

## The race for 2014

**I**N the U.S., the campaign for presidency starts the day after the inauguration of a new president. In India, the two-year gap between the presidential election and the general election has now inaugurated a campaign for Prime Ministership. The BJP/NDA could barely get its act together for the Presidential nomination. Yet BJP is way ahead in its quest for power in 2014.

Or rather some of its leaders are. The unseemly haste to crown Narendra Modi as prime minister designate is surprising. All indications until very recently were that neither of the two national parties will get many seats in 2014; my own guess is that together they will get fewer than the 283 they got in 2004. Congress will lose the extra 50 or 60 seats that Manmohan Singh brought to it in 2009 thanks to his high profile from the US nuclear deal and his image as a reformer. Reform has not been Congress's agenda in UPA-II. It is about inclusive development, i.e. spending rather than growing. So

Congress can kiss those seats good bye unless a miracle happens in the next two years to revive growth back to above 8 per cent and inflation falls below 5 per cent.

But it is not clear that the seats lost to Congress will gravitate to BJP. Narendra Modi intends no doubt to run as the man who has delivered growth with 100 per cent electrification, good infrastructure and sustainable environmental policies. His detractors harp on the inequity of what Muslims get in Gujarat and, of course, the 2002 riots. On the equity for Muslims, the record is dismal across all parties. The Sachar Commission's report showed the gap after nearly sixty years of 'secular' rule. The latest attempt to legislate 4.5 per cent quota for Muslims shows that desperation is setting in.

The problem is that the Indian polity does not deal with the root

icy built on objective measures of disadvantage than the current casteist Mandal criteria. It will need an educational infrastructure less heavily burdened by bureaucratic regulations and more open to innovations.

Neither of the two big parties can deliver such policies. Rahul Gandhi will no doubt run on an Indira Gandhi Garibi Hatao slogan and have just as much success in removing poverty that his grandmother had. Narendra Modi will fail because he cannot bring himself to be genuinely secular, even of a RSS type. He does not want to show any remorse for what happened on his watch in 2002. India cannot have a prime minister who does not care about its largest minority. India will have to pension off both parties and choose an eclectic coalition of parties which have achieved much at State levels.

The third party option is the most attractive one. Pranabda can do the math of who has the majority in 2014.

### out of my MIND

Meghnad Desai



causes of poverty or inequality in terms of health, education and skills and particularly all year round employment in modern industry but throws money at whichever group it wants to placate to make the poverty palatable. The roots of Muslim backwardness are in the educational underachievement which has been obvious since the day of Sir Syed Ahmad. It is more serious in the Gangetic plain than in the South or in the West. But that is also where the largest proportion of Muslims live. For fifty years, Congress ruled and impoverished UP and Bihar thanks

to the orthodox Brahmin leadership. The OBCs and Dalits have clawed back some gains by political action outside Congress control. But the Muslims remain captives of the secular parties.

Of course, all parties are secular. RSS tells us that Hindutva is secular. If that is the case, then the word is meaningless. The election of 2014 will be a noisy one but if it gets distracted by the secular question then the voters will lose out. What India needs is a pivotal decision on whether it wants to get out of poverty on a sustainable basis. This would require rapid re-industrialisation which would employ millions of people wasting away in rural poverty. It would require creditable outcomes, not just plans and schemes for infrastructure development. It should, but I doubt it would, develop an anti-discrimination pol-