

Will INDIA's spirit be stable and sustained?



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The month of January 2024 was marked by events that have added strength to the BJP. But the start of February has enthused and encouraged the opposition parties. Several developments including the setback to the BJP in the Jharkhand political game and the Supreme Court's snub to the election official for having acted favorably for the BJP candidate in the Chandigarh Mayor election have put the opposition camp in high spirits. In addition, the controversy that threatens to paralyze Paytm, an organization that has flourished during the regime of Modi, and the allegation leveled by Arvind Kejriwal that the BJP tries to woo the Aam Aadmi party men to join their party have assumed significance.

Jharkhand that inspires hope

Hemant Soren, leader of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and former Chief Minister of the state, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on the charge of land document forgery and he had resigned his post before his arrest. This episode has cheered the BJP beyond measure. However, the new JMM government formed by Champai Soren has proved its majority by 47:29. The disappointment that opposition parties had in Bihar has been set right in Jharkhand. Additionally, they felt elevated and spirited when Hemant Soren, who participated in the trust vote proceedings with court permission, castigated the BJP and the ED. The BJP felt embarrassed when Soren called the BJP's bluff, saying that if any evidence was produced for the complaint against him, he would be ready to quit politics. He also said the BJP was vindictive towards him as he belongs to a tribal community. He pointed out the controversial remark of a pro-BJP media man, "He (Soren) would have to go back to the forest where he was living 30 years ago."

Soren's acerbic comments have dealt a death blow to the BJP's hope of winning the support of the Scheduled Tribes people constituting 8.6 per cent of the total population by appointing Droupadi Murmu, a tribal woman, as the President of the country. At a time when hardly a congenial atmosphere is prevailing in the opposition camp over the issue of Rahul Gandhi's 'Nyaya Yatra,' these developments, pleasing to the opposition parties, have taken place in Jharkhand during Rahul's visit to the state.

Electoral arithmetic

As far as the Jharkhand Assembly elections are concerned, it is the JMM alone, which has a solid tribal votebank. It was only in 2014 when the BJP won the election that a non-tribal man (Raghubar Das) took over as CM. But in the 2019 Assembly election, Hemant Soren overthrew the BJP and came back to power. At the same time, things were quite different in the parliamentary elections. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the JMM contested in only four out of 14 constituencies (the remaining seats were given to the Congress and the RJD). The JMM won only one seat then whereas the BJP-led NDA swept the stakes, bagging 12 seats including those reserved for the tribal communities. So, it won't be a cakewalk for the opposition parties including the JMM to mobilise the tribal voters solidly against the BJP. Moreover, the JMM, given its current significance, may demand more seats in the run-up to the general elections. This may cause another rift within the INDIA front.

Awakened opposition parties

It is said that the BJP had toyed with the idea of conducting both general and assembly elections in Jharkhand if the JMM government was overthrown. It is said in the same breath that as the JMM rule was officially nearing the completion of its term, the BJP was not interested in weaning the JMM MLAs back to its fold. When all is said and done, the way the JMM has 'taken care' of its MLAs has grabbed attention far and wide.

Right on the heels of the announcement about the trust vote in the Assembly in Jharkhand, the Congress sent its MLAs to Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana that it rules now, in order to safeguard them from the BJP's snares. Though 10 days had been given to prove the majority, JMM Chief Minister Champai Soren came forward to face the floor test on the first day itself in the

two-day special session. It is said that he was ready for a trust vote quite ahead of the deadline because he had feared the BJP's Machiavellian strategies.

Meanwhile, the Congress action of sending its MLAs to Hyderabad for safety despite the NDA's sufficient strength in the Assembly has become a topic of hot discussion with the BJP sarcastically commenting, "The Congress has no faith in its own MLAs."

Other salvos

The opposition parties have begun criticizing the BJP, focussing on the controversy over Paytm which the RBI axe has fallen on in the wake of the allegations that accounts opened in thousands of names have been linked to a single income tax PAN and rules have not been properly complied with in KYC norms. Congress national spokesperson Supriya Shrinate shot off a volley of questions to the BJP, disclosing to media persons the selfies that Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma had taken with Prime Minister Modi and the information about Paytm's advertisements with photos of Modi published in leading newspapers after the demonetization in November 2016.

Arvind Kejriwal has been alleging that he is being pressured to join the BJP and predicting that he will also be arrested as his party colleagues Satyendar Jain and Manish Sisodia were. He has also been castigating the BJP which, he says, has been taking vindictive measures, unable to tolerate the AAP government's progressive schemes in education and health.

The opposition leaders including Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren have started rallying together, proclaiming that they will not yield to the ED's pressures.

The Supreme Court's categorical statement, "We will not allow the murder of democracy," in the case of the Chandigarh Mayoral election malpractices has created a moral crisis for the BJP.

In his address thanking the President's speech in Parliament, Modi said he was hopeful of the BJP making a hat-trick, winning the general elections and capturing power again. Reacting to his optimism, opposition parties ridiculed him, saying that after all, it was his right to dream. They have pointed out that Modi, who was always harping on his disbelief in caste politics, had asked in Parliament why the opposition parties had failed to note the fact that he belonged to the OBC segment. Modi's remark has revealed his anxiety and panic, said the opposition leaders.

All said and done, the INDIA bloc's future hinges on how the opposition parties, which have become more active and brisk in the second round, will double down on their anti-BJP political game.

Translated by V. Mariappan.