals involving US companies. The rejection of Lockheed Martin's F-16 and Boeing's F/A 18 Super Hornet by the Indian Air Force was meant to convey the impression that the Congress High Command would like to shed its pro-America image. For the past decade, various American Ambassadors have been pressuring both central ministers and the bureaucracy to favour American multinationals for government contracts. Subsequently many top babus got lucrative assignments with leading American companies either after quitting their jobs or post-retirement. Most envoys had acquired uninhibited access to powerful leaders of both the national parties, as well as to top civil servants. Roemer's failure to achieve his commercial mission will deter others from pushing business instead of credible friendship between the two countries.