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### **Bihar Shows the Way**

**B**ihar, the alma mater of democracy for centuries, has always guided the destiny of India as and when democracy has been in peril in post-independent India. Political developments occurring in recent times in India have been characterized by the novel practice of ousting the democratically elected non-BJP state governments by hook or crook with the avowed objective of bringing those states under the BJP tutelage. The 2020 state assembly elections in Bihar witnessed the installation of the NDA government led by Nitish Kumar of JD (U) as chief minister, and the BJP along with smaller regional parties as other coalition partners.

Undoubtedly, the Nitish-led NDA government in Bihar in the post-2020 period was apparently running smoothly; nevertheless, there existed differences between Nitish Kumar and the BJP leadership on vital national and regional issues. Bolstered by its success in uninstalling the MVA government in Maharashtra led by Shiv Sena supremo Udhav Thackeray, the BJP was said to be covertly manoeuvring to dislodge Nitish Kumar from the helm and grab power for itself in Bihar, and the statement of the BJP President J.P Nadda in Patna on July 31 this year that all other political parties barring the BJP would be destroyed was an alarming bell for the Nitish-led JD (U) which sensed the shape of things to come.

JD (U) under the leadership of Nitish Kumar parted company with the BJP and Nitish Kumar tendered his government's resignation and joined hands with RJD-led Mahagathbandhan to form the new government in Bihar, and all these developments took place so hurriedly that the JD (U) leadership left no room for any manoeuvrability by the BJP. It was a surprising development for the Bihar BJP that puzzled the central leadership of the BJP as well. A seasoned and astute politician equipped with political acumen to interpret the writing on the wall, Nitish Kumar disarmed the BJP to launch its so-called operation lotus in Bihar and it was a great setback for the BJP.

The political coup staged by JD (U), apart from taking the BJP off-guard, was nevertheless pulled off without leaving a mess, devoid of resort politics, without any allegation of money changing hands and without any effort to split the opposition. Nitish-led Mahagathbandhan (MGB) consists of RJD, JD (U), Congress, CPI (M), CPI, CPI (M-L), and Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM). In other words, the entire Opposition in Bihar has coalesced into an anti-BJP front under the leadership of Nitish Kumar.

Many experts feel that the MGB has emerged as a formidable social coalition of the prime backward castes like Yadavs and Kurmis, the more backward castes, and extremely backward castes. The CPI (M-L) and HAM represent the Dalit votes and the MGB also represents a ray of hope for the Muslims as well. Nevertheless, the success of the MGB government in the interregnum period to ensuing elections to Lok Sabha in 2024 and the state assembly of Bihar in 2025 will decide its future and it is prone to have a bearing on national politics as well.

Delivery on its electoral promises without any inner tussle for power and cohesiveness of all the constituents of the MGB can serve as a bulwark against manoeuvres and disinformation campaigns of the BJP which has seemingly mastered these techniques over the years with tremendous money and political power at its disposal. Ensuing months are going to be challenging for Nitish Kumar who is known as "Sushasan Babu" or a man of good governance, and while living up to his this public image he will have to consolidate his position within the MGB while delivering on his promises before he transforms into a pan-India leader.

A clean image without the baggage of being a dynast makes Nitish Kumar a sure bet against PM Modi in the ensuing 2024 Lok Sabha election because all these qualities entail the potential of taking the sting out of the BJP's campaign rhetoric, and being a Kurmi is also a potent counter to the BJP's 'OBC PM.' Nevertheless, Nitish has to prove his credentials through his performance in Bihar and his success there can inspire other non-BJP parties to emulate his example and heed his call for unity. The journey is tedious but not impossible.

— BK