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Installing UPA-II: Balancing Interests and Affiliations¹

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Anyone hardly expected a clear verdict in India's parliamentary elections of 2009. Analysts and psephologists predicted a hung parliament with the two dominant coalitions of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Congress Party, and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), winning almost a similar number of seats but still far from an absolute majority. It was argued that, in a hung parliament, government formation would be very complex as the two parties will have to poach parties from the "Third" and the "Fourth" fronts. The "Third Front" was mobilised by the Left taking, besides others, former NDA coalition partners such as Telegu Desham Party (TDP), led by Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh; the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), led by Jayalalitha from Tamil Nadu; and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), led by Navin Patnaik from Orissa. This group wanted to form a non-Congress, non-BJP government. The "Fourth Front" comprised former UPA partners, the Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Lalu Prasad Yadav, the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) of Bhola Paswan and the Socialist Party (SP) of Mulayam Singh Yadav. They continued to claim affiliation with the UPA, though they had fallen apart from the Congress on the distribution of seats to be contested. They wanted to contest a larger number of seats on their own so as to strengthen their position in the post-election bargain within the UPA.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), representing the former untouchable castes, led by Mayawati, with her strong base in the largest Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, contested nearly 500 seats all over India. Mayawati hoped to emerge as a serious contender for the post of Prime Minister, with the support of the "Third Front" or any other possible combination, in the case of an expected fractured verdict. There were others who also had prime ministerial ambitions such as Sharad Pawar, the leader of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). He was a UPA ally and remains so. However, Pawar's calculations were that as the UPA would need the support of the Left and its "Third Front" allies in government formation after the elections, he would secure that support on the condition that he, and not a Congress candidate, is chosen as the Prime Minister. Some analysts also projected the possibility of the "Third Front" emerging as the largest combine in the new parliament. In that case, Pawar would also have been prepared to jettison the UPA to become a Prime Minister with the support of the "Third Front". The prospects of the emergence of the "Third Front" also led

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the decision by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) to join the government, contrary to its past record when it had preferred to lend only ‘issue-based’ support to the ruling coalition from the ‘outside’.

Brushing aside these assessments, speculations and forecasts, the Indian voters gave almost a clear mandate to the UPA which fell short of the absolute majority only by 10 seats. The following table lists the party-wise results of the 15th Lok Sabha (House of the People).

UPA		NDA	
Party	Seats Won	Party	Seats Won
Congress	206	BJP	116
Trinamool Congress	19	JD(U)	20
DMK	18	Shiv Sena	11
NCP	9	SAD	4
NC	3	AGP	1
JMM	2	RLD	5
Muslim League	2	TRS	2
VCK	1	TOTAL	159
Kerala Congress (M)	1		
TOTAL	261		
Left		Others	
Party	Seats Won	Party	Seats Won
CPM	16	SP	23
CPI	4	BSP	21
RSP	2	BJD	14
FB	2	AIADMK	9
TOTAL	24	TDP	6
		RJD	4
		JDS	3
		MDMK	1
		Independents and others	18
		TOTAL	99

Source: ‘Dance of Democracy’, *Times of India*, 18 May 2009, p. 9.

The full names of the parties listed are TC (Trinamool Congress); DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam); NCP (Nationalist Congress Party); JMM (Jharkhand Mukti Morcha); VCK (Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi); JD(U) [Janata Dal United]; SAD (Shiromani Akali Dal); AGP (Assam Ganotantrik Party); RLD (Rastriya Lok Dal); TRS (Telengana Rastriya Samiti); CPM (Communist Party of India-Marxist); CPI (Communist Party of India); RSP (Revolutionary Socialist Party); FB (Forward Block); SP (Socialist Party); BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party); AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam); TDP (Telegu Desham Party); RJD (Rastriya Janata Dal); JDS (Janata Dal Secular); and MDMK (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam).

With the clear results, the UPA government formation was assumed to be easy because independents were willing to extend support to make up the required numbers. Other smaller parties, even from the “Third” and the “Fourth” Fronts, also appeared to be keen to join the

UPA bandwagon. The Karnataka-based JDS of Deve Gowda was the first to reach out to the Congress leader, Sonia Gandhi, in this respect. The SP, the BSP and the RJD followed suit and submitted their letters of support for the UPA to the President, voluntarily and without conditions. Before the results were known, however, the SP leader, Mulayam, had declared that his party would support only that formation at the centre which promised to dismiss the BSP government in Uttar Pradesh, led by Mayawati.³ It was partly to outsmart the SP and buy insurance for various Central Bureau of Investigation cases against her that Mayawati also extended the BSP's unconditional support to the UPA. Thus, the UPA had a very comfortable position of assured support from more than 325 members against the requirement of 272.

However, the government formation, in no way, proved to be easy and smooth. It took nearly 12 days of intensive efforts on the part of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi. The exercise had to be completed in two rounds. The first round was concluded on 19 May 2009, when 19 ministers of cabinet rank were administered oath but only six of them could be allocated their portfolios even after two days of considerations. The rest had to wait until the second round on 27 May 2009, when 59 more cabinet ministers and ministers of state were inducted. All in all, the UPA-II government now has a cabinet of 79 ministers, just two less than the upper limit of 81, set in a parliament of 793 members (543 in the Lok Sabha and 250 sanctioned strength of the Upper House called the Rajya Sabha). The new cabinet has 34 ministers of cabinet rank (including the Prime Minister), seven ministers of state with independent portfolios and 38 ministers of state to assist the senior cabinet rank ministers. The constitution, however, does not make any distinction between the ministers of state and the ministers of the cabinet. There are no assistant or deputy ministers in the Indian cabinet.

The challenge of government formation laid in balancing diverse interests and affiliations. Not only the allies had to be satisfied but the interests of various federating states of the Indian Union also had to be given adequate representation. Then, there was the question of accommodating various caste and religious groups as well as women. A new phenomenon was the entry of a large number of first-timers in the 15th Lok Sabha. Of the 543 members, 302 were first-timers, 20 percent more than their numbers in the previous House. Among them were a large number of young members of parliament. Therefore, an important consideration was the representation of youth which reflect India's changing demographic composition, with nearly 65 percent of the population being of less than 35 years of age. Rahul Gandhi, the son of Sonia Gandhi and the Congress Party's youth leader, took the lead to galvanise the young generation for the Congress. The new Lok Sabha has nearly 80 elected members below the age of 40 years and another 236 in the age-group of 41-55 years. No less important in making the task of ministry-making difficult was the fact that the larger number of elected Congressmen were looking for rewards having performed better at the electoral battles.⁴ It may, however, be noted here that the impressive tally of the Congress, winning 206 seats on its own, also gave it an advantage over the smaller allies in bargaining ministerial berths and portfolios.

³ After casting his vote, the SP leader, Mulayam Singh, told reporters that, "No government at the Centre would be possible without the SP's support". He termed the Mayawati government as "unconstitutional" and said, "The youth, farmers and traders, all are disheartened with the state government. Whoever dismisses the Mayawati government will get our support", *The Hindu*, 8 May 2009.

⁴ Santwana Bhattacharya, "In India, the comedy of power-sharing", *Asia Times* (On Line magazine), 3 June 2009. <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/printN.html>.

Pre-Election versus Post-Election Allies

Soon after the announcement of the results, Dr Singh called on all the secular parties to support the UPA. Somewhat estranged allies such as Lalu Prasad of the RJD admitted that it was a gross electoral miscalculation and a mistake to go to the polls without an alliance with the Congress. He was keen to get back to the UPA fold and possibly in the government. The Congress leadership, however, decided to go for ministry-making without those who did not join the UPA alliance before the elections. There perhaps was some personal consideration to include Lalu Prasad in the cabinet for his otherwise strong loyalty to Sonia Gandhi, but to avoid setting precedence for other post-election allies to also press their claims, such personal consideration was set aside.

Among the pre-election allies, the DMK created most of the problems. Having performed much better than expected by securing 18 seats, the DMK's claims were enhanced both in terms of the number of ministerial positions and the nature of portfolios desired. The DMK demanded nine berths in all, including five of cabinet ranks and added important portfolios of railways and commerce to what it had in the previous government, that is, shipping, surface transport, information technology (IT) and communication. The Congress was not prepared to offer more than six berths to the DMK and the portfolio choice had to be left entirely to the Prime Minister. After two days of hectic parleys, the DMK leader, Karunanidhi, went back to Chennai without participating in the oath-taking ceremony on 19 May 2009. The DMK leader had pressing family compulsion to accommodate his own children, born to his three wives, along with other relations as well as party members.⁵ The Prime Minister, reportedly, had reservations on two of the former DMK ministers, A. Raja and T. R. Baalu, for their unimpressive and scam-fraught performance in the previous government. After a week-long bargaining, the DMK eventually agreed to join the government in the second phase. It reconciled to seven berths (three cabinet ranks and four ministers of state positions). Karunanidhi's eldest son, M. K. Azhagiri, his nephew, Dayanidhi Maran, and DMK member, A. Raja, were accommodated as cabinet ministers. The ministries allocated to them were Chemicals and Fertilisers, Textiles, and IT & Communication respectively. Karunanidhi's youngest daughter, Kanimozhi, opted out of the race and T. R. Baalu was dropped. Thus, the Prime Minister broadly had his way. The DMK did not really have much option as its government in Tamil Nadu was dependent on the support of the Congress which has 35 members in the state assembly and the Congress had enough overall support to form the government at the centre even without the DMK, if forced to do so.

Of the other pre-election allies, there was no problem with the NCP which, soon after the declaration of results, promised an unconditional support to the UPA. The NCP was humbled as it could not improve on its previous tally of nine seats. The poor results for the "Third Front" also dashed the NCP leader Pawar's ambitions for prime ministership. Three of the NCP nominees, including Pawar and Praful Patel, were included in the government, the former as a cabinet minister and the latter as a minister of state. They were given their old portfolios of Agriculture, Food and Civil Supplies, and Civil Aviation respectively. The West Bengal-based TC of Mamta Banerjee was allocated seven berths – one cabinet rank and six minister of state positions. Mamta was given her much cherished portfolio as Railways minister. Her attention was focused on cementing the newly-forged alliance with the Congress so as to unseat the Left in West Bengal at the coming state elections in 2011. She,

⁵ The complex family relations of the DMK leaders were analysed in an article "Karuna's Kutumbam", *Indian Express*, 31 May 2009.

therefore, preferred to be a “good” ally to the Congress. Initially, she had demanded a seat more than the DMK since her party won a seat more than the DMK in the elections. However, she did not insist either on the numbers or on the portfolios allotted to her party in the Council of Ministers. In fact, the Congress was willing to give more cabinet rank berths to her party, particularly to senior people like Dinesh Trivedi but she was not interested in that, perhaps to keep her own dominance intact.⁶ The NC’s President, Farooq Abdullah, created a minor stir by complaining that he was not informed of his inclusion in the cabinet in the first phase.⁷ He had to fly off to South Africa to watch a cricket match. However, he was included in the second phase and was allocated the portfolio of New and Renewable Energy. There was some reservation in the Congress on the inclusion of Farooq in the cabinet as he was seen responsible for the defeat of the Congress candidate in Ladakh though the Congress and the NC had an alliance in Jammu & Kashmir.

Rejuvenating the Congress

In the process of ministry-making, the Congress leadership seems to have been driven by the objective of rejuvenating the party and hopefully coming to power on its own in the next elections. The initial thrust of this objective could be seen in Rahul Gandhi’s efforts to galvanise the youth through democratisation of the Youth Congress. The positive impact of these efforts was clearly visible in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan where the Congress registered an impressive tally and in Gujarat where the “Modi effect” was contained. However, this task of democratising the Youth Congress is far from accomplished. That is why Rahul Gandhi decided to decline the ministerial berth for the time being, as he has a “job to do”. Talking to the press after the second phase of swearing in, Sonia Gandhi said, pointing towards Rahul Gandhi, “He is refusing to become a minister. He wants to work for the party”.⁸ The democratisation and streamlining of the Congress organisation cannot be confined only to its youth wing.

Encouraging fallout of the organisational streamlining has added momentum to the drive of rejuvenating the Congress. The results in Bihar have clearly shown that the coalition of Muslims and Yadavs (backward caste), forged by Lalu Prasad under his RJD, has been substantially eroded and even the Dalit (former untouchables) voters seem to have ignored their caste leaders like Paswan. In Uttar Pradesh too, the Yadav-Muslim coalition, built by Mulayam, seems to have been shaken. Encouraged by the support it received in these elections from the Muslims and Dalits, the Congress wants to step into the vacuum thus created by contesting alone. A continued alliance with the RJD and the LJP in Bihar may, therefore, not be advisable in this respect. Similarly in Uttar Pradesh, where the Congress won an unexpectedly high number of 21 seats by going alone, it does not want to carry the electoral baggage of the SP in the next state assembly and parliamentary elections. This is the reason why the RJD and the SP were not included in the UPA-II coalition government. In Maharashtra, there are also indications that the Congress is seriously thinking of going alone by jettisoning the alliance with the NCP. The induction of former Maharashtra Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, into the cabinet is a pointer in that direction. Deshmukh is not a member of parliament but he is a known baiter of the NCP chief, Pawar, as well as a Maratha by caste, like him. Maharashtra goes to polls for the state assembly later this year. Another Congress leader from Maharashtra, Prithvi Raj Chauhan, had also openly asked for

⁶ *Indian Express*, 7 June 2009.

⁷ The NC’s unhappiness was publicly aired in a television interview by Farooq Abdullah’s son and the Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, Omar Abdullah, on 18 May 2003.

⁸ *The Times of India*, 28 May 2009.

the Congress to go alone in the state, saying that the NCP now has no rationale to exist as an independent political unit since it was established on the basis of opposition to Sonia Gandhi (for her Italian roots). Such calls have made the NCP nervous and worried.⁹ Strong representation from this state of the Congress ministers (four cabinet ranks, one minister of state with independent charge and one minister of state) also suggests that the leadership has an eye on the coming elections. In Karnataka, the BJP is getting entrenched as reflected in the parliamentary elections. The BJP had earlier captured the state assembly. To counter the BJP and enable the Congress to go alone in Karnataka, four ministers have been inducted from that province, despite the poor results in the parliamentary contest where only six seats were won.

Efficient and Clean Governance

The objective of rejuvenating the Congress and coming to power without allies on its own cannot be achieved if the UPA does not deliver efficient and clean governance. Rightly or wrongly, the message of the electoral verdict read by the Congress is that the performance and delivery of development have been rewarded. In order to keep the momentum on this, the Prime Minister explained the delay caused in ministry-making due to “talent” search and asserted that “business as usual won’t do”. Addressing the newly-elected Congress members of parliament, he said, “The people of India have given us an impressive mandate. They have rubbished the fashionable theory of anti-incumbency. But we have to work harder and better to secure a wholesome mandate entirely in our favour. That is the challenge before our party and our government... We have to make [the] government more efficient and effective, more responsive and active... I hope each of you will rise to the expectations of your voters and retain their trust and support.”¹⁰

The concern for efficiency in the government formation was reflected in dropping ministers who did not seem to perform well. The names of Arjun Singh, H. R. Bhardwaj, Sis Ram Ola, Shiv Raj Patil and Ashwini Kumar may be mentioned in this respect. In a media rating, all these former ministers had been given negative grades.¹¹ Arjun had also personally displeased Dr Singh by lodging a written complaint against him to Sonia Gandhi for the lack of support on his policy of reservations in educational institutions during the last term. Another senior minister Saifuddin Soz from Jammu & Kashmir also was not included but that was because two other ministers had already been appointed from that state and Soz was not on the best of terms with Farooq. Former Law Minister Bhardwaj’s strong loyalty to the Gandhi-Nehru family was also ignored because the judiciary needed a revamp. Bhardwaj had also run into a controversy of politically influencing the judiciary in the cine-actor Sanjay Dutt’s case who had joined the SP and had planned to contest the Lucknow seat in Uttar Pradesh. The possibility of Bhardwaj and some of the dropout leaders being accommodated in any other positions such as Governors may not be ruled out.

The emphasis on performance was also evident in the retention and elevation of some of the junior ministers to the cabinet rank. The names of Kumari Shailja, Anand Sharma, Subodh Kant Sahai, Chauhan and Pallam Raju may be mentioned here. The first three were promoted to full cabinet ranks from their previous status of ministers of state and the latter two were retained in their previous positions in the Prime Minister’s Office and Defence ministry,

⁹ *The Hindustan Times*, 3 June 2009.

¹⁰ *India Today* (online) 19 May 2009. http://indiatoday.intoday.in/election2009/content_mail.php?option=com_content&name=pri....

¹¹ *Indian Express*, 28 May 2009.

respectively. The factor of countering the NCP in the coming Maharashtra state elections also went in favour of Chauhan. The elevations of Shailja and Sharma disturb the regional balance a bit vis-à-vis the provinces they come from. Shailja comes from Haryana and is not believed to be on great terms with that state's Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda. Sharma is from Himachal Pradesh but does not belong to the dominant community of Thakurs/Rajputs there. To correct this aberration, Virbhadra Singh, a former Chief Minister and representative of the dominant community from Himachal, has been inducted into the cabinet.

The induction of young members of parliament into the cabinet is in recognition of the shifting demographic dynamics in the country as well as the Congress organisation. Prime Minister Singh had underlined this aspect in his first address to the new members of parliament on 18 May 2009, as mentioned earlier. He said, "The youth of India have voted in large numbers for our party. But it is in the nature of youth to be impatient. They will not tolerate 'business as usual' attitude...The youth expect the government to cater to their aspirations. They expect a more responsive government". Nearly seven young members of parliament, some of them first-timers, have been inducted into the Council of Ministers. Prominent among them are Aghatha Sangma, Sachin Pilot, R. P. N. Singh, Vincent Pala and Jyotiraditya Scindia. Most of them belong to political families, being the sons and daughters of prominent Congress leaders. They are highly educated public school products. There has been criticism that young leaders coming from rural background and without any political parentage or patronage have not been able to come into prominence. The young cabinet inductees have been placed in critical ministries where senior ministers belong either to the alliance partners or have doubtful performance potential. The considerations of checks and balances as well as efficiency and performance seem to have been in play in the induction of these young ministers. Prime Minister Singh issued directives on 8 June 2009 that the junior ministers must be allocated proper responsibilities to avoid their marginalisation. There is, however, no dearth of seniority and experience in the cabinet to match the youth energy, as seven former Chief Ministers have been included, though for a variety of political reasons.

To keep the image of the government clean, people with questionable backgrounds have been avoided. The name of Baalu of the DMK has been mentioned earlier. No one has been inducted from the JMM, whose leader, Shibbu Soren, enjoys a questionable reputation. It was reported that intelligence and thorough background checks were conducted on the prospective ministers before their induction. Despite these efforts, there are reports of the new Council of Ministers having about nine members (seven Congress and one each from the TC and the DMK) with 'criminal records' and 'dubious pasts'.¹² These reports also claim that 47 of the 79 ministers have assets over 10 million Rupees each and 38 of them belong to the Congress. The past legacies, it seems, cannot be brushed aside easily and in one go.

Balancing Regional, Religious, Caste and other Interests

Almost all the states found their representation in the UPA-II government, except Chhattisgarh. From Bihar, only one minister was chosen, Meera Kumar, and she has now been elevated to the position of the Speaker of the House, leaving the state unrepresented for the time being. The representation was generally decided on the basis of the number of members of parliament from the UPA constituents elected from the given state. However, this criterion

¹² "A quick peek into the new council of ministers", *Mint* (Hindustan Times group), 28 May 2009. http://blogs.livemint.com/blogs/have_you_heard/archive/2009/05/28/a-quick-peak-into-the-... According to this report, the Congress Party which was in a position to call the shots "had a brilliant opportunity to draw out a clean, cohesive cabinet...a chance that the grand old party, unfortunately ended up blowing away".

was not strictly followed. A broad breakup of state representation in the Council of Ministers is as follows:

States	Ministers	States	Ministers
Andhra Pradesh	6	Kerala	6
Assam	2	Madhya Pradesh	5
Bihar	1 (elevated)	Maharashtra	9
Delhi	3	Meghalaya	2
Gujarat	2	Orissa	1
Haryana	1	Punjab	3
Himachal Pradesh	2	Rajasthan	4
Jammu & Kashmir	2	Tamil Nadu	9
Jharkhand	1	Uttar Pradesh	4
Karnataka	4	Uttaranchal	1
Union Territories	2	West Bengal	9

Source: Computed from newspaper reports.

There were some imbalances in the regional representation. Two of them became matters of public controversy. One was the missing rank of a cabinet minister from Uttar Pradesh where the Congress made major gains, winning 21 seats. Even senior members from this large province such as Sri Prakash Jaiswal and Salman Khurshid were inducted only as ministers of state with independent charges. The only explanation extended was that the first and most deserving of a cabinet position from Uttar Pradesh was Rahul Gandhi. As he declined to join the government, no one else could be considered for the position of a cabinet minister before him. However, this highly parochial reasoning was surely not very persuasive. The other question related to Srikant Jena, the lone inclusion from Orissa. Jena has only been appointed as a minister of state, for which he has strong reservations. He had served earlier as a full cabinet minister and found it humiliating to be downgraded. He was reluctant to take the oath but was persuaded to do so on the assurances that his status will be reconsidered. It is hoped now that with Meera Kumar's elevation, the cabinet portfolio of Water Resources Ministry vacated by her may be considered to accommodate Jena.

The trickiest exercise was ensuring the representation of castes and religions which is reflected as follows in the new government.

S/No	Castes/Religions	No. of Ministers
1.	Backward castes	18
2.	Brahmins	9
3.	Other upper castes	19
4.	Dalits	10
5.	Tribals	5
6.	Vaishyas	4
7.	Kshatriyas	4
8.	Muslims	5
9.	Sikhs	3
10.	Christians	4
	TOTAL	79

Source: computed from various newspaper reports, including *Times of India*, 29 May 2009.

While the Christians were happy with their strength in the government, some sections of the Muslim community expressed unhappiness on the “inadequate” presentation of their community. In all, 30 Muslims were elected to the new Lok Sabha of which 20 belonged to the UPA. Five Muslim ministers out of the UPA Muslim strength of 20 is not a bad number, though the previous UPA government had six Muslim ministers. The inadequacy of Muslim ministers was pointed out first by Syed Sahabuddin, a former member of parliament and the chief of a non-government organisation which speaks for the Muslim community. One of the Congress leaders, Anil Shastri, son of former Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and editor of the party mouthpiece *Congress Sandesh*, also wrote to the Prime Minister on Muslim representation. His contention was that one of the important factors for the impressive performance of the Congress was the Muslim support but only two Congress Muslim members of parliament were inducted into the cabinet. The remaining three are from the ally parties.¹³ The cabinet also has nine women, which is less by one from their number in the previous UPA government. Probably to compensate for that, the UPA decided to elevate Meera Kumar to the status of Lok Sabha Speaker. Being a Dalit, she will also help the Congress to mobilise the Dalit votes that are being claimed by Mayawati as her preserve. The 2009 Lok Sabha elections brought considerable Dalit and Muslim votes to the Congress and the effort would be to consolidate and expand this constituency. The induction of Veer Bhadra Singh from Himachal Pradesh on caste considerations has been mentioned earlier. In Rajasthan, three dominant caste vote banks of the Brahmins, the Gujjars and the Meenas have been represented. This was partly also a response to the Gujjar-Meena rivalry which rocked the state in the past three years.

Appraisal

The Congress has emerged strong in the 2009 elections but not strong enough to do away with the allies. In order to complete its full term in office, it will have to keep the allies in good humour, though it need not succumb to their unreasonable and politically-expensive demands. The two main allies of the Congress in UPA are the TC and the DMK. They are difficult allies and have a history of changing partners to suit their political exigencies. The stability of the UPA-II and the nature of alliance structure would, therefore, depend on the evolving contours of political dynamics. A particularly decisive factor would be the coming state assembly elections in Maharashtra later this year and in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal in 2011. The Congress’ declared goal of emerging as the single largest force with absolute majority in its favour will keep the allies uncertain and insecure. In the case of the DMK, the Sri Lankan issue would continue to figure in alliance relations with the central government.

Although the UPA-II Council of Ministers has been installed, there is nothing fixed about the appointments. The performance and loyalty of the Congress ministers will be continuously under scrutiny. There are also unrepresented states that will clamour for ministerial berths in the political interests of the Congress itself. The pack of ministers will, therefore, be subjected to periodic reshuffles to accommodate individuals and specific interests. If there is any change at the top for one reason or another, a whole new ball game will be set in motion. How these prospective changes keep peace and harmony with the broader political goals of consolidating and expanding power and of the obligations of delivering good governance and development remain to be seen.

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¹³ *Indian Express*, 6 June 2009.