



Politics over Presidency

Complexion of coalitions set to change

UPA Presidential candidate Pranab Mukherjee's victory by a wide margin is now assured as he has got support even from unexpected quarters: the Janata Dal (United), the Shiv Sena and the CPM. Whether it is reforms or the Presidential election, the BJP refuses to rise above petty politics and play the role of a responsible national party by standing for what is in the larger interest of the nation. A political consensus on distinguished candidates enhances the dignity of the offices of President, Vice-President and Lok Sabha Speaker. Politicking diminishes their stature. A contest for the sake of a contest does not make the country a better democracy. Short-sighted, graceless politicians sometimes dictate terms to their parties and the political fight tends to get dirty.

Pranab Mukherjee is a formidable parliamentarian and fully deserves to occupy Rashtrapati Bhavan. The CPM is doing him a disservice if it supports him just because he is from West Bengal. NDA allies do themselves no honour if they oppose him just because he is from the ruling alliance. Their candidate, P.A. Sangma, is a respectable leader known for his creditable performance as the Lok Sabha Speaker. But why is he itching for a fight when his own party has abandoned him? He is not the first choice of the BJP, which tried to cajole A.P.J. Abdul Kalam to a contest. But the former President did not want to stoop to a contest to get a second term and in the process emerged taller.

Though the UPA has earned a bad reputation for mishandling its allies, at least in the Presidential election it did not let the Trinamool Congress have its way. By rejecting Mamata Banerjee's choice, fielding Pranab and managing Mulayam Singh, the UPA leadership stopped stubborn allies from muddying waters this time. On the contrary, the BJP could not reach a consensus on anyone. NDA unity stands bruised with JD(U) leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar declaring his support for Pranab. The Shiv Sena too has made it clear that it can take its own decisions. Even though the outcome of the Presidential election is known, the future of the existing political alignments is not.