



## RACE COURSE ROAD PRABHU CHAWLA

### *NDA in Sleep Mode, Modi in Overdrive*

Does the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) exist only in the drawing rooms of Lutyens' Delhi? Has it been reduced to a talking shop which occasionally opens at its working chairman L K Advani's residence? Or has the BJP chosen to ignore its allies? If elections to the five state Assemblies are any indicator, the NDA doesn't operate like an active political alliance outside Delhi or Bihar. The BJP hasn't commissioned any

leader from its alliance partners like the Janata Dal(U), the Shiv Sena or the Akali Dal to campaign in any of the state elections, preferring to use its own chief ministers and middle-rung leaders. Predictably, it was Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi who was in greatest demand. It was for the first time that Modi was extensively used as a campaigner. He had been prevented so far from visiting Bihar during state polls. Even BJP chief ministers were reluctant to invite him. This time, he faced

hardly any opposition because Nitish wasn't around to dictate terms. Modi's rise in the BJP hierarchy has given heartburn to many.

### *All Eyes on Cabinet Secretary*

As Manmohan Singh's Government lurches towards a topless summer with most senior bureaucratic positions falling vacant post-May, he has launched a massive hunt for credible, yet dependable names to fill the to-be-empty chairs. His moves, however, are hamstrung by Cabinet Secretary K M Chandrasekhar retiring in June. Normally, it is the cabinet secretary's office that initiates the process to appoint secretaries to the Government of India. Chandrasekhar is not in a mood to take the initiative as he would rather have his successor begin the process. A new cabinet secretary is appointed a month before the current incumbent retires. So, the name should be announced within next two weeks. If the PM chooses to make history of sorts, the civil service may see a woman taking charge of the cabinet secretariat for the first time ever, and after 29 male cabinet secretaries. Alka Sirohi, a UP-cadre IAS officer and secretary of the crucial Department of Personnel appears to be the dark horse. Although she is only No. 5 in the merit list, Sirohi enjoys the reputation of being a firm, yet dignified officer. However, those close to 10 Janpath are once again floating the name of Pulok Chatterji—currently with the World Bank. But, it will be very difficult for Manmohan Singh to ignore the claims of seven other officers, including a woman. If he has to go purely by seniority then A N P Sinha, secretary, Panchayati Raj, should be automatically elevated. Since the cabinet secretary is expected to play an important fire-fighting role in crises, the PMO is also considering Anup Mukherjee, the senior-most officer of the 1974-batch, now chief secretary of Bihar. Mukherjee's appointment would eliminate the hectic lobbying in the capital. The choice of the next cabinet secretary will set and define the tone and direction of the Government. It will not be a surprise if the PM opts to retain Chandrasekhar, who by completing a four-year term, would've broken all records since Independence.

### *The Jetsetting Babu Code of Conduct*

The Election Commission may be taking credit for strictly enforcing the Code of Conduct on Union ministers. But there's a catch. It had prohibited ministers from traveling to their own states at government expense. The fallout was that over a dozen ministers such as Finance



Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Defence Minister A K Antony, Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee, Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister M K Alagiri were stuck in their respective election-bound states. Since important files and Cabinet notes couldn't be delayed, the private secretaries to some of the ministers had to make fre-

quent trips to the relevant states for approvals. Since all notes and proposals meant for the Cabinet are stamped 'Top Secret,' only IAS babus were allowed to travel. Now it is for the Election Commission to determine whether the money spent by the private secretaries and private assistants to meet their bosses during the campaign amounts to a violation of the code of conduct. Or should these expenses be added to the amount spent by the party or by the candidates?

### *Kani Takes Poll Route to Fight Back*

Despite many investigations against her, Kanimozhi, the feisty daughter of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi, is undeterred. Her direct line to 7 Race Course Road may have been disconnected following her connections with A Raja surfacing in public, but Kani's will to fight back was reflected in her state Assembly election campaign. Not only did she cover over 40 to 50 constituencies, Kanimozhi made sure that her meetings were well-publicised. The idea was to prove the point that she may be facing a CBI investigation and even possible prosecution, but isn't an unwanted political leader in her own party. She hired a young team of professionals who created a special Web network for her with the e-mail ID: Kanimozhi News. Every day, the inboxes of over 500 journalists and other opinion-makers countrywide were flooded with her campaign speeches and photographs. Fielding Kanimozhi was part of Karunaidhi's strategy to divide the entire state into various sectors between his children so that his two sons Union minister M K Alagiri and Deputy Chief Minister M K Stalin don't get embroiled in turf wars with the daughter. The sons were asked not only to campaign for the candidates recommended by them, but also to raise resources. Now, the three siblings are waiting for the results to pour in. Is the daughter more popular than the sons? May 13 will tell.