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Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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## Message from Patna

Through the JP Movement and more recently by hosting a meeting of over 15 non-BJP Opposition parties to create a united front against the incumbent BJP for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Bihar is renowned for paving the way for the nation to escape crises. On June 23, when the top leaders of over 15 non-BJP Opposition parties gathered in Patna to discuss the future course of action to forge a strong alliance against the Modi-led BJP government at the Centre in the wake of the subsequent 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Nitish Kumar, the chief minister of Bihar, saw the results of his tireless efforts.

The Patna meeting was attended by top leaders of various opposition parties, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, party leader Rahul Gandhi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav, Maharashtra's former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, NCP president Sharad Pawar, RJD supremo Lalu Yadav and Bihar deputy CM, Tejaswini Yadav, former J&K CM and National Conference president Omar Abdullah, former J&K CM and Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti, CPI (M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary D Raja, CPI (ML) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, RSP leader N K Premachandran, and Forward Bloc leader G Devarajan.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a fundamental framework and action plan for opposition unity without immediately addressing the divisive issues of leadership and seat distribution.

After the meeting, Nitish Kumar said that all the leaders had agreed to work together to oppose the current government at the Centre. Kharge added that the front's modalities would be finalized at the following meeting in Shimla. AAP and Congress had some disagreements during the meeting, and Kejriwal urged Congress to publicly condemn the Delhi ordinance that he claimed was an assault on democracy. He claimed that until then, it would be extremely difficult for AAP to join any coalition that includes Congress.

Following the meeting, Nitish Kumar stated at a press conference that all the leaders had agreed to work together to oppose the current regime at the Centre. Kharge added that the front's modalities would be finalized at the subsequent meeting, which would be held in Shimla. Kejriwal demanded that Congress publicly condemn the Center's ordinance in Delhi, which he described as an attack on democracy, during the meeting, which also saw some disagreements between the AAP and Congress. According to him, it would be extremely challenging for the AAP to join any coalition that includes Congress before that time.

Unaffected by the BJP's tirade, the leaders gathered in Patna decided to collaborate in order to create an opposition party for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. They also decided to hold their next meeting in Bengaluru on July 13-14 in order to finalize the details of the opposition party, which some media reports claim will be called the Patriotic Democratic Alliance (PDA). The economic situation, the Covid-19 pandemic, the farmers' strike, the increase in fuel prices, and the deterioration of democratic institutions were among the issues brought up by the opposition leaders. The opposition leaders disagreed on the Delhi ordinance issue and the place of Congress in the front, particularly between AAP and Congress.

The opposition parties' future is currently unclear because they are attempting to unite despite numerous obstacles and uncertainties. In terms of national presence and vote share, the Congress party continues to be the largest opposition party, but it has been losing ground to the BJP and local parties in many states. It also has conflicts in its leadership and internal divisions. The Congress must decide how it will accommodate the aspirations and demands of other parties, as well as whether it wants to lead or be a partner in the opposition front.

Strong regional parties have established their effective electoral dominance in their respective states, including the AAP in Delhi and Punjab, the TMC in West Bengal, the BJD in Odisha, the JD (U) and RLD in Bihar, and the DMK in Tamil Nadu. They might not be ready to give up their territory or compromise their interests in favour of a national alliance. Additionally, they might have opposing ideologies and agendas with Congress or one another. However, participants in the Patna meeting realize that it is a question of now or never and it is with this approach they are expected to meet at Bengaluru and those who miss the bus will have to blame themselves. The concerted efforts of all will bear fruitful results.

— BK



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