

ISSN 0970-7247

THIRD CONCEPT

English Monthly
Annual Subscription Rs. 200

Vol. 36

No. 428

OCTOBER 2022

Rs. 20.00

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Vol. 36 No. 428 OCTOBER 2022 Rs. 20.00

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Published, Printed and Owned by
Babuddin Khan
Third Concept,
LB - 39, Prakash Deep Building,
7, Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi-110 001.
Ph : 23711092, 23712249, Fax No: 23711092.
E-mail : third.concept@rediffmail.com
Website: www.thirdconceptjournal.com

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Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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Chinks in Opposition Armour

Hectic activities by Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar, in forging an alliance of non-BJP political parties on a single platform to confront the BJP in the ensuing 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the ongoing Bharat Jodo Yatra embarked upon by Congress Party under the leadership of Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, covering a 3,570-km long route passing through 10 states, and the massive public response this Yatra has received in Tamil Nadu and now in Kerala, has raised hopes of a meaningful Opposition unity of non-BJP parties.

Undoubtedly, the efforts of Nitish Kumar have proved instrumental in eliciting positive responses from many regional satraps; nonetheless, the reluctant response from TMC, TRS and AAP entails the likelihood of proving chinks in Opposition unity armour in the coming days. Some regional satraps like TMC, Aap, TRS, Akali Dal, INLD, BSP, and others disapprove of any sort of political or electoral alliance with Congress or forging a united front against the ruling BJP under the very aegis of the Congress party.

Nevertheless, in the recently held Opposition meeting at Fatehabad in Haryana under the aegis of INLD to commemorate the birth anniversary of the late Deputy Prime Minister of India, Chaudhary Devi Lal, the Bihar Chief Minister had explicitly ruled out the possibility of a Third Front and asserted that there would be only One Front including Congress. The reluctance of TMC, TRS, and Aap to join hands with Congress is puzzling because of various reasons that are distinct in each case.

The TMC supremo is a former Congress leader and she nurtures the ambition of leading the Opposition at the national level. She had been a very vocal critic of the BJP government at the Centre and political machinations staged by the BJP unit of West Bengal during the course of the State Assembly elections. Besides, the raids by CBI and Enforcement Directorate on some TMC leaders recently also enraged the TMC supremo and she bitterly criticized the Modi Government. She had been a vocal supporter of Opposition unity sans Congress. However, recent days have witnessed seemingly a change in the tone and tenor of Mamata Didi. Her praise for the RSS and 'clean chit' to Prime Minister Modi, as reported in the media, has taken many Opposition leaders by surprise.

The TRS supremo KCR is also an ambitious leader who nurtures the hope of playing at the national level and he has been keenly looking for forging the Third Front sans Congress. Undoubtedly, KCR held a meeting with Nitish Kumar but he seems reluctant to accept Bihar CM as a prime ministerial candidate on behalf of the united Opposition. Similar is the case with AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal who nurtures high political ambitions. AAP supremo's high political ambitions have led many founding members of the AAP to part company with him and prominent among those are Yogendra Yadav, Ashutosh, Prashant Bhushan and others.

Undeniably, TMC and TRS are currently the ruling parties in their respective states but they lack a pan-India presence. AAP is in power in Delhi and Punjab and entails minimal presence in a couple of other states and that does not make it a pan-India party. Besides, the high ambitions of the leaders of these regional satraps entail the potential of proving chinks in Opposition unity armour.

Another challenging issue is the pro-BJP inclination of the YSR Congress of Andhra Pradesh and BJD of Odisha, and both these parties have not been seen in recent years sharing any platform with the Opposition. In fact, Nitish Kumar has taken upon himself a herculean task of fostering Opposition unity to confront the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha poll.

Under the prevailing situation, much depends on the success of the Bharat Jodo Yatra of the Congress Party in the coming months, especially when this Yatra passes through Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, part of UP, Haryana and then to its destination in Srinagar. If Congress manages to muster a massive public response in these states like that of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, then it can help the party to capitalize on its Yatra to emerge electorally stronger and spur other regional satraps to shun their reluctance and join hands with it to offer a viable and strong alternative to the BJP.

— BK