

Of Cabals and Kings—2. Since our last political report of July 1, the Indian government lost a key ally and found another. This is the stuff of a dynamic democracy, particularly one in which coalition politics is a given. The profiles within complement our earlier report, and complete the list of politicians who would be prime ministers or who would make them.

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Foreword

The strength of the Indian political system, many have argued, lies not so much in the quality of leaders at the national level, but in the depth of leadership that is available at state level. For the fact is that much of what the government does has to be done by state governments – health, education, policing, rural development, agriculture, urban development... Even when it comes to industrial development, it is state governments that have to do much of the work.

So if a state is lucky enough to have a strong administration and good leadership, it does well—as Tamil Nadu has done. If not, as in the case of Bihar, the state suffers. It is also possible for a poorly run state to play catch-up, as Orissa and Bihar are now doing. In that sense, Nitish Kumar in Bihar and Naveen Patnaik in Orissa are far more important to the country as a whole than many of the ministers in the central government who fill the airwaves with their sound bites.

While this second lot of political profiles includes pen-sketches of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, it focuses much more on state-level leaders, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, their personal histories and their quirks: Jayalalithaa and Parkash Singh Badal, Deve Gowda and Mulayam Singh Yadav, Karunanidhi and Om Prakash Chautala.

These are not people whom India's largely apolitical middle class would take to, but they run vast political machines, have a huge mass following, and in many cases also are able administrators. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the articulate economist who is deputy chairman of the Planning Commission (which has annual expenditure discussions with state governments) says for instance that the most impressive chief minister whom he has met is Jayalalithaa (when she was in office)—though you would never guess that from the kind of media coverage she gets. She in turn has no patience with the media, knowing that she can go over its head, and reach out directly to voters.

Indeed, while the Prime Minister in Delhi works on a large canvas, Prime Ministerial decisions can seem somewhat distant when you meet the wayside cobbler in a backward district. By way of contrast, it is the chief minister of a state who is close to the ground, whose decisions on sugarcane pricing or cotton procurement make a difference to the farmer, and whose monitoring of the police force determines whether there is proper law and order or a collapse of administrative oversight.

It is also interesting that while the country as a whole talks of the Gandhi dynasty, there are mini-dynasties flourishing at state level: the Badal clan in Punjab, Karunanidhi and progeny in Tamil Nadu, the Thackerays of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Mulayam Singh and son in Uttar Pradesh, and of course Biju Patnaik and son Naveen in Orissa—among many others. If voters seem to prefer someone with a political lineage, how different are these from the rajahs and nawabs of feudal India, you might ask.

We hope this second volume of political portraits will help improve your understanding of the complex mosaic that is India, at a time when the coming year promises to be dominated by elections and post-electoral negotiations for government formation, in New Delhi and in half a dozen states.



Manmohan Singh

India's un-Prime Ministerial PM

Manmohan Singh has successfully managed to run a Prime Ministership without fully being his own master

By Aditi Phadnis

When is a Prime Minister not like a Prime Minister?

When he's like Manmohan Singh.

The man challenges every notion you might have had of a successful Prime Minister. He doesn't exude a sense of power or authority. He does not grab every opportunity to fill the airwaves with sound bites. And look at his pictures at summit meetings: while the others are smiling at the camera or making conversation, our Prime Minister looks preoccupied with some distant thought. He's had all of two press conferences in his four-year tenure, and given scarcely an interview or two—old-timers will recall how different he was as finance minister in 1991-96, when he would even show up for the post-budget briefings normally given by finance ministry officials, and take charge of the proceedings.

Perhaps this is because, on many issues, the buck does not stop with him, it carries on to the lady who lives 2 km away. Perhaps it is because he has decided that being high-profile in such a situation is not in his interest. But so low-profile has he been that most people don't know how hard he works, and how hard he drives his team of officials. Few also know of the many directions in which he has moved, and how much he has beavered away on several fronts. In many ways, he is your invisible Prime Minister.

And yet, this gentle, diminutive, shy man has run rings around so many people who are so sharp that they are in perpetual danger of cutting themselves. What is more, no one but Manmohan Singh could have run a Prime Ministership where authority and power are diffuse and divided, and done so successfully through a full term. To be sure, it must be embarrassing to have the Home Minister declare repeatedly that he held office so long as he enjoyed the confidence of the Congress president (forgetting for a moment what the Constitution says about it being the pleasure of the President of India). But for all that, it must be dangerous to under-estimate Manmohan Singh; there is more to him than he lets on.

And as the debate on his government's confidence motion showed, he can give as good as he gets—advising the leader of the opposition in the House to change his astrologer who had so often forecast the fall of the government, and asking what the Vajpayee government thought it was doing when it sent its minister to escort terrorists to freedom in Kandahar.

While there is widespread disappointment that he has not been able to do more (because much was expected), the fact is that his government has presided over record economic growth and low inflation (except in the last few months), lowered the communal temperature, and made good strides in international relations—and not just the nuclear agreement with the US. There is the free trade agreement with Asean, the ceasefire agreement with Pakistan on the Line of Control in Jammu & Kashmir, the beginning of movement across the LoC, and the successful management of the Nepal relationship as that neighbour has re-invented itself. On top of all of which, there is the deal that opens up world nuclear trade with India after 34 years.

There is also the new law on Right to Information, the rural employment guarantee programme, the tribal lands law, and the improvement on some infrastructure fronts (railways, air services, airports). But there are failures as well—to improve the power supply situation, to reform

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education (though a spate of new elite institutions have been announced)... So it is hard to tell what history might say about Manmohan Singh. It would be true if it said that, at the end of his five years, Manmohan emerged a far taller leader than at the start of his tenure, when he was still considered an economist and not a politician.

And yet, the Congress party treats Sonia Gandhi as the boss, not the Prime Minister. The party's website scarcely mentions him, and various people tell the Prime Minister's Office to do this, that or the other, and add, importantly: "Madam se baat ho gayi hai" (We've talked to madam). The states are not listening too. Home Minister Shivraj Patil confessed in Parliament in both cases—of the law passed by the Punjab Assembly annulling previous water-sharing promises with Haryana and the Manipur government's lifting of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in a part of the state—that the state government had acted contrary to the advice given to it by the Centre.

However, people under-estimate the degree of trust that exists between the Prime Minister and the party president. Sonia Gandhi knows that he will not do anything against her interest, and will bow to her judgment on anything that may not be politically feasible. And he knows that, in most things connected with the running of the government, she leaves the job to him. To be sure, the big ideas have been hers (like the right to information law and the rural employment guarantee programme), but the day to day job of keeping things going has been his.

He has had to make his compromises, having to defend at one stage retaining in his Cabinet a minister who had been charged with murder. Singh even did a reshuffle and replaced the petroleum minister with someone who had proven connections with a company in the petroleum business, while his communications minister's brother ran a media business that was regulated in part by the communications ministry! Talk of conflicts of interest.

Still, if you make the mistake of thinking that he does not see himself fitting into the big chair, he did say in a rare interview to *India Today* magazine that it was "my destiny to become Prime Minister". Even the President of India, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, was provoked to comment to a visitor: "I did not know that it was Doctor Sa'ab's destiny to become Prime Minister."

To his credit, he read the Left parties correctly fairly early on, that they would never support the nuclear agreement with the US, and told the Congress President as much. Indeed, he foresaw a turbulent phase for the economy well in advance, and advised early elections at a time when the economic story was still very rosy, but the Congress party did not feel it was ready right then.

His steely determination showed itself in the nuclear deal. When Prakash Karat and the rest of the Left pushed him to the wall, he declared to *The Telegraph* that if the Left didn't like the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, they would have to lump it. When the rest of the government had all but given up hope of ever getting the deal done, he said in Tokyo that India would go to the International Atomic Energy Agency for further negotiations, Left or no Left. He virtually forced the government and the Congress to make good on the promises that he had made internationally.

There is much that Manmohan Singh has left unfinished, as he nears the end of his Prime Ministership. For all the talk about inclusive growth, there has been little progress on the ground at a macro-level. He promised a tighter, leaner, meaner government, and a more efficient state, but has not been able to deliver.

But he has one trait that might come in useful for the Congress party if it is in need of the support of the Left after the next election. His wife Gursharan Kaur confessed shortly after he was anointed Prime Minister that when she and her husband have a fight, he's the one who initiates the making up. The question is, will he be willing to do that with Prakash Karat?



LK Advani

The man who could be Prime Minister

Advani, who has presided over the biggest Hindu political consolidation in Indian history, is an organisation man who came late to electoral politics

By Aditi Phadnis

Lal Krishna Advani is to be the Bharatiya Janata Party's candidate for Prime Minister at the next general election, due in May 2009. This may have come as a bit of a surprise to those who have always thought that his hardline Hindutva advocacy would stop him short. The conventional logic has been that the BJP could come to power only as part of a coalition of parties, and Advani, quite different from the accommodating Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Prime Minister in a National Democratic Alliance government from 1998 to 2004), would be the one to preside over the destruction of the same alliance (the NDA), not its electoral resurrection. That the BJP's partners in the NDA have unreservedly backed Advani says something for his acceptability; in any case, the BJP has no other leader of comparable stature.

Advani's place in modern Indian political history is secure on the strength of his having presided over the biggest Hindu consolidation the country has seen. Like it or not, it happened on his watch as BJP president. He led the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign that led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in the early 1990s, declaring at the same time that when this happened it was the saddest day of his life because party workers had run amok. Later, he had no word of regret when Muslims in Gujarat were butchered in a pogrom in 2002, whereas Vajpayee at least made some placatory noises (asking the state government to do its duty, for instance).

That is why he is seen as a divisive figure, though Advani himself insists that he is no bigot. Indeed, people who meet him see him as a thoughtful, well-read individual who is looking for ideas and for people to give them shape through action.

His is a long journey that began in Karachi, where he began his career by joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) when still in his early teens. After Partition, he worked for some years in Rajasthan before moving to Delhi state politics, and being asked by the Sangh to help the newly-born Jana Sangh get moving. He has been the organic link between the BJP and its parent, the RSS, and in many ways has been more a builder of the party than Vajpayee, familiar as he has been with party workers at the local level in many parts of the country.

But a setback hit him in the 1990s, when his name figured in a little-known businessman's diaries listing political pay-offs, some of them in violation of the foreign exchange laws in place. Advani declared that he would not contest another election till his name was cleared, and even an editor with anti-BJP leanings wrote in his column at the time: "If L K Advani is corrupt, I'm a banana." The charge was scarcely believable, but it hurt Advani deeply. After all these years, was he going to have to stand up in court to proclaim his integrity? Eventually, he was exonerated in the case that was filed.

As Home Minister in the Vajpayee government, he had a less than stellar record although he saw himself as a second Sardar Patel, India's first Home Minister and the man who brought all the princely states into the Indian Union immediately after Independence. Indeed, when Advani stepped down after six years in the home ministry, as many as 160 districts in the country had some Maoist challenge building up. Clearly, he had failed to nip the problem in the bud.

The biggest surprise of his long career, though, has come at its fag end. His laudatory remarks about Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, created a stir, for it suggested either that Advani was going soft in his old age, or that he was deliberately trying to improve his image and make it more acceptable to a broader mass of people. Advani himself believes that he merely spoke the self-evident truth.

Whatever the reason, Advani found that he had few friends willing to stand by him, and the RSS was clearly upset. He had to offer his resignation, and then slowly work his way back to the centre of things, which is where he is today. With inflation running at a 15-year high, and with the Congress-led government failing on the issue of internal security, he has got two issues that he and the BJP can hammer home. So the coming Lok Sabha elections are for him and his party to lose. But he also remembers the unexpected defeat of 2004, and has got his party to focus on winning over enough allies to form a coalition that can control more than half the seats in the House. Although trim and healthy, he is now past 80, and knows that he will not get another chance to go down in history for something more than consolidating the Hindu vote.



Pranab Mukherjee

Man for all seasons

Mukherjee has handled key portfolios in a long political career, and the government does little without his crucial input

By Saubhadra Chatterji

Ministers in the new United Progressive Alliance (UPA) were scheduled to be sworn in that evening. After eight long years, the Congress had returned to power. Pranab Mukherjee, who had won his first-ever election to the Lok Sabha (the Lower House of Parliament), was poring over committee reports relating to the working of the home ministry. He had been told that that was the portfolio he was going to get. Some television channels had got wind of the fact and had even telecast some stray statements made by him in the context of an extremist attack in Kashmir earlier that day.

Suddenly Mukherjee's eyes caught a scroll running on the TV screen: the portfolios had been announced and he had been given Defence! His aides were shocked, believing that he had been insulted, because Defence had a status that was a notch lower than Home. But what did the man himself

do? He took 10 to 15 seconds to absorb the new situation, went to the men's room, returned and told his secretary: "Connect me to the Defence Secretary."

Pranab Mukherjee, the most experienced minister in the UPA, was at work, for in politics there is no time to spend on unfulfilled possibilities.

Mukherjee, a Congressman for 50 or so years, has the advantage of having a brain that is like a computer: not only can he recall dates and names flawlessly, but also the logic of events and the twists in the tale. His best stories begin: "If so-and-so hadn't happened in 1932..." But this is an opportunity as well as a threat—to others.

When his name was mentioned for the post of President of India a year ago, his party, much to his disappointment, turned it down, saying he was needed to run the government. The real reason was that the Left parties—which can't decide whether to love him or hate him—spoke to some leaders in his party about how he could be the most suitable candidate and the party thought he would end up being President of India for the Left parties instead of his own!

Mukherjee eventually came to love being Defence Minister. "I enjoyed it a lot. There was so much to learn, so many technical things, and more than anything, it was a new kind of a job," said the man who in the past has handled Finance, the Planning Commission, Commerce, Shipping and Transport, Industrial Development, and Steel and Mines. In this government, at one point Mukherjee was heading 35 Groups of Ministers (GoMs)—entities constituted to go in depth into contentious issues. From wheat prices to airport modernisation, from drafting a policy for Special Economic Zones (SEZ) to issues relating to climate change, the government seems to do nothing without asking Mukherjee. A few years ago, when agitating upper caste students opposing caste quotas were asked to meet Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh, and they refused on the ground that the minister was biased, that matter too fell into Mukherjee's lap.

But Foreign Minister K Natwar Singh's involvement in the oil-for-food scam and his subsequent resignation left a breach. In 2007, Mukherjee became External Affairs Minister. Although this tenure saw its share of diplomatic triumphs, Mukherjee's management techniques had to be honed in the matter of the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement. The Left parties—then the allies of

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the government—kept warning that they would not allow an agreement to be signed which would have the effect of ‘emasculating’ India’s sovereignty. Mukherjee and the CPI-M’s Sitaram Yechuri were the two main pointsmen. Although Mukherjee finally failed to convince the all-powerful CPI-M general secretary, Prakash Karat, on the need for the deal, he kept the Left engaged until July 2008—by which time the government carried out many of its promises and also prepared alternative support bases to run the UPA for its remaining months in office.

The parting with the Left parties was bitter. But Mukherjee had to immediately step into the breach because he continues to believe that, in an era of coalition governments, the Congress may once again need the Left’s help to form a government. This was perhaps why Mukherjee and Yechuri held long meetings over the two days that followed the Left parties’ march to Rashtrapati Bhawan (the Presidential Palace) to withdraw support.

As the “eternal number two” (which he was in both Narasimha Rao’s and before that in Indira Gandhi’s Cabinet, as well as in the present government), Mukherjee has emerged as the minister for all purposes, and a man for all seasons. Ask Mukherjee who his favourite leader is and he will unhesitatingly reply: Indira Gandhi. She taught him both administrative skills and the tactics of managing party politics. Stories about that relationship are legion. Despite Gandhi’s advice, he contested—and lost by a large margin—the Lok Sabha elections in 1980. Gandhi telephoned Mukherjee a few hours after the results were out: “Everyone in this country knew that you would not win. Even your wife Geeta knew it. What made you think that you could do it?” she said, and without waiting for an answer slammed the phone.

Two days later, the sulking Mukherjee got another call from Delhi. This time it was Indira’s son Sanjay Gandhi: “Mummy is very angry with you. But she also said that that there cannot be a Cabinet without Pranab.” In due course, Pranab Mukherjee became the Finance Minister in Indira Gandhi’s Council of Ministers, having been given a Rajya Sabha seat.

He respects Prime Minister Manmohan Singh too. But conscious that Singh was just a bureaucrat when Mukherjee was Cabinet Minister (in fact, it was Mukherjee who as Finance Minister appointed Singh as Governor of Reserve Bank of India in 1982), you will never hear him address the PM as ‘Sir’, always as ‘Manmohan’. When he speaks to the PM on the phone, it is always: “Uh, Pranab here.” This is not disrespect. It is just the assertion of a seniority that Mukherjee feels, even though he is still only the No. 2.



Sharad Pawar

Maratha strongman

Pawar's greatest regret is that he has never managed to win enough seats, either when he was in the Congress or while leading his own party, to allow him to take a crack at the job of Prime Minister

By Makarand Gadgil

In 1984, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Congress won 43 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra—its best-ever performance in the state. But even this sympathy wave could not breach the bastion of Baramati from where Sharad Pawar won his first parliamentary election. Pawar is arguably the most famous Maratha (Maharashtra's most influential and prosperous middle caste) since Chhatrapati Shivaji, the seventeenth century warrior-king of central India, who is credited with unifying and expanding the Hindu empire right up to South India, through military strategy and political cunning. Pawar's talents too lie in this direction.

India has seen many politicians who have never lost their constituency, simply because of the assiduousness with which they have nurtured it.

Pawar is one of them. Himself a gifted farmer, he encourages farmers in his constituency to be adventurous: one set of farmers is rearing ostriches and emus, as their meat is highly priced by Mumbai's luxury hotels. Strawberries, grapes from the region's sprawling vineyards, and mushrooms are common, too, as are fields of swaying sugarcane. For the benefit of his constituency, Pawar frequently invites agricultural scientists from places as far afield as Israel and Brazil, to hold workshops on drip irrigation and technologies to produce better yields for ethanol. It is this continuous nursing of his voters' welfare and prosperity that has ensured that he has never lost an election from Baramati.

But his greatest regret, near the end of his five-decade-long political career, is that he has never managed to win enough seats, either while he was in the Congress or while leading his own party, to allow him to take a crack at the job of Prime Minister. Perhaps that is because, while he has been seen as an excellent Chief Minister in Maharashtra, he has been rarely able to make a mark as Cabinet Minister in Delhi. He has been agriculture minister for more than four years in the Manmohan Singh government, but most observers feel he has been able to do little with his portfolio, at a time of widespread agrarian distress. Indeed, he seems to spend more time on cricket, as he is the president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

Another reason why he has not been able to rise to the level of his ability could be that Pawar's devotion to his region—and constituency—has earned him the image of being a leader of western Maharashtra. Thus the other two regions in the state—Vidarbha and the Konkan—have always viewed him with distrust. A credibility deficit has always dogged him in these regions, where he is perceived to be a politician who tends to use friends and opposition alike when it suits him, dumping them when it does not.

Pawar must get the credit for wiping out left of centre parties like the Janata Dal, the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) and the various factions of the Republican Party of India (RPI) from the political map of Maharashtra. He forged alliances with all of them at various times, enabling him to acquire the image of a progressive leader. He even succeeded in tapping their vote banks. But they got very little in return from him. On the contrary, every alliance with Pawar caused their vote-base to shrink a little, making Maharashtra's politics bipolar: the state is now divided between the Congress and Pawar's own Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on the one hand, and the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance on the other.

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Before the 1998 Lok Sabha election, when he was still in the Congress, Pawar managed to cobble together an alliance with all factions of the Republican Party. This took their combined tally to 37 seats out of 48. But in 2004, when pay-back time came around with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coming to power in Delhi, Pawar scuttled RPI leader Ramdas Athavale's chances of a ministership.

But even *bête noire* and BJP rival Gopinath Munde will concede that, with his deep and intricate understanding of Maharashtra, Pawar is at his best when faced with a crisis. Whether it was the handling of the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts, when he ensured that normalcy returned to Mumbai within 24 hours of the blasts; or the Latur earthquake, when he camped in the areas affected by the earthquake for almost a fortnight and personally oversaw relief and rescue operations, Pawar is an unparalleled administrator.

He may have used left of centre political leaders and intellectuals to establish an image as a progressive leader, but he is pro-reform by instinct. Perhaps because of his pro-reform convictions, he enjoys the trust of all big corporate houses in the country. When a family feud broke out recently between two branches of the well-known Bajaj business family (one mainly making scooters and motorcycles, the other primarily sugar), both factions accepted Pawar as the arbitrator.

When it comes to dealing with the opposition, Pawar is a Congress politician cast in the traditional mould—he does not believe in turning political rivalries into personal feuds. He never uses harsh language about his political opponents even during election rallies. In fact, he tries to build bridges with all his political opponents—which is why, despite being in fierce competition in Maharashtra, he shares an excellent personal rapport with Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray and will almost certainly manage to get his support for the Prime Ministership, if he should ever make a bid for it.

But as a wise politician he has realised how hard it is now for him to become Prime Minister. So his goal now is to leverage his influence with the Congress, expand his party's base in the state and bring it to power in Maharashtra on its own one day. Also, by increasing the number of MPs from his party in the Lok Sabha, he wants to play kingmaker in Delhi.

Pawar has announced he will not contest any more elections. So what are all these exertions in aid of? To establish the next generation of Pawar's firmly in politics with a clear-cut division of labour: between his daughter and nephew. While nephew Ajit Pawar is being groomed to become the boss of the party's state unit, daughter Supriya Sule leads the party in Delhi.



Muthuvel Karunanidhi

Southern discomfort

It's a stressful time for Karunanidhi, who is creating a succession plan to ensure the DMK's domination in Tamil Nadu

By Aditi Phadnis

The year 2006 marked Muthuvel Karunanidhi's fifth term as party leader and Chief Minister. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)'s founder C N Annadurai died in 1969, when just two years into the party's first term in office. Karunanidhi amended the party constitution and became its president for the first time that year. Since then, he has been appointed Chief Minister in 1969, 1971, 1989, 1996 and 2006. Not bad going for a script writer, party ideologue and poet.

Now 84, Karunanidhi is in busy putting together a succession plan. The DMK that he has honed into a well-oiled machine has investments in a television channel, cinema, newspapers, and real estate. Who will inherit all this, quite apart from the party? Whether the DMK continues to win elections in Tamil Nadu depends as much on the mood of the electorate and the performance of the government as it does on the effectiveness of the party machinery.

Karunanidhi has been married thrice. His first wife Padmavathy died young. Dayalu Ammal and Raajathi Ammal followed. Both are still with him. To Padmavathy was born MK Muthu. Dayalu Ammal gave birth to Azhagiri, Stalin, Selvi and Tamilarasu. Kanimozhi is the only daughter from Raajathi Ammal. This is Karunanidhi's immediate family. Two sons of his nephew Murasoli Maran (his sister's son) are media barons in their own right: Kalanidhi Maran's Sun TV Network is a Rs400 crore company with the Marans holding most of the shares. Before becoming a Union Minister, Dayanidhi Maran was in charge of Sun TV's cable network operations in movie-crazy Tamil Nadu.

The older Maran's relationship with his uncle was one of total trust and devotion. Karunanidhi rewarded this loyalty, and the talented Maran became Commerce Minister in the Vajpayee government (1998-2004), before he died after a prolonged illness. After the party was dumped as an ally by the BJP and tied up with the Congress, Murasoli's son Dayanidhi was included in the Manmohan Singh Cabinet as its youngest minister, in charge of telecommunications.

While Stalin is the Local Administration Minister in the state, his half-brother Azhagiri does not hold any post, in the party or government, but has carved out a political empire for himself in southern Tamil Nadu, with his base in Madurai. The two used to be at odds with each other but buried the hatchet a few years ago, the peace having been brokered by the father.

Kanimozhi, his daughter, is a Member of Parliament. She is a feminist, a gifted orator in Tamil and a poet. Of all his children, she is said to be most like the father, but unlikely to get any major political role. All eyes are on Stalin, who has been groomed to take over the party, though there is no shortage of people who wonder whether he is up to the task.

Trouble started when Dinakaran, a newspaper run by the Marans, published an opinion poll in May this year. The question that sparked the trouble was "Who should be Karunanidhi's political heir?" In the poll, conducted by A.C. Nielsen, 70 per cent of the respondents backed Stalin and 2 per cent each favoured Azhagiri and Kanimozhi. The category "others" (widely perceived to be a reference to Dayanidhi Maran) received 20 per cent of the votes. In Chennai, Azhagiri drew a blank, while in Madurai, his fief, more respondents preferred Stalin to him.

Sensing the risks involved, Karunanidhi warned against its publication. His warnings were ignored. A day after the poll findings were published, supporters of MK Azhagiri attacked the symbol of the Maran family, the local offices of Sun television in Madurai, burst buses and stoned cars. The police did nothing.

Two days later, a massive function was held in Chennai to celebrate Karunanidhi's 50 years as a legislator. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi came but Dayanidhi Maran, who used to be present by Karunanidhi's side on every occasion, stayed away. Azhagiri flew in from Madurai to be with the family at the celebration.

On May 13, the DMK's administrative committee empowered Karunanidhi and party general secretary K. Anbazhagan to "remove" Dayanidhi Maran from the Union Cabinet because his "recent approaches and activities violated party discipline and maligned the DMK." This tore the veil from the ongoing feud between the Maran brothers and the Chief Minister's sons Azhagiri and Stalin.

Karunanidhi was angry that the survey was published at all. He was even angrier that family politics was now out in the open, and affecting the party. In a letter on the whole affair, Karunanidhi said: "What is funny in this is that Azhagiri has often given interviews to the press that he is not interested in party posts. Kanimozhi, who takes part as a poet in literary functions organised by the DMK and the Communist parties, has also said openly, and subtly, that she will not join politics. But Dinkaran needlessly publishes a poll that Azhagiri commands only 2 per cent support [in the State] and none at all in Chennai."

That controversy has blown over, though there has been no rapprochement with the Marans. It has brought into focus the simmering tensions in Tamil Nadu's current First Family. Karunanidhi's oldest daughter Selvi is married into the Maran family. When the feud erupted, she tried to meet her father to attempt a patch-up, but failed.

This is the backdrop against which Karunanidhi is trying to work out his succession plan. At this point, a seamless inheritance does not seem to be on the cards. After him, how thinly veiled ambitions in the DMK will spill out into the open and pull the party in different directions, only time can tell. It does not help that the Telugu Desam split after NT Rama Rao, the AIADMK split after MGR, and now the Shiv Sena has split even when Bal Thackeray is still around. Will the DMK's future be any different?



Mulayam Singh Yadav

The man who saved the UPA government

Yadav, a provincial warrior, has opted not to fight all his battles alone and allied with the Congress

By Aditi Phadnis

Mulayam Singh Yadav was the man who used to run the government in Uttar Pradesh, India's biggest state with a population of 170 million, home to the Taj Mahal and almost 10 per cent of the world's poor. If it were a country, it would be the world's sixth biggest. It sends 80 parliamentarians to the 545-member Lok Sabha, the Lower House of India's parliament.

For the last four years, despite having 39 MPs in the Lok Sabha, this man has been sitting and twiddling his thumbs. Just when the Samajwadi Party (SP) chief was getting ready to fight the 2009 Lok Sabha elections on his own, fate intervened in the form of the United States. The issue was the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement. A minority Congress-led government needed to make up the numbers in the Lower House of Parliament after the Left parties walked out from the government in protest against the deal.

Till then, Yadav and company too had opposed the agreement, alleging that it made Washington India's capital, and not New Delhi. "The last government fell because of the 'feel good' factor; this government will fall on the 'deal good' factor," Yadav's lieutenant Amar Singh had predicted. But overnight, the SP changed its stance, deciding to support the government and make extraordinary exertions to save it, including allegedly offering bribes to discontented members of other opposition parties to help it make up the numbers. What had changed?

The answers are in Uttar Pradesh, not in Delhi. In May of 2007, Mayawati of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) swept the state elections, winning an absolute majority, something that no party in the state had done since the 1980s. Mulayam and the Samajwadi Party decided that they needed allies, and could not fight on their own against a Mayawati who is still on the ascendant. So the party decided to make peace, on its own terms, with an enfeebled Congress that desperately needed its support in Parliament. As the old saying goes, the party which controls Uttar Pradesh (UP) controls the government in Delhi, and a Samajwadi-Congress alliance would be very useful against Mayawati.

Mulayam's party has been one of the main political forces in India's most populous state. This is partly because of its caste-based appeal—the Yadavs are a middle caste, socially backward but economically prosperous. Their consolidation and the gradual accretion of the Muslim vote to Mulayam Singh Yadav has resulted in a solid support base. But the consolidation of one caste base invariably results in counter-consolidation by others. The traditional tormentors of the lowest rank of the Hindu social order, the untouchables—or Dalits—have been the middle castes. To keep the political balance intact, the Dalits have gathered behind the BSP led by Mayawati. With the support of some Muslim groups, she was able to sweep the elections and form a stable government.

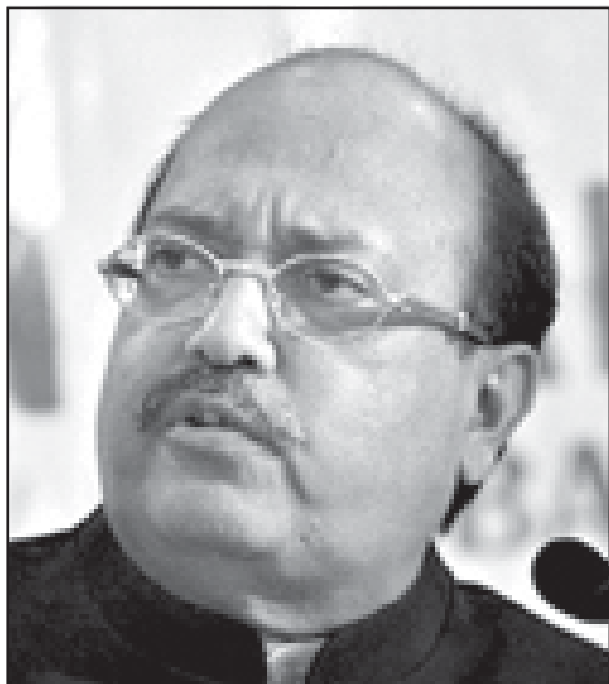
Mulayam's U-turn was facilitated by two things: it is a caste-based party, and appeals to caste override everything else. Though it began as a socialist party, its economic policy was pretty much made up as it went along. During his first spell as Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav began an ambitious programme of privatising loss-making state-owned units, beginning with the UP Cement Corporation (1991). The privatisation of sugar mills and cement mills followed, with the government going so far as to order policemen to fire on workers resisting the move at a cement factory in a small town called Mirzapur.

During his third tenure as Chief Minister, there was also concerted action to invite private sector investment in UP. Private investment was invited to develop new townships in UP, a UP Investment Centre offered single-window clearance for foreign investment, the state's power policy was rewritten, and Yadav met the Prime Minister to complain that state governments could give environmental clearance only to projects worth up to Rs500 crore. A new Uttar Pradesh Development Council was set up to advise the state on industrialisation, and some of the country's best known businessmen invited to be on the council—providing scope for lots of photo ops, even as some big-ticket investments were announced.

But Yadav soon found that while all this looked and sounded good, it needed an extraordinary effort to translate them into practice, especially with UP's change-resistant bureaucracy, its laid-back work culture and its poor image as an investment destination. With a large number of family members in government, who were unmoved by his passion for development and change, very little of Yadav's plans found their way to fruition.

The result was that those who were supposed to vote for him because of the 'development plank' found they had been sold a lemon. When, despite winning 24 per cent of the vote, Yadav got only 94 seats out of 404 in the Assembly, it was clear that in addition to development, he needed friends who would prevent his base from drifting away to Mayawati or to others.

In partnership with the Congress, Yadav should be able to command a bigger vote share than Mayawati, so long as she does not tie up with the BJP, something that she has said she will not do. While such assertions are often nothing more than a negotiating stance, the Samajwadi-Congress alliance has a genuine chance of staging a coup when it comes to the Parliamentary elections next year. Still, it is far from certain how the new partnership with the Congress will work. A dry run is now on in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, which goes to the polls at the end of 2008, and tensions have already developed between the two parties. Whether seat adjustments (so that the two parties do not fight each other and split their vote) and mutual support in each other's constituencies will work in Uttar Pradesh during the Lok Sabha elections next year remains therefore to be seen. Meanwhile, Manmohan Singh's government has survived in New Delhi, and the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement is going through.



Amar Singh

Power broker or great survivor?

Able to bring together on one platform people representing disparate interests, he can be the Congress' best friend or its worst enemy

By Aditi Phadnis

"I was born and grew up in a three-room flat on 202, Chittaranjan Avenue (in Kolkata). There were five of us and only one bathroom. I still remember the torture of the mornings when all of us used to queue up before the toilet. Since then I have an obsession with big bathrooms. Every room in my Greater Kailash house has a bathroom. I've seen those days, and the days when I left home because I didn't want to carry on with the trading business my father wanted me to continue. I had nothing. Proud fathers get suits stitched for their sons. I paid for my first suit myself when I was 28. Those 10 years were a period of great struggle. So I'm afraid of nothing. What's the worst that can happen? That I go back to those days? So what! I've survived those."

The king of the politics of possibilities, the great survivor Amar Singh, is back in action. Expect turbulence ahead.

Certainly, there was turbulence in the air-waves. As soon as Samajwadi support to the UPA government became public, Singh was holding forth to every TV channel and radio station: the government would have to change this policy, adopt that one, drop this minister, and so on. His series of demands gave every impression of having been engineered to help one particular friend, Anil Ambani. Each such statement made an already nervous Congress increasingly queasy about what was in store in the new partnership. In the event, the Samajwadi party has not joined the government, so Amar Singh is not the minister that everyone thought he would be.

The man himself now says: "We're not wheelers and dealers. We don't want anything from the relationship." In fact, there had been no relationship to begin with, as Amar Singh had had a run-in with Sonia Gandhi of the Congress back in 2004, when Amar Singh felt he was humiliated. And since he is big on respect, the issue has rankled. So who is this man who buried the past and, if the accusations that have been made are to be believed, bribed MPs to make sure the UPA government won the trust vote?

In small towns, there is a class of traders and businessmen that rushed to open demat share trading accounts in 2007, at the height of the stock market boom. For them Amar Singh is the symbol of what they can achieve. He's known as a man who can get things done, someone who can leverage relationships and network to get doors opened.

Singh has never been less than frank about his abilities. His first business deal was to service his company's need for industrial alcohol, a market tightly regimented and controlled by the UP government. How did he manage to make a success of business in that environment? "By representing to the government and by networking— through bureaucratic and political networking," he says.

From those humble beginnings till now, it has been a long journey. Having traded the black safari suit for the kurta pajama, in the 1980s Singh faced betrayal from the Congress, which had promised him a parliamentary seat from Madhya Pradesh. He joined the Samajwadi Party because he had something he could offer to the SP, and the SP had something it could give him. Mulayam Singh Yadav recognized the merit of a man who was content being the bridesmaid, never wanting to be the bride.

And Singh had many virtues. That a succession of unstable governments came to rule India in the late 1990s, in an environment of half-done reforms, afforded unique opportunities for leverage in government. Singh taught Mulayam Singh Yadav how to use this. From someone who was adept at getting his work done by *babus*, Singh graduated to someone who could now order *babus* to work.

But his field of political operation continued to be Uttar Pradesh. When the Samajwadi Party came to power in UP, Singh launched with great enthusiasm and fanfare administrative structures that he said would change the face of Uttar Pradesh. To his credit he tried to modernize a moribund system by making it more corporate, more responsive. A UP Development Council, a system that was corporate-compatible, single window systems, revamping, privatization...

Despite Singh's best efforts, it didn't work. Too much else intervened: the demands of day-to-day politics, UP's existential contradictions, the standard UP politician's inability to see beyond his nose. Again, there were many to take advantage of a measure only half done. It was Mulayam Singh who privatized 24 state-owned sugar mills in UP in 2003 as Chief Minister, but the issue was mired in controversy, since all the mills were to be handed over to a particular industrial house which has now emerged as the largest sugar producer in the country.

Singh does not agree, but UP was in a shambles because Mulayam Singh's tenure started out as modern and visionary— with considerable credit due to Amar Singh— but got bogged down in Yadav's family politics, mismanagement and his Disproportionate Assets cases (one is being reviewed by the Supreme Court). Amar Singh will dispute these vigorously, but somewhere along the line, he just lost interest in modernizing UP, and is content with just going with the flow.

Today, the man has something to prove once again. With his uncanny ability to bring people representing disparate interests together on one platform, he can be your best friend— or your worst enemy. The Congress has to decide what it wants him to be.



Arun Jaitley

Backroom boy and master strategist

Jaitley has not fought and won a direct election of any importance, but has plotted many a memorable victory for the BJP

By Nistula Hebbar

Former Union minister and current general secretary of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, Arun Jaitley, has the ability to mastermind the electoral success of party colleagues, but ironically has yet to contest and win an election to the Lok Sabha or any state Assembly.

Jaitley, since entering politics during the heady days of the Emergency (1975-77), has only contested the post of president of the Delhi University Students Union, a contest he won. Although he has been a member of the Upper House, the Rajya Sabha, that is only an indirect election by an electoral college. Some say that he is keen to plug this chink in his resume by contesting the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, either from his home state of Delhi or from the BJP stronghold of Himachal Pradesh.

The 1952-born Jaitley admits that he was interested in politics right from his childhood but, unlike others, preferred to concentrate on academics and only took the plunge in the Emergency era. He finished his schooling from St Xavier's School, Delhi, and his graduation and law degree from Delhi University. He was arrested during the Emergency in 1975, and earned his stripes as a political activist by also winning the Delhi University polls fighting on the panel of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (the student wing of the BJP).

In the 1980s, although he was active in the BJP, it was the era of Rajiv Gandhi's brute majority in Parliament, with the opposition having little scope to do anything. So, he concentrated on his legal career, which flourished. Once the Bofors scandal broke out in 1987, involving kickbacks in an arms deal, Jaitley became active in the political firmament. His friendship with V P Singh, chief dissenter against Gandhi, who was later to become the Prime Minister of India, is well known.

Jaitley admits that the canny V P Singh taught him a thing or two about realpolitik. When Jaitley complained that not enough Congress MPs were crossing over, Singh said, "That's just MPs, watch the chemistry on the ground, the political chemistry of this country is changing." Jaitley frequently quotes this sentence and it is reflected in the way he takes up various issues to corner the government.

Indeed, in 1989, the Congress lost the polls and V P Singh, in an extraordinary feat, became Prime Minister with the support of both the right wing BJP and the Left parties. Jaitley became the Additional Solicitor General, and pursued the Bofors case with vigour. The 1990s were a tumultuous decade, with both the debate over reservations in government jobs for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and the agitation spearheaded by the BJP on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue gaining ground. Riding on this wave, the BJP first came to power in 1996 in a 13-day government. Later in 1998, leading a coalition of 22 parties collectively called the National Democratic Alliance, it came to power again for 13 months and repeated its victory in 1999 and ruled till 2004.

Jaitley, as one of the prominent second generation leaders of the party and an important part of its brains trust, got various assignments because of his sharp mind and problem-solving abilities. He was made Minister of State for the newly created Department of Disinvestment, then for Information and Broadcasting in 1999. In 2000, he was given additional charge of Law, Justice

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and Company Affairs and Shipping, Commerce and Industry, and was elevated to Cabinet rank. As a minister he laid the foundations for the latest delimitation exercise, and got the 84th and 91st Constitutional amendments dealing with freezing the number of seats in the lower House of Parliament and penalization of defectors passed.

As Commerce Minister he led India in the WTO negotiations in Cancun, which saw him take a tough stand. However, it is after the BJP demitted office in 2004 that his skills as an election manager extraordinaire have come to the fore. As BJP general secretary he has managed eight Assembly elections and one municipal election until now, with seven states seeing the BJP come to power or become part of the ruling coalition.

In all this, the fact that he has yet to face a Lok Sabha election is something he has come up against repeatedly. In the crowd of second generation leaders of the BJP, this alleged shortcoming is always held up as a hurdle to Jaitley's qualifications for the top job in the party. He is, however, the ultimate insider in the BJP, and after the death of the other master strategist Pramod Mahajan, the undisputed inheritor of the crown as backroom strategist.

His commitment to the BJP takes various forms, from giving up his official residence to be converted into a kind of hostel for old BJP and Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh's bachelor officials, to lending his legal acumen to the party on several occasions. The party acknowledges this, in fact his very obvious enjoyment of the finer things in life would have been frowned upon in the BJP if it had been anyone else. He is one of the highest taxpayers in India.

In recent times, Jaitley has found himself closer to one set of BJP leaders led by L K Advani and Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi, and at odds with BJP president Rajnath Singh. Maintaining his reputation as the man with the right quote for any occasion, he often repeats the advice that Delhi's former Chief Executive Councillor, Jag Prवेश Chandra, once gave him: "Never criticise your party or partymen in front of others, it just proves that your writ does not run in the party." For Jaitley, the consummate strategist, that is never an option.



Sushma Swaraj

Poster woman for Hindu womanhood?

Women politicians in India have traditionally been entrusted with 'soft' portfolios, but Swaraj has handled tough assignments

By Nistula Hebbar

Before Sushma Swaraj became the poster woman for Hindu womanhood, publicly celebrating *karva chauth* (a Hindu festival where women fast for their husbands' longevity) and the most powerful woman in the BJP, she was actually a socialist. Swaraj was born in the north Indian state of Haryana in 1952, a state which has one of the worst male-female ratios in the country. Her interest in political life began early, but unlike a lot of women politicians in the sub-continent, she did not hail from a political family.

Swaraj, born Sushma Sharma, plunged into political life during the years of the emergency (1975-77) when, as a student leader (she was studying law at that time), she organised protests against Indira Gandhi's government. Talking about her entry into politics, she always credits the timing of her entry with her initial success. "I entered politics as part of an agitational movement led by Jaiprakash Narayan. It was a young movement and I got opportunities. Now, it is much more difficult for women with no political family backing to make it so fast," she said candidly to *Business Standard* in an interview.

After the Emergency, she twice fought and won elections to the Haryana Legislative Assembly. She was Minister for Labour in the state government in 1977-79, under Chaudhary Devi Lal. But when the Jana Sangh parted ways with the Janata Party government at the Centre in 1979, Swaraj threw in her lot with the Jana Sangh, which then relaunched itself as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Since then Swaraj has been one of the senior and most vocal leaders of the party. She has been elected twice to the Lok Sabha (1996 and 1998) and thrice to the Rajya Sabha (1990, 2000, and 2006). She has been the Minister for Information and Broadcasting in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, and as also held the portfolios of Communications, and Health and Parliamentary affairs. As a minister, she brought a thoroughness to her work, but has also landed in controversy. Her advocacy of celibacy rather than awareness of contraceptives as a preventive for AIDS raised a furore among activists.

While most women politicians are only entrusted with 'soft' portfolios, such as those relating to the social sector, Swaraj has been given some tough assignments, including being made the chief minister of Delhi shortly before fresh elections were due (the BJP lost, for no fault of Swaraj's), and later taking on Sonia Gandhi in a straight fight for the Bellary Lok Sabha seat in Karnataka. Swaraj ran a charged campaign, and surprised voters by picking up a smattering of Kannada. Gandhi polled 51.7 per cent of the vote, Swaraj coming not too far behind with 44.7 per cent.

As a post script, Swaraj visits every year on Vara Mahalaxmi Pooja (a religious festival) and has engaged a Kannada tutor to help her become fairly fluent in the language. Indeed, there is speculation that in the next general elections, Swaraj will contest from Bellary,

After the defeat of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government in the general election of 2004, Swaraj again shot to fame, opposing the possibility that Sonia Gandhi could become the next Prime Minister of India. She swore that if this happened she would shave her head, wear simple clothes and only partake of berries for the rest of her life, a lifestyle imposed on Hindu widows in the past. Gandhi declined the leadership of the Congress parliamentary party, and nominated Prime Minister Manmohan Singh instead, while Swaraj faced a barrage of protests for her shrill remarks.

Swaraj has mostly spent her time in the opposition in the Upper House of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) as its deputy leader. Her public speaking skills stand her in good stead. She also led the party's internal committee on affirmative action for women; the BJP is now the only party in India which reserves 33 per cent of all organizational posts across the board for women.

Swaraj's handicap in the BJP is that she does not have her roots in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, having come from the Socialist stream. Then, despite the BJP reserving posts for women, the Sangh organizations are essentially male bastions—the only other woman in any position of responsibility in the BJP is Vasundhara Raje Scindia, chief minister of Rajasthan. So, while Swaraj would clearly like a shot at the top job, most observers would be surprised if she finally made that grade.



Mamata Banerjee

Firebrand from West Bengal

It's easier to bet on the correctness of weather predictions than on Mamata Banerjee's political moves—perhaps because she doesn't herself know what she will do tomorrow

By Saubhadra Chatterji

It's easier to bet on the correctness of weather predictions than on Trinamul Congress boss Mamata Banerjee's political moves— perhaps because the impulsive leader, the most reliable anti-Left force in its bastion of Bengal, doesn't herself know what she will do tomorrow.

She was the only ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to jump ship when the NDA was on a high. She resigned over the Tehelka episode, when the then BJP president was caught on camera accepting bribes. However, she rejoined the coalition a few months before the general elections of 2004 and was reduced to just one seat (her own in the South Kolkata constituency), from as many as eight seats in the previous election.

The person who was the main reason for her quitting the Congress is now her latest ally— Somen Mitra. She is the only leader in West Bengal who teamed up with the Congress for the state Assembly elections and then joined hands with the Congress's bete noire—the BJP—for the general elections just two years later. Then, Mamata Banerjee maintained a distance from the BJP at the state level but remained an ally of the NDA in New Delhi. She didn't allow the BJP to share the stage with her but her party, the All India Trinamul Congress, attended the meetings of the BJP-led NDA.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had telephoned her party MP, Sudeep Bandopadhyay, one evening and invited him to take the oath of office as a minister in his Council the next day. The swearing-in ceremony was at 6 pm, but in the morning Banerjee scuttled the move and made sure that Bandopadhyay was dropped from the list. Many of her old loyalists have either left her to join other parties or retired from politics altogether.

Mamata Banerjee's rise in national politics has been like a meteor. She joined the Congress party through its youth wing. Then in 1984, for the first time, she was made a Lok Sabha candidate from her party. Banerjee was given the Jadavpur seat, adjacent to the state capital of Kolkata, and the newcomer had to fight against the heavyweight candidate of the state's ruling CPI-M party, Somnath Chatterjee. Banerjee defeated Chatterjee in her very first Parliamentary election, and he eventually had to shift his constituency for the remainder of his political career.

She broke away from the main Congress after she felt let down by the party's lack of active opposition to the Left Front in the state, and quickly became the main opposition figure in the state. Her brand of street politics (made possible by her own personal bravery) is ill-suited to the responsibilities of ministerial office, and her tenure as railway minister was undistinguished. There are many observers in Kolkata who regret the fact that the choice they have is between the Communists in the ruling Left Front and a Mamata Banerjee who does not inspire any confidence that she can run an effective administration.

Still, she is personally popular with the man in the street, and is as famous for her modest lifestyle as she is for her mercurial temper. Vikram Sarkar, a former civil servant, was one of her party MPs from 1999 to 2004. Since Banerjee was not very fluent in the English language, Sarkar once suggested, "Mamata, why don't you talk in Bengali in Parliament? Look at Jayalalithaa (the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister). She always talks in Tamil."

“What!” erupted Mamata. “You are comparing me with Jayalalitha? She has corruption cases against her. And you are suggesting that I should follow in her footsteps.” For the next few months, poor Vikram Sarkar was not even allowed to meet his party leader and eventually moved to Sharad Pawar’s Nationalist Congress Party after a few years.

Despite her rise and fall, Banerjee has maintained her simple lifestyle and that is a clever political move. She lives in a small, tin-roofed house near a mosquito-infested open canal. It is widely believed in political circles in Bengal that Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is himself forced to stay in a small two-bedroom flat as Mamata stays in her modest, single-storeyed home. Even when she was the country’s Railway Minister, she continued to wear a white cotton sari. Wearing plastic slippers and an ordinary watch, Banerjee didn’t take the air-conditioned ambassador car available for ministers. She travelled in Delhi in her assistant’s second-hand Premier Padmini, a now-defunct model. Of late, she has been using a Maruti-Suzuki Zen in Delhi.

She survived an attempt on her life by CPI-M goons after she formed her own party, the All India Trinamul Congress, in 1998 and soon emerged as Bengal’s biggest mass leader. Banerjee’s rallies regularly attract bigger crowds than that of any leader of the cadre-based CPI-M. Whatever the platform, whatever the topic, her main agenda is to blaze away at the CPI-M. Everyone knows that she is against the policies of the CPI-M; what she stands for, however, has yet to be discovered.

For the past year or so, Mamata Banerjee has been regaining fast lost ground in Bengal politics. The Singur land row, where the government forcibly acquired land for Tata Motors’ small car project, and the fierce Nandigram episode where the police killed at least 16 people who were protesting against land acquisition, has sent her popularity soaring. She has won four crucial district panchayat elections and also regained some municipalities, sending shockwaves through the CPI-M.

But nothing prepared the Left Front for what was to follow at Singur, where Mamata Banerjee led a sit-in for days on end in front of the Tata Motors factory. She has stuck to her demand that 400 acres of land have to be given back to unwilling farmers who had not wanted to sell their land. The state government rejected the demand outright, but eventually had to accept the offer of mediation by the state’s Governor. After all, Tata had threatened to pull the project out of the state, after Tata employees were barred from entering the factory compound. Mamata, sensing that her victory could be pyrrhic if the state lost the iconic project, sought out the governor’s intervention, and for a few days it seemed that some middle ground would be found to keep everyone happy. But events have moved on since then, and it is once again a face-off.

Mamata Banerjee’s next few moves will therefore have a decisive impact on the resurgence of industry in Bengal and also on her own political future. After her party won a number of panchayats and municipalities, a senior minister of the UPA government remarked, “The development of Bengal will face a major setback.” Already, the state government has had to stall or cancel various developmental projects because Trinamul-led local bodies are not cooperating with the Left Front government. After ruling the state consistently for more than 30 years, the Left Front government now faces a new challenge from an inconsistent Mamata Banerjee. And the administration does not seem to know how to handle the situation.

Although she fights from an urban seat, Banerjee’s politics is primarily aimed at garnering rural votes. Even as a vast urban population would love to see a Tata factory next door, Banerjee has taken the risk of opposing a milestone development in the industrial history of Bengal. It is a risky course, but for the moment she is riding high.



Jayalalithaa Jayaram

From silver screen to the political stage

One of the biggest enigmas in Indian politics has signalled that she is ready for a comeback

By Aditi Phadnis

What would you get if you crossed Imelda Marcos, Hilary Clinton and Simone de Beauvoir? A passionate but unhappy woman, authoritarian yet submissive, intelligent yet sensual, stylish yet conventional, a film star enthralled by one man?

You could apply the description to Jayalalithaa Jayaram, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, General Secretary of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, (Dravidian Progressive Federation), often described by opponents in quite unparliamentary terms while her own partymen literally prostrate themselves at her feet in public displays of total submission.

Tamil Nadu straddles the southern-most tip of India with just a 12-mile ocean strip separating it from Sri Lanka. Tamils consider themselves

ethnically distinct from other Indians, and the Tamil language has a different root from Sanskrit (from which all other major Indian languages are derived). The state's Brahmin-dominated era saw the evolution of a rich culture that found expression in music, architecture and dance. But the Dravida movement (of which Jayalalithaa's party is one of the offshoots) was in direct response to this. It debunked gods and religion, developed a semi-separatist stance, found popular expression through mass cinema, and evolved a style and linguistic style that was all its own.

It is hardly surprising then that the most important figure in contemporary Tamil politics should have been MG Ramachandran, himself a non-Tamilian (to add to the ironies, Jayalalithaa is a Brahmin!). MGR was the ruling matinee idol in Tamil cinema, and the protagonist in a multitude of films supporting the underdog. He began his political life as an actor-politician in the Congress, but gradually began proclaiming himself a Dravidian, a self-consciously different racial group whose political stance was openly hostile to Brahmins, many of whom left the state over the years after they were denied educational opportunities.

Through a film career spanning six decades, Ramachandran was conscious of his image as a romantic, sensitive, righteous hero, always with the weak. A series of heroines starred opposite him. But none of them was as deeply touched by politics as much as Jayalalithaa Jayaram, whose first film with MGR was *Aayirathil Oruvan* (One in a Thousand), in which he was a Robin Hood type of figure—a pirate, both dashing and adventurous. Despite their 32-year age difference, the pair clicked and the film was a runaway hit.

Till then very little was known about Jayalalithaa—this was only her second film. The only authoritative accounts of her early life are contained in an autobiographical series of articles in the mass-circulated Tamil magazine, *Kumudam*, in the late 1970s. Entitled *Manamtirandu Solrain* (I am baring my heart), the series talks about her early life, the poverty her family had to face and, as a result, how she was pushed into the world of cinema by her mother when barely out of a convent school.

The series breathes bitterness about her early life, the relentless discipline of learning dance, music and acting, a lost youth, and the penury in which her father died. The series also talks of her fascination with cricket. Then, as she embarks on an account of her association with MGR, the series ends abruptly. The last instalment in the series was called *Manamtirandu Sollamudiyallay* (I am unable to speak from the heart).

What followed, the world saw. Jayalalithaa joined the AIADMK and became MGR's right hand, rising to become Propaganda Secretary. The party old guard, resentful at her sudden rise, connived against her and suddenly she found MGR had dropped her. She was sent to Delhi, ostensibly on promotion to the Rajya Sabha as MP, but in reality to bring down her public profile a notch or two.

Then MGR died and Jayalalithaa tried to appropriate his legacy. A faction in the AIADMK heaped humiliation upon her. But after various machinations it was Jayalalithaa who came to power. The Imelda Marcos period followed, alleges the Opposition. It was inevitable that the AIADMK should lose the next elections. Her rival, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) did everything to punish her, including setting up special courts and imprisoning her "with cockroaches and rats" for company in her cell, she complained.

The 2001, Tamil Nadu Assembly elections saw the rout of the DMK and the reinstatement of Jayalalitha as Chief Minister. Because of the plethora of legal cases against her, she had to quit the Chief Ministership and install a "loyal soldier of the party" as Chief Minister. However, when she was acquitted by a lower court, she won a by-election and was Chief Minister till 2006.

An able administrator by all accounts, and a quick decision-maker, she banned lottery tickets without bothering about the revenue loss to the state government, when the poorest in Tamil Nadu saw the lotteries as their only way to get rich. She sacked thousands of government servants at one go when they went on strike, and tried to improve the state's finances (she had complained that she inherited an empty treasury) by stopping free power supply to farmers, increasing the price of subsidized rice in the ration shops, cancelling the ration cards of all those who earned more than Rs 5,000 per month, and hiking electricity and bus charges. She also passed a law seeking to curb religious conversions, and banned animal sacrifices in temples—steps that endeared her to the BJP, which partnered with her in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections in which the partnership won all of one seat out of 39.

Realising that none of what she had done was popular, though the exchequer was now in good shape, she promptly reversed gear and undid much of what she had done in the previous three years. She allowed animal sacrifices in temples, supplied free power to farmers, took back the sacked government employees, and restored many subsidies. None of it helped. When the Assembly elections came round, she was unseated.

Her antipathy to criticism is legendary, and her contempt for journalists well known. Perhaps this is because, in her personal life, Jayalalithaa has seen more twists and turns than most people. Her mutually instrumentalist relationship with MGR had its ups and downs; her first love was said to be an actor who eventually would not divorce his wife. Surrounded by political intrigue, Jayalalithaa had to hone her instincts of self-preservation and eventually came to depend on a comrade called Sasikala, on whom she now relies for emotional support.

Her political rival, M.Karunanidhi of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (from which MGR had broken away to form his party) is now old (having just celebrated half a century in public life), there is no clear succession; indeed, there is evidence of tension between his sons. If the DMK were to splinter after Karunanidhi, that would give Jayalalithaa pole position in the state's politics. Against that backdrop, as the 2009 general elections draw near, Jayalalithaa has signalled that she is ready for an alliance with anyone who wants to have one with her. She will not be an easy alliance partner, but could turn out to be the vital one that makes the difference.



AK Antony

The 'cut and run' minister

Obsessed with personal probity, Antony has a clean image but is not seen as the most effective of ministers

By Aditi Phadnis

In 2005, three weeks after he was appointed Defence Minister, when Arackaparambil Kurian Antony rose to speak at a seminar on defence economics, the army brass wondered about their new boss when he quoted Kautilya as saying: "The power of counsel is superior to sheer might and energy" (sic). Another pacifist Defence Minister, the generals thought, for who listens to your soft talk if you don't also wield the big stick?

The truth is that not much was expected of Antony when he took over, though the defence establishment in the country was crying out for leadership. "I am giving you my sleepless nights," said Pranab Mukherjee, the outgoing Defence Minister had told him even as Mukherjee headed for his new perch in the foreign office. But there isn't much evidence that Antony has solved the problems that were robbing Mukherjee of his sleep.

His critics will argue that this is entirely in keeping with his track record. As Chief Minister more than once in Kerala, Antony is known throughout this southern state and beyond as someone who is personally incorruptible, though he might tolerate corrupt ministers in his Cabinet. As one consequence, he is also said to be wary of taking decisions that might be controversial, for fear of losing his own reputation. As a wielder of power, therefore, he is not your most effective politician. Indeed, he has in the past chosen to quit office rather than continue under circumstances that are not to his liking—something most unusual for an Indian politician, but a trait that has also led some to believe that he cannot take the heat in the kitchen.

At the same time, there are few around who, like him, will put the party's interests above those of his own faction. When his long-time rival in Kerala politics, the older K.Karunakaran, had left the Congress in a huff and then wanted to return, Antony endorsed the idea of bringing him back because it would add to the Congress vote in the state. But on another tack, Antony is rare among Congressmen for having had the courage years ago to criticise Indira Gandhi when she visited a place of worship in Kerala; Antony's point was that politics should not be mixed with religion.

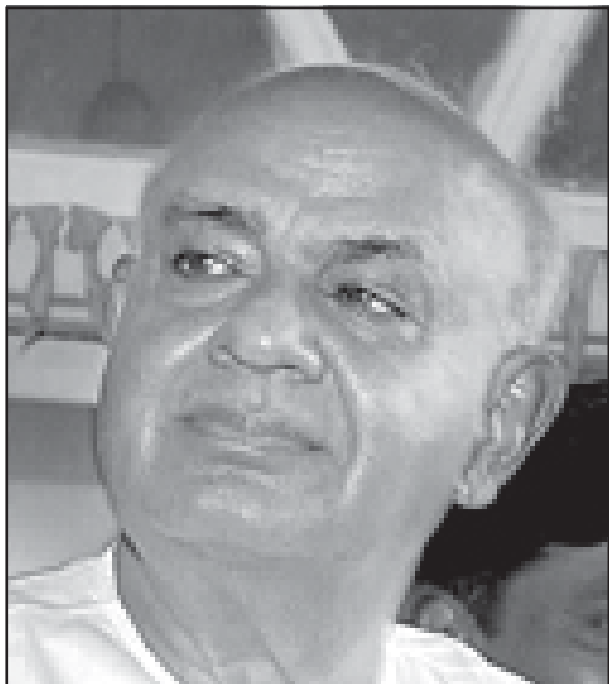
Catapulted from state politics to the national stage rather late in the day, several challenges have confronted Antony in the defence ministry: the cumbersome and controversy-ridden procedure for buying defence hardware, the need to bone up the defence research laboratories so that they become more productive, the structural change required in the defence establishment by having a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) chosen from among the chiefs of the three fighting arms, settling the pay revision for defence forces, and making the defence services an attractive career option for young men and women, since there is now a severe shortage of people in the officer cadres.

To his credit, he has managed to formally bring the private sector into the defence production ambit, by articulating a new policy that will (among other things) get the government to pay for private sector R&D that helps weapons development. And he has settled some (but not all) the issues that arose from the report of the latest Pay Commission—though the defence service chiefs believe that he has left them to do the fighting on this issue. The other issues remain to be sorted out.

Meanwhile, he ran into controversy when he failed to attend the funeral of India's best loved soldier, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, who led the army in the victorious war to liberate Bangladesh in 1971. And on an inspection tour of the border with China, he expressed shock that the infrastructure on the Chinese side of the border was so much more developed—something that he should have been conscious of much earlier, after the Chinese built an impressive railway line into Tibet that many had prophesied could not be done. But he took a tough stand and refused to get the army involved when fresh unrest broke out in the Kashmir valley recently, insisting that the police and para-military forces deal with the problem.

On the critical issue of defence procurement, however, he has not been able to make any difference. Year after year, the budgetary allocations for buying hardware lapse because no decision gets taken. The planned acquisition of 126 Multi-role Combat Aircraft, talked about for years, is still many years away after the formal request for proposals from suppliers was issued at long last. The Gorshkov aircraft carrier deal with Russia has run into trouble because the Russians raised the asking price sharply midway through the ship's refitment. And many of the planes that are already there with the air force are not airworthy, because the Russians are playing hardball on supplying spares. Antony has also done little to push the defence forces into reshaping their thinking on war strategy, and understanding the growing importance of special operations forces.

As defence ministers go, therefore, Antony is unlikely to be remembered for anything very special. Perhaps that is how he would want it to be.



HD Deve Gowda

Back to where he started

Most people go from state politics to the national stage, but Gowda has travelled in the opposite direction

By Aditi Phadnis

As regional satraps go, few have gone as far as Hardanahalli Doddagowda Deve Gowda. The only Karnataka politician to have become Prime Minister (in 1996-97, as the compromise candidate heading a patchwork United Front government), he is remembered chiefly for having declared himself a 'humble farmer', as one who slept through many meetings because he had been up late at night clearing files, and as someone who fought with the then president of the Congress, on whose support his government survived. To no one's surprise, the Congress soon withdrew support, and Deve Gowda's government lasted less than a year.

Most people go from state politics to national politics. Deve Gowda, unusually, has gone from national politics to state politics. He was in Delhi in 1994 when the Janata Dal (under Ramakrishna Hegde's leadership) won the Assembly elections in the mid-1990s. Deve Gowda rushed back to Bangalore to claim the mantle of Chief Ministership, only to be pitchforked back to New Delhi as the unexpected choice for Prime Minister. The United Front had chosen Communist Jyoti Basu to head the government, but Basu's own party nixed the idea. Two other nominees (GK Moopanar of the Tamil Maanila Congress and Chandra Babu Naidu of the Telugu Desam) were opposed by rivals heading other parties. So the choice finally fell on Deve Gowda.

Despite having tasted power in New Delhi, Deve Gowda at the end of the day is more comfortable in his native Karnataka, in the Hassan-Old Mysore belt, immersed in sectarian Vokkaliga politics and in various land controversies. A municipal-level politician who rose above himself, is how critics describe him. His friends would argue that his earthy manner appeals to his base, which is why he surprised everyone by doing so well in the state elections in 2004. His supporters were not surprised. Between 1997 and 2002, when he was elected MP from the Kanakapura Lok Sabha seat in Karnataka, Deve Gowda had managed to revive his political career and eventually became the kingmaker after the Assembly elections of 2004.

In 2001, when he was 'unemployed', he did a 'padayatra' (literally, 'journey on foot') around Bangalore, bringing the message of the villages to the state capital. The issue was the killing of two farmers in police firing during an agitation over the right to tap coconut trees. He spoke of agrarian distress and suicides by farmers owing to faulty economic policies, the growth of poverty and unemployment. Little wonder that he won the Kanakapura Lok Sabha seat by a big margin.

Then came the Karnataka Assembly elections in 2004. The Janata Dal (Secular)'s campaign was a variation on the Kanakapura theme. But there was an important addition: Deve Gowda said he would be willing to get into an alliance with the Congress, and attacked the BJP during the campaign. That brought in the minority vote. He became kingmaker after the elections. The BJP had 75 seats, the Congress 65, his own JD(S) 57, and others 27. The Congress and JD-S joined up and the Congress' Dharam Singh became Chief Minister, supported by the JD(S). That arrangement lasted only a couple of years, when an extraordinary sequence of events erupted: Deve Gowda's son, HD

Kumaraswamy, struck a deal with the BJP, walked away with the Janata Dal legislators, and left the father fuming—though many suspected that the father-son split was just drama manufactured for the TV cameras.

Deve Gowda first claimed that his son had broken his heart and done a deal with the BJP behind his back. But this phase lasted precisely one week. At the end of the day, blood proved thicker than water and Gowda sided with his son, thus losing the minority vote. Neither father nor son did much to develop the state capital of Bangalore, which had become an IT hub and needed urgent investment in its basic infrastructure. Deve Gowda, however, kept stressing the needs of the farmers in the countryside.

Meanwhile, he tried to carve out an independent place for the JD(S). He spent nights in the huts of Dalits (although he carried his own commode, mattress and mineral water), talked to minorities to clear the air, and finally decided to dump the BJP, only to find that some of his own younger leaders were deserting his party. Thus the party became secular once again, lost power, but also came to be known as the 'thande-makkala party' (father and son party). Today, all that Kumaraswamy and Deve Gowda have to show for their long record in Karnataka politics is a string of broken promises. Mani Shankar Aiyar (the foreign service officer who became a Congress MP and is now panchayat raj minister) called HD Deve Gowda the 'fumble harmer', to debunk his claim of being a 'humble farmer'.

When the 2008 Assembly elections came round, an ambitious BJP and a weak Congress were all that were left standing. From 57 MLAs in the Assembly, Deve Gowda's strength came down to 17 in a house of 224. This number is likely to decline further, and likewise, his standing and popularity. So when he looks around and asks himself how a former Prime Minister came to be reduced to the leader of 17 men in the state Assembly, there is only one answer. But Deve Gowda will not want to hear it: the Deve Gowda brand of politics (opportunistic, dynastic, caste-based and mired in sundry controversies) is in the end counter-productive and self-destructive.



B S Yeddyurappa

From rice mill clerk to Chief Minister

This unremarkable politician has carved out a remarkable victory for the BJP in Karnataka, giving the party its first government in a South Indian state

By Nistula Hebbar

Just before he was elected Chief Minister of Karnataka, B S Yeddyurappa changed the spelling of his name from Yediyurappa to its present form. It was on the advice of an astrologer who assured him that dropping the “I” and adding a “D” in his name would ensure his victory at the hustings. In this matter at least, Yeddyurappa was running true to form as far as Karnataka politicians are concerned. His predecessor as Chief Minister, HD Deve Gowda, took many decisions on the advice of astrologers.

It would, however, be unfair to say that his faith in astrologers is all there is to say about his political career. Yeddyurappa, born in 1943 into a family of Shaivite-Lingayats (one of the dominant castes in Karnataka), first worked as a clerk in a rice mill and later set up a hardware store in Karnataka’s Shimoga district. Through it all, he remained a member of the

Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the parent organisation of the Jan Sangh, which later became the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

He rose steadily through the ranks, becoming first the secretary of the Shikaripura unit of the RSS, then the taluka president of the Jan Sangh and, in 1975, the president of the town municipality of Shikaripura. Like most Jan Sangh leaders, he was arrested during the ‘Emergency’ rule imposed by Indira Gandhi in June 1975. After the Emergency was lifted in early 1977, he continued his political life with the BJP. In 1983, he fought and won elections to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly from Shikaripura, a constituency he has represented five times since.

His rise echoed the BJP’s rise from minor player to a major presence in the state, the only South Indian state where it has a substantial foothold. As the socialists and the Congress fought for the same political space, the BJP carved out its own exclusive preserve, a combination of Shaivite-Lingayat communities, and a Hindu revivalist agenda in the state.

In rising to the post of Chief Minister, he has negotiated the usual minefield of party rivalries, but was helped by his consistent record. In the late 1980s, when the Karnataka state unit of the BJP was caught in the rivalry between former Union Ministers Ananth Kumar and Dhananjaya Kumar, Yeddyurappa emerged as everyone’s favourite consensus candidate, and became state party president in 1988.

His big moment came when he, along with a faction of the Janata Dal (Secular), a party led by former Prime Minister Deve Gowda and his son H D Kumaraswamy, toppled the coalition government led by the Congress in the state in 2005. According to the arrangement between the two parties, they were to split the five-year chief ministerial term for equal durations. Kumaraswamy got the first chance and Yeddyurappa was appointed Deputy Chief Minister.

When the BJP’s turn came, however, Kumaraswamy refused to play ball, forcing the BJP to withdraw from the government. Eventually, under a new arrangement between the two parties, Yeddyurappa was sworn in as Chief Minister. But his term lasted a mere seven days as he could not prove his majority in the legislature. The elections that followed in April 2008 saw him ride to victory on a sympathy wave and a cleverly designed campaign.

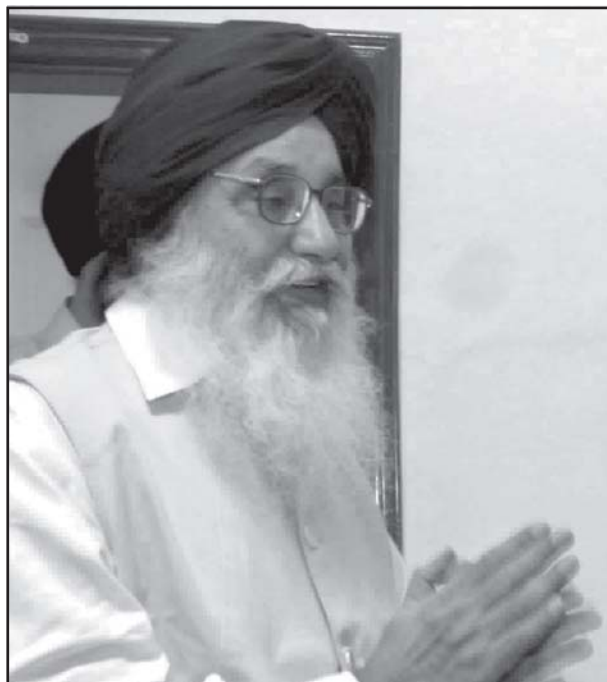
Yeddyurappa's advantage is that, although the BJP has a largely urban base in most of the country, in Karnataka it has a strong rural base as well, because of Yeddyurappa. Before the Central government announced a loan waiver for farmers in the Union Budget, Yeddyurappa as Deputy CM and Finance Minister had already announced a loan amnesty in the state a year ago. Also, Yeddyurappa has the strong support of the Lingayat community, since the rival Vokkaligas (comprising the other dominant caste group) tend to flock to leaders from their community, Deve Gowda of the Janata Dal (S) and SM Krishna of the Congress.

Yeddyurappa is deeply rooted in the state, and has risen through the ranks. He is known to have a quick temper too. When newspaper headlines used the diminutive 'Yeddy' to describe him, he sent messages asking editors to refer to him as 'BSY' rather than what he considered a disrespectful shortening of his name. His daughter Anuradha, one of five children, says that he was in the habit of watching up to three films a day, when he took time off to be with his wife who died in 2005. "He tried to make up for all the time that he spent away from the family," she said in an interview.

His tenure as Chief Minister has not been a smooth one. As soon as he took over, a fertiliser shortage gripped the state, just before the sowing season. Farmers protested in the streets and one died in police firing. Although he was quick to blame the Centre for the shortage, it continues to be a crisis for his government, overtaken only by the fact that Karnataka has for the first time become a state that has seen the Bajrang Dal (an arm of the RSS, parent of the BJP) attacking churches and Christian prayer halls after what was seen as a provocative poster put out by an evangelical group. The Congress has immediately alleged that the Hindu majoritarian BJP coming to power in South India has brought communal strife to the region.

To his credit, Yeddyurappa has tried to expedite various infrastructure initiatives, clearing the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor, the controversial project that had led to the parting of ways between the BJP and the Janata Dal (S) in 2007, over differences relating to land acquisition. He is keen on developing airports in small towns in Karnataka, and encouraging investment in the power sector. He says that he wants to make Karnataka the state with the best air connectivity—an unusual objective for an Indian politician.

However, it is not his programmes or objectives but his faith in astrology that usually grabs the headlines. In an interview to Business Standard, he admitted: "I believe in astrology. I believe in destiny and God." Just before he began campaigning for the Karnataka Assembly polls earlier this year, he visited the mountain shrine of Vaishno Devi in distant Jammu and Kashmir. It seems the gods are smiling on Yeddyurappa.



Parkash Singh Badal

Keeping it all in the family

The Badal family and the Shiromani Akali Dal that they control have been a constant factor in Punjab's politics

By Aasha Khosa

At 82, Parkash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab, believes in keeping things in the family: four of his nephews are senior cabinet ministers in the government he heads. This is as it should be. The best-known word in the Punjabi language is '*pind*' (village). Everything is '*pind*': whether relationships or business, tragedies or celebrations, you do it with the *pind*.

This has something to do with the intensely feudal, wealthy upper class in Punjab, thriving in the ownership of large tracts of land in India's most prosperous agricultural state. When land in Punjab ran out, they went to cultivate land in neighbouring Rajasthan, and then further afield, in Canada and the US. Thus the diaspora plays a big part in the politics of Punjab. But one thing has been a constant factor in Punjab politics: the ultra-rich Badal family and the party, the Shiromani Akali Dal, which it controls.

In 1920, when what are now Indian and Pakistani Punjab were still part of a single undivided province, Master Tara Singh founded the Akali Dal to safeguard the interests of the Sikhs. The party based itself on the Sikh '*panth*' (community), a breakaway group from the Hindu mainstream, and evolved its own religious tenets. Although religion and politics derived legitimacy from each other, at various times in history there were tensions too on this score.

Badal joined the Akali Dal at a time when the party was fighting for a separate Sikh homeland. After the British divided the country along Hindu-Muslim lines and then left, in 1947, the Akali Dal found that its main mission had not been served and ran itself into the ground by dividing into squabbling factions. Whose writ should run: that of the Sikh clergy or the political front of the party? This became the big issue in Akali politics, even as Master Tara Singh continued to agitate for a homeland for the Sikhs. In 1966, shortly after she became Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi gave them their wish: the mostly semi-arid Haryana (predominantly Hindu) was carved out as a separate state, the hilly Himachal Pradesh (also predominantly Hindu) became another state, and a much smaller Punjab now had a Sikh majority. The Akali Dal moved centrestage in the reduced Punjab.

Both the Communist Party and the Congress had strong roots in Punjab, but the Communist movement petered out and gradually the Congress hit upon the strategy of dabbling in the differences within the Akali Dal to deepen the divisions. In the early 1980s, amid unsettled conditions in Pakistan, a plethora of new Sikh organisations decided that the only way to end '*discrimination*' against the Sikhs in India was to overthrow the '*collaborators*' in the *panth* and throw off the yoke of the Congress. From across the national border, Pakistan found these alienated young men willing agents for its own designs. Badal's former colleague and rival, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, fought the battle from the religious arm of the community, the Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which runs the community's places of worship, the gurdwaras.

What Badal had to do was wrest control of the SGPC from Tohra, dismantle and purge it of pro-Tohra elements. But Punjab was engulfed by militant terrorism, and it took the entry of the Army into the Golden Temple, the Vatican of the Sikhs, to destroy the militant movement. Indira Gandhi paid for that with her life, when two Sikh bodyguards shot her four months later. It was not till the early 1990s that normalcy returned to the state.

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Through all the turbulent years, Badal craftily managed to uphold the authority of the Akali Dal and considerably weaken the hold of the SGPC over the state's politics. His, therefore, is the moderate face of the Akali movement. He has been elected to the Punjab Vidhan Sabha nine times, has thrice been the leader of the opposition, and is now serving his fourth term as Chief Minister, always in opposition to the Congress.

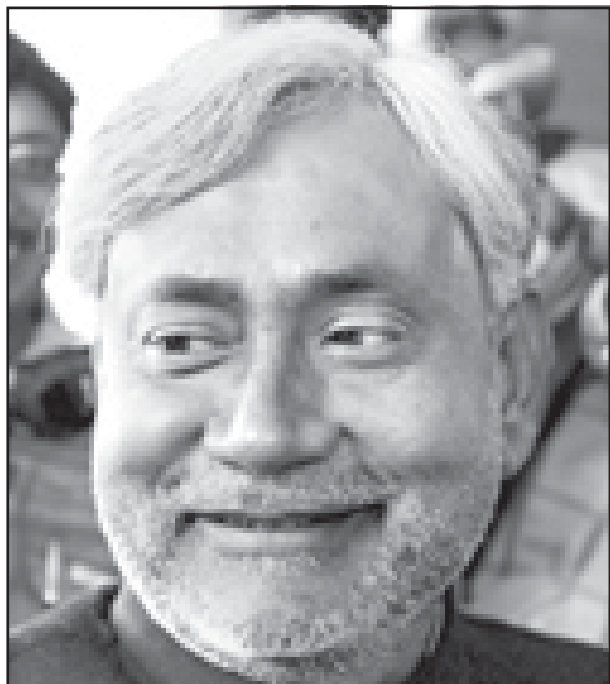
Badal's politics, based on antipathy to the Congress, makes him ironically enough an ally of the Hindu majoritarian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is a good fit in some ways, because the BJP's base in Punjab is largely urban while the Dal's influence is predominantly in the countryside. This alliance tends to make the Dal view the world with blinkers. For instance, the Dal-BJP alliance was put to the test recently during the confidence vote sought by the Manmohan Singh government in Parliament on the Indo-US nuclear deal. While many party leaders wrestled with the dilemma of voting against India's first Sikh Prime Minister, the grand old Akali leader stood by his ally, the BJP. His son Sukhbir had gone on record that Akalis were not against the nuclear deal. However, barring one member who abstained, the Dal voted against the Manmohan Singh government in Parliament, despite intense pressure from the Sikh diaspora in the US—both Democrats and Republicans.

Economic populism has been combined with religious identity. In the elections to the state assembly in 1997, Badal swept the field by promising free electricity to farmers—at a time when many farmers in the state were discovering that agriculture was no longer lucrative. But, this eventually led to the Badal government's fall in the next elections. Free power proved an advantage for only the big farmers, and the subsidy became a drain on the state exchequer. After five years of Congress rule, Badal is now back in power but has refrained from making more populist promises.

The rising star in the Dal is of course Badal's son, Sukhjit Singh Badal, who is now president of the Dal and is seen as being more inclined towards developing industry at a time when many farmers in the state are taking advantage of record land prices to simply sellout and become traders or shopowners. The father, meanwhile, may be in the twilight of his life, but surprised the world with his grit. Ahead of the 2007 Assembly elections Badal broke his hip and was rushed to the US for surgery. The party was worried about his absence from the election scene. However Badal, with half his body in a plaster cast, returned to lead his party's campaign from an improvised vehicle.

Charges of corruption have dogged Badal all his political life, but seem to have done him no harm. The Congress government of 2002-07, led by Amarinder Singh, spent a good deal of its energy chasing down many allegations of corruption against the Badals, as did previous governments. Assets were seized, and cases filed in court. But before any of the charges could be proved in court, the Badals are back in power and now it is their turn to go after Amarinder with allegations of corruption during his own term in office.

Corruption has been part of the state's politics for decades, and seems to do no lasting damage to any politician. So, even as this tit for tat game continues, the feudal Badal clan has become another of democratic India's political dynasties. It has been a long journey from the panthic Akali Dal of Master Tara Singh.



Nitish Kumar

Resuscitating benighted Bihar

Nitish Kumar has had to re-establish governance and accountability, and address a grim law and order situation

By Aditi Phadnis

When Nitish Kumar, a socialist by conviction and an engineer by training, came to power three years ago in Bihar, one of the states in India with the worst human development indices, he found that he first had to set up a Chief Minister's secretariat. The previous incumbents, Lalu Prasad and his wife Rabri Devi, had ruled Bihar for a total of 15 years. By the end of that period, kidnapping had become the state's growth industry, a Maoist challenge had spread through the heart of central Bihar, university examinations were rarely held on time, teachers were not paid their salaries because the treasury was empty, and scandals ruled. Money meant for providing cattle fodder under a government programme was suspected to have been siphoned off by several leaders—Lalu Prasad had to resign when implicated, but ensconced his wife as Chief Minister, and little changed. If the people asked for roads, Lalu would resort: "Why do

you need roads, do you own cars?"

The result was that when Nitish Kumar won the Assembly election in 2005 and came to power in partnership with the Bharatiya Janata Party, he walked into his new office on his first day as Chief Minister to find some old Remington typewriters and moth-eaten sheets of paper. There was no carbon paper, so he wrote his first order as Chief Minister by hand and copied it out by hand.

The immediate challenge was to tackle the law and order situation. A decades-old Arms Act, was invoked. Beautiful in its simplicity, this stipulated that a policeman witnessing illegal arms being borne by an individual could put him behind bars. Kumar announced that the Arms Act would be applied stringently and created a fast track judicial process to try cases. Suddenly, gang-lords and kidnapping rings, who had been making national headlines with their rampaging ways, began collapsing like ninepins. The number of kidnapping cases halved in six months, and you don't hear of them any more in Bihar.

Kumar then began tackling the basic issues of education, health and infrastructure. Recruitment had been frozen in Bihar, leading to huge shortages of teachers in government schools. Braving the charge—that would and did follow inevitably—that appointments were 'fixed', Kumar hired 200,000 primary school teachers. And since most government-appointed teachers collect their salaries but do not teach (because there is no penalty for staying away), he empowered *panchayats* (the lowest tier of local bodies) to appoint these teachers and oversee their performance.

As an additional safeguard, he ensured that 50 per cent of the seats in the panchayats were reserved for women. What woman would not want quality education for her child? The representation of women on these bodies became a kind of insurance for primary education. While it is too soon to assess the results, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is improvement.

Health was harder to tackle because of the shortage of doctors. Before the Opposition had a chance to shout 'privatisation', Kumar outsourced diagnostic services to private sector agencies, revived village hospitals by posting doctors there and even wired the entire health system through a computer network so that the highest health official in the state—the Civil Surgeon General—could sit in his office in the state capital, Patna, and conduct consultations through

video conferences, no matter how remote the hospital. New systems for the procurement of drugs, bandages and syringes ensured a steady supply. Footfalls in Bihar's public hospitals have increased.

How would he pay for all this? This was the next big question before Kumar. Bihar has a gift it both reveres and fears: the river Ganga which brings with it from the Himalayas vast quantities of rich alluvial soil that yield some of the best vegetables and grain in India; but its fury in the monsoons is both predictable and ferocious. The Ganga can and does wipe out months of painstaking work, destroying roads, bridges and embankments.

Still, Kumar persevered. Contracts were given to build roads, and when they were destroyed by floods, to rebuild them. The Gods did not bat with him when he tried to revive one of Bihar's most important agro-industries: sugar. The government cleared the privatisation of half a dozen sick state-owned sugar mills. But in a year when there was a global glut of the commodity, with both Brazil and India reporting bumper crops, in a climate of crashing prices, industry suddenly discovered it had no stomach for investment in mills. Despite a new policy architecture for alcohol, ethanol and sugar, the government found there were no takers. Kumar hasn't lost hope, however.

Kumar's biggest achievement has been in demonstrably plugging leakages—which cannot be eliminated as any administrator knows, but can be brought down to manageable levels. He innovated with a biometric identity card and introduced a phone line under the Right to Information Act which has become a model for many states, including Congress-ruled ones: in fact, Congress President Sonia Gandhi recently lauded the Bihar model of the RTI Act.

There is hardly any doubt now that Kumar will be on a great wicket when it comes to the next Assembly elections, scheduled for 2010. But the more immediate challenge is the Lok Sabha elections, due in 2009. Bihar sends 40 MPs to the Lok Sabha. Lalu Prasad won 24 in the last election. How many will he win this time, and can Nitish Kumar pull ahead? That's the key question.



Naveen Patnaik

Gentleman around town, turned politician

This apolitical man founded a regional party, and has focused on consolidating his base in Orissa

By Aditi Phadnis

Naveen Patnaik (Pappu to his friends, and he has many) may be looking at a third term as Chief Minister of Orissa. In the last 15, he has lost touch with many of his friends from his earlier life, some of whom lament that he's changed. The man who once thought nothing of taking off to New York at a day's notice, who counted Mick Jagger and Jackie Onassis as friends, drank tea at Fortnum & Mason's and shopped at Saks Fifth Avenue, is now not sure if his passport is still valid. He says he hasn't had a holiday in nine years, so busy is he with the affairs of Orissa, the state which is one of India's poorest, but which attracts investment in billions of dollars.

Welham Boys and Doon School prepared him for little other than being a gentleman around town. His friends at Doon remember him as a shy but charming boy with beautiful hands: he was a gifted painter with a deep interest in history—and absolutely none in politics, although he belonged to an intensely political family. His father, Biju Patnaik, is Orissa's best-known politicians, an irascible, wealthy socialist who liked fine wines and cigars as much as liberty and equality, and who still has a larger-than-life image amongst his people.

But nowhere was there even a hint in the way the children—Naveen and his sister Gita who is a gifted writer—were brought up that they would embrace politics. That change came about only when Biju Patnaik died and Naveen contested from his constituency Aska, for a Lok Sabha seat two decades ago.

The election must have been a liberating experience as well as a humbling one. Patnaik may have felt impelled to embrace the legacy left by his father. He may have been seduced by power and adulation. Whatever the reason, he founded the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), not making the mistake that others like contemporary and Telugu Desam supremo Chandrababu Naidu in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh did, by trying to emerge as national leaders. Naveen has stayed in Orissa, developed and plotted the course of the BJD, with his only priority being to consolidate the regional party's base.

He didn't have to work too hard. When the BJD-BJP coalition came to power in 2000, it had to do very little to establish its credentials. There were so many corruption charges against the discredited Congress government led by JB Patnaik that when Naveen Patnaik began a clean-up operation, and put bureaucrats behind bars, it took very little effort on his part to earn for his government the image of a corruption-free administration.

Soft-spoken and gentle in manner, Patnaik was ruthless when it came to establishing his leadership in the party. He dropped ministers if there was even a whisper of corruption against them, using this as a way to fell rivals with a smile. State elections were due in 2005, but he advanced them to coincide with the general elections in 2004. He fought this round on the back of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's popularity and the advantages accruing from the Congress's installation of JB Patnaik as state Congress chief just before the elections. The BJP's tally suffered and Naveen Patnaik became even more powerful.

Ironically, it is from Chandrababu Naidu's experience that Patnaik decided on how to run the state government, or how not to do it. Naidu did a great deal for rural Andhra (new water-sharing initiatives, massive public works, plentiful supply of subsidized grain through the public distribution system, women's credit cooperatives, and more), but never got credit for what he did. That, Patnaik realized, was because he had grabbed attention with his IT initiative, his focus on making the state capital of Hyderabad an IT hub, of trying to make it a transport hub by pushing for a new, private airport, and so on. Patnaik decided that everything that Naidu had done was good, and he would do the same. But instead of talking IT, he would talk rural development. That would ensure he did not get the wrong political image, as Naidu had done.

Bhubaneswar in Orissa was never an IT centre, but Patnaik has gone out of his way to attract firms like Infosys to the city, making it something like a boom town, with commercial rents that match the big metros. Ironically, Patnaik's plans too seem to be going awry. In his current (second) term as Chief Minister, Patnaik has sought to develop large-scale industry in the state—just as his father had done half a century ago. Posco, Arcelor Mittal, Tata Steel and others have been willing to pour money into massive steel and mining projects, but many have got stuck because of opposition from local people whose land is being acquired for the projects. In Kalinganagar, in 2006, there was even a case of police firing on local people. While the projects are stuck, making the state the centre of the wrong kind of headlines, Orissa continues to attract investors with smaller projects because the state has among the largest deposits of iron ore, bauxite and other industrial raw materials.

Patnaik, like many other chief ministers, empowers his civil servants more than his ministerial colleagues. Perhaps he feels he needs the bureaucracy to manage the flow of money and get things done. There have been incidents when ministers have written notes seeking transfers of officials and the secretary of the ministry has overruled on the matter. The bureaucracy is obviously confident of the Chief Minister's support. Politicians don't like this, naturally, but don't know how to hit back at the Chief Minister.

Meanwhile, the Naxalite (or Maoist) challenge is growing, as the Maoists expand their base faster in Orissa than in any other state, spreading out from their traditional bastion in south Orissa to new territories in West Orissa and even in the coastal areas. Orissa has two Naxal-hit neighbours—Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh—and unless its law and order machinery is exceptionally efficient, it is vulnerable to the Naxalite threat. Kidnappings are now a growing threat, while the recent violence against Christians (in the wake of the killing of a Hindu leader) has brought the state into focus for all the wrong issues.

But what must shame bureaucrats and politicians of Orissa alike is the callousness with which the health management of the state has been handled. Whether it is female foeticide, or fake medicines or the outbreak of cholera in the Koraput-Kalahandi districts in August 2007 (which the government admitted claimed 500 lives), the record is not a good one.

Patnaik's strength remains the fact that the Congress in the state has not been able to mount a credible challenge. However, there is no second line of leadership in the party. Patnaik himself has a clean image and is now something more than just Biju Patnaik's son, but the very fact that the Naxalites are getting stronger shows how much work remains to be done if the poor and downtrodden in the state are not to be attracted by the alternative of armed violence.



Uddhav Thackeray

The son also rises

Uddhav Thackeray may lack the charisma and the oratorical skill of Bal Thackeray, but he is firmly in place as his father's chosen successor

By Makarand Gadgil

When Uddhav Thackeray (48) first entered politics in the mid-1990s by joining the Shiv Sena, he did so reluctantly, having been egged on into taking a bigger role in the 'family business' by his wife Rashmi. But how things change! Today, the retiring Uddhav is firmly in command of the party his father Bal Thackeray founded in the 1960s, surefooted and calculating, ensuring that future threats—whether from Narayan Rane, the uncrowned king of the Konkan region in Maharashtra who was thrown out of Shiv Sena; or his cousin Raj, who recently launched the Maharashtra Navanirman Sena (MNS)—represent no challenge to his own leadership and to his party's position.

The Shiv Sena, which has been the ruling force in Mumbai since 1985, was founded in 1966. It began with the 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians' slogan and rooted its mobilisation strategy in seeking to define such an animal—the Maharashtrian. But there was a problem with this strategy, for it excluded linguistic groups that might have been Shiv Sena-minded but found themselves left out, such as migrants from Gujarat, UP and coastal Karnataka.

To tweak the strategy was easy for the Shiv Sena. It retained its USP—direct action, militant vision and aggressive rhetoric—but expanded the community to which it was addressed. By the early-1980s, Hindu nationalism overtook the Sena's regional plank. Added to this was the cult built around its 'supreme leader', Bal Thackeray.

This yielded golden results. The Shiv Sainik was now an identifiable political figure. He stood between the citizen and corruption, made things work and offered protection in a variety of ways. Nothing is free, so petty criminalisation and extortion lubricated the vast and complex *shakha* (or branch) machinery. But by the mid-1980s, the collections of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) were beginning to swell. The builders' lobby was a good cash cow, and local rackets of all kinds flourished.

The problem was leadership. The organisation succeeded so long as there was Balasaheb Thackeray—larger than life, loved or feared. But he chose his son Uddhav, rather than his nephew Raj, as his successor, a choice that disappointed many of his followers. The most important among them, Narayan Rane, quit the Sena and spoke out against the infallible Thackeray himself. Raj Thackeray—acknowledged to be the 'mason' of the Sena while Uddhav has always been considered the 'architect'—also walked out. Confused, the Shiv Sainiks began questioning their leadership and ideology. Suddenly everything was negotiable.

Before he entered politics, Uddhav was just a mild-mannered wildlife photographer. But he found himself inexorably pushed to the political centre-stage and, by 1995, was contributing to the party's propaganda machinery. In 1995, when the party came to power, few would have thought that one day he would emerge as the successor to Bal Thackeray and lead the organisation.

When faced with a setback—electoral or political—the Sena's answer is violence. When it lost the Lok Sabha elections in 1998, *sainiks* (as they are known in Maharashtra) stormed the concert of Pakistani ghazal singer Ghulam Ali, renewed their attacks on painter MF Hussain for

having painted nude pictures of Hindu goddesses, and supported the ransacking of his house by the Bajrang Dal, the youth organisation of the VHP. Sainiks dug up the ground in the Ferozshah Kotla stadium in Delhi prior to a cricket match with Pakistan. They also threatened to attack the newly established bus link between Delhi and Lahore which Prime Minister Vajpayee had just inaugurated.

That phase ended. Maharashtra saw a bad round of bomb blasts in Mumbai in July 2006 and Nashik and Malegaon two months later. By now anointed Executive President, Uddhav attended a condolence meeting for the blast victims in Nashik but the target of his attack was neither Pakistan nor Muslims. It was the Congress, for having "indulged in casteist politics" for 50 years. Since then, Uddhav has grown in stature not only in the party but also in state politics. He first tasted success when the Sena retained control of the BMC in 2002. This qualified him for a promotion and he was appointed working president of the party, and clearly his father's chosen successor.

By 2006, Raj, his cousin, couldn't take it any more. He left the party and launched his own outfit. The two cousins, now political rivals, no longer share a cordial relationship in their personal lives either. They try to avoid each other even at family functions. (Recently, at a relative's wedding, the two cousins ensured they were not present under the same roof at the same time. When one arrived, the other left.)

In terms of personality the two are as different as chalk from cheese. Uddhav lacks the charisma, the firebrand oratory and the devil-may-care attitude of his father and his cousin Raj. But he overcomes these handicaps by being a studious, meticulous planner and a hardworking politician. When Bal Thackeray decided to turn his party from a 'Maharashtrian' one into a 'Hindu' entity, his instincts paid off. He could sense the popular mood in the country and the state and exploited it to the hilt to expand the party across the state.

However, when Uddhav led the party's agitations on issues like the loan waiver for indebted farmers, the long power cuts and crumbling urban infrastructure, it was the result of a well thought out strategy to exploit anti-government sentiment. Following the BMC election in 2007 and subsequent victories in municipal elections elsewhere in the state, the average Shiv Sainik now accepts Uddhav's leadership, while Raj is still struggling to establish his MNS. But his biggest test is still to come; he will have to ensure that the party repeats its performance during the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections with its alliance partner, the BJP. The saffron combine had won 25 seats out of 48 in the state. A good performance in the general elections will ensure that the party comes to power when state Assembly elections are held later in 2009.

Uddhav cannot afford to fail. So far senior party leaders like the former Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Manohar Joshi, and others across the state have remained loyal to the party because Bal Thackeray is still on the scene. But a second successive failure to bring the party back to power in the state could prove to be Uddhav's Waterloo, because many second-rung leaders would then shift their loyalties to his younger cousin. Raj has managed to capture the imagination of the younger generation of the state, especially in the urban areas, as he is aggressively championing the cause of the sons of the soil, and espousing the use of Marathi as a language by all those who live in Mumbai.

So which Sena will it be? 2009 could provide the answer.



Om Prakash Chautala

Battling heavenly configurations in Haryana

Chautala's misfortune is that voters remember him more for what he did wrong than what he did right

By Aditi Phadnis

Indian astrology dictates that, sometimes, the stars are in a configuration so complex that you can struggle all you like to avoid an event, but happen it will, because it is dictated by higher forces. Something like that is happening to the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), the main opposition party in Haryana, which has yet to recover from the humiliating defeat handed out to it by the Congress in the 2005 Assembly elections. Though more than half the Hooda government's term is over, the INLD has not been able to find any hot-button issues on which it can mobilise the people for any agitational programme.

And why should anyone listen to Chautala? In the Assembly elections, he and his party were rejected so comprehensively that they could win only nine of the 90 Assembly seats in the state. Both Chautala's sons, Ajay and Abhay, lost the elections. The INLD nominee from Sirsa lost even from the

Dabwali segment, where Chautala's village is located. The rejection was absolute and the humiliation total.

Why did this happen to Chautala, and will history repeat itself in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections? May be (remember the stars?). There is an unnatural calm in Haryana. The rebels from the Congress, led by Bhajan Lal, have been thrown out of the party, but Bhajan Lal has been able to do little so far to destabilize the Hooda government. To be sure, there is some criticism of Hooda's regime for nepotism and corruption, and the criticism is probably not unfounded. But the Congress owed its victory to people's intense disapproval of Om Parkash Chautala's vindictive and coercive style of governance, to the extent that voters ignored the positive developments that took place during his leadership of the state. This continues to be the case. People remember Chautala for all the things that he did wrong, not for what he did right.

There is no doubt that, cut from his father Devi Lal's cloth, Chautala was an unbending, rigid Chief Minister who got things done on his own terms, right or wrong. In a state where officials' transfers and postings used to be an industry, Chautala ruled with an iron hand and—as he was never afraid of saying—through fear. He had the smallest Cabinet in the country—just 11 ministers, well within the prescribed norm of 15 per cent of the size of the Assembly. You heard of no dissidence in the INLD, whereas the Congress in the state always had no fewer than four or five factions.

With him as Chief Minister, Haryana embarked on ambitious power sector reforms but the World Bank threatened to stop its Rs2,400 crore loan to the state on the grounds that it had managed to unbundle utilities but was unable to take the next step of privatising them. The state had an autonomous regulator who recommended two tariff hikes in the last four years. Chautala was always clear about power—everyone has to pay for it. “Don't forget that I was blunt in refusing free power to the farm sector. We did promise this at one time, but later realised it won't be feasible,” he told reporters. The power situation in Haryana had improved as a consequence, during his rule.

The state's finances also improved, with the deficit coming down significantly. Conscious that farmers were his biggest constituency, Chautala ordered aggressive market intervention in conditions of glut. The roads improved too. But the reign of his sons and the terror they

unleashed made people overlook many of these achievements. And the biggest setback was that Chautala refused to compromise with his then electoral partner, the BJP. The 2005 Assembly election was fought by the two erstwhile allies separately. Despite the people's anger, the INLD managed to get 22 per cent of the vote, though it got only 9 seats.

Haryana as a state is well known for its demanding electorate: no incumbent regime has ever been voted back to power, and if the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are held at the same time, it is the party in power in the state that has been booted out in the Lok Sabha elections also. Though the state has only 10 seats in the Lok Sabha, the election sets the mood.

Finding himself relatively irrelevant in state politics, it is only natural that Chautala should look for a national role for himself. Having tried to expand the party's base in Rajasthan, UP and Delhi (INLD has five MLAs in Rajasthan), and made little progress, he has now joined hands with some regional party satraps to launch a 'third front', as distinct from the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. What role the third front, comprising ideologically heterogeneous regional parties that have been mostly rejected by their own people, will be able to play in shaping national politics will be keenly watched; it is doubtful whether it will be able to exercise any kind of influence in Haryana politics.

But Chautala—who has been Chief Minister of Haryana four times—is not the one to give up easily. Not many people know about his personal struggle as a child stricken by polio. When, at the age of 70, Chautala recently opted to undergo a series of operations on his polio-stricken leg to get it straightened at a hospital in Seattle, he talked quite frankly about his pain at having been treated harshly in his childhood because of his deformity.

Now, after being in the opposition for three years and being hounded by corruption cases launched against him and his sons, Chautala feels there is a chance of coming out of the shadows. Whether the stars will favour his foray, it is too early to say.

India's Constitutional Scheme

Introduction

India is a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary system of government, a key feature of which is the holding of regular elections to the two Houses of Parliament (the Lower House or Lok Sabha, and the Upper House or Rajya Sabha) and the legislative assemblies in the States and Union Territories. Elections to the 543-member Lok Sabha are held on the basis of universal adult suffrage (the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18 in 1989); the Rajya Sabha's 233 members are elected by members of the state legislatures (12 more are nominated by the President of the country to represent literature, science, art and the social services).

Elections are conducted under the supervision of the Election Commission, a three-member statutory body. An Indian general election is a gigantic exercise: the 2004 election to the Lok Sabha featured 1,351 candidates from six National parties, 801 candidates from 36 State parties, 898 candidates from other officially recognised parties and 2,385 Independent candidates. Nearly 390 mn people out of a total electorate of more than 670 million cast their votes in over 700,000 polling stations spread across the country. The Election Commission employed almost 4 mn people to oversee the election.

Constituencies

Each of the Lok Sabha's 543 constituencies, elections to which are based on the first-past-the-post system, returns one MP. The size and shape of the parliamentary constituencies are determined by an independent Delimitation Commission, which aims to create constituencies with roughly the same population, subject to geographical considerations and the boundaries of the states and administrative areas. A delimitation exercise, based on data gathered in the 2001 census, is now under way.

Apart from the 543 elected members, the President can nominate two members to represent the Anglo-Indian community. Of the 543 constituencies, some are reserved for candidates from the depressed communities (scheduled castes and tribes), though all eligible voters can vote.

The Structure of Parliament

The Parliament of the Union consists of the President, the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). The President is the head of state, and appoints the Prime Minister, who heads the government so long as he enjoys the confidence of the Lok Sabha. The Cabinet is the central decision-making body of the government. Members of more than one party can make up a government, and although the governing parties may be a minority in the Lok Sabha, they can govern as long as they have the confidence of a majority of the members of the Lower House.

Members of the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly- by each state legislative assembly or Vidhan Sabha, using the single transferable vote system. The number of members returned by each state is roughly in proportion to their population. There are currently 233 members of the Rajya Sabha elected by the Vidhan Sabhas, apart from 12 members nominated by the President as representatives of literature, science, art and the social services. Rajya Sabha members serve for six years, and elections are staggered, with one-third of members being elected every two years.

State Assemblies

India has a federal structure within the Union. The Vidhan Sabhas (state legislative assemblies) are directly elected bodies set up to carry out governance in India's 28 States. In some states there is a bicameral organisation of legislatures, with both an Upper and a Lower House. Two of the seven Union Territories-the National Capital Territory of Delhi and Pondicherry-also have legislative assemblies.

Elections to the Vidhan Sabhas are carried out using the same first-past-the-post system as for the Lok Sabha election, with the States and Union Territories divided into single-member constituencies. The Assemblies vary in size, according to population. The largest Vidhan Sabha is for Uttar Pradesh, with 403 members; the smallest Pondicherry, with 30 members.

President and Vice-President

The President is elected by elected members of the Vidhan Sabhas, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and serves for a five-year period (with re-election permitted). A formula is used to allocate votes, so there is a balance between the population of each state and the number of votes that the assembly members from a state can cast, and to give an equal balance between State Assembly members and National Parliament members. If no candidate receives a majority of votes there is a system by which losing candidates are eliminated from the contest and votes for them transferred to other candidates, until one gains a majority. The Vice-President is elected by a direct vote of all members, elected and nominated, of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

Elections

The Election Commission maintains an updated electoral roll of all people in each constituency who are registered to vote. The Commission ordered photo identity cards for all voters in 1993. Nearly 500 million identity cards have been issued.

Elections for the Lok Sabha and every State Legislative Assembly have to take place every five years. The President can dissolve the Lok Sabha and call a general election before five years are up, if the government can no longer command the confidence of the Lok Sabha, and if there is no alternative government available to take over.

The election process starts when the Election Commission issues a notification, after which candidates can file their nominations, for which they are given a week. These are scrutinised by the Returning Officer of each constituency. The validly nominated candidates can withdraw from the contest within two days of the date of scrutiny.

Contesting candidates get at least two weeks for the political campaign before the date of polling. Due to the magnitude of operations and the massive size of the electorate, polling is held on at least three days, and usually more, for national elections. A separate date for counting is set and the results declared for each constituency by the concerned Returning Officer. When all results are in, the Commission issues a notification for the constitution of the new House, after which the President (in the case of the Lok Sabha), and the Governors (for the State Legislatures), convene their respective Houses to hold their sessions. The entire process takes 5-8 weeks for Parliamentary elections and 4-5 weeks for each Legislative Assembly election.

Any Indian citizen who is registered as a voter and is over 25 years of age is allowed to contest elections to the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assemblies. For the Rajya Sabha the age limit is 30.

Voting is by secret ballot. Polling stations are set up within 2 km of every voter, and no polling station should have to deal with more than 1,500 voters. Since 1998, the Commission has switched to Electronic Voting Machines instead of ballot boxes, with more than one million EVMs used in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections.

There are tight limits on the money a candidate can spend during the election campaign, varying for the Lok Sabha from Rs1,000,000 (about US\$25,000) to Rs2,500,000 (about US\$60,000), depending on the size of the constituency/state.

The Election Commission has allowed all recognised National and State parties 122 hours of free access to the state-owned electronic media-All India Radio and the Doordarshan television network-for their campaigns, given out equitably by combining a base limit with additional time linked to the performance of the party in recent elections.

Source: www.eci.gov.in (website of the Election Commission of India)

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