

By Sidharth Mishra



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee doesn't seem to be much enamoured by the what the newspapers in the national Capital have to say about a possible alliance between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Speaking at the rally of Opposition parties at her bastion in Kolkata last Saturday, Banerjee said, "Hum saath ladega aur Dilli mein saatho seat jitega (We shall fight together and win all the seven Lok Sabha seats in the national capital)."

While the Trinamool Congress leader said this, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal heard her in rapt attention. Earlier during his own turn to address the rally, Kejriwal remained focused on spewing venom on the BJP. This was less than 24-hours after the AAP had declared in the national Capital that it would contest all seven seats in Delhi on its own blaming the Congress of being arrogant.

The local leadership in the three north Indian states of Haryana, Punjab and Delhi, where Kejriwal insists on his party having a presence, are all against any idea of entering into an alliance with AAP, whose rise is rooted in running an anti-corruption campaign in the early part of this decade against the Congress governments both at the Centre and in the states.

In fact, addressing mediapersons a day before Mamata's rally in Kolkata, Delhi Minister Gopal Rai, while announcing party's decision to go alone in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi had said in the national Capital, "The AAP has always been against the principles of the Congress. The AAP was the only party to start a movement against corrupt Congress rule."

The grand old party on the other hand sees its fortunes on an upswing in these states especially after having returned to power in Punjab after a 10-year hiatus. In neighbouring Haryana, to keep up the anti-BJP mood the Congress has even gambled fielding its national media head Randeep Singh Surjewala for bypolls for the Jind assembly seat.

A Resurgent Congress In Mood To Fight Alone in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana

Written by Administrator

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Kejriwal, who belongs to Haryana and calls it his home, on the other hand, is looking at the state as an area of opportunity. The chance has come his way with the break-up in the Chautala clan-run Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). With party patriarch Om Prakash Chautala and his son Ajay in jail on corruption charges, the leadership has passed into the hands of younger son Abhay Chautala.

This transfer is being resisted by Ajay's son Dushant and Digvijay, former a Lok Sabha member, and Kejriwal is looking up to them as possible allies; whereas the break-up in Chautala camp has Congress strategists looking at the transfer of large chunk of Jat votes to its treasure chest. Meanwhile, Kejriwal wants to build a Jat-Bania combination which once existed when Chowdhary Devi Lal and Chowdhary Bansi Lal ruled roost in state politics.

When Bansi Lal had walked out of the Congress to form Haryana Vikas Party, it was industrialist OP Jindal who had stood by him as strong pillar and HVP did go onto to form a government in the state. Then there was Banarsidas Gupta who twice rose to be chief minister albeit first as proxy of Bansi Lal and later of the Chautala clan. Kejriwal is looking to revive a similar kind of caste combination to launch himself in Haryana politics.

This move the local Congress leaders, especially those belonging to the Jat and Bania communities, perceive as a threat to their existence and would thus resist any truck with the AAP tooth and nail. Would this stand benefit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), not just in Haryana but in neighbouring Delhi and Punjab too.

Congress under Rahul Gandhi, while not exactly rejecting coalition politics has in a way promoted go-alone formula, wherever the state leadership has given him the confidence to do so. The recent polls in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are cases in point. While going alone has helped it reap harvest, coalition move in Telangana floundered.

In one-week that Sheila Dikshit has been in the office at the Rajiv Gandhi Bhawan, the Delhi Congress headquarters, she has pushed the agenda of good governance and of course her target is Arvind Kejriwal's Delhi government. As reported by newspapers, in a meeting last Saturday, presidents of district and block Congress Committees were directed by the former chief minister to visit every household and interact with the people to make them aware of the Congress party's achievements in Delhi and the failures of the BJP government at the Centre

and the AAP government in the national capital.

Dikshit has been targeting the AAP government for not having done anything for the development of Delhi in the past four years. "The AAP government has been misleading the people in matters such as mohalla clinics and health services. Kejriwal is taking credit for the development works carried out by the Congress government during its 15-year rule," she was reported by media as saying.

Dikshit's bluster against Kejriwal has somewhat enthused the BJP strategists, who point towards arithmetic of support base of the respective parties while drawing a victory roadmap for their candidates. However, not to forget that in politics, electoral arithmetic is important but so is chemistry. BJP Rajya Sabha MP Swapan Dasgupta wrote in a recent newspaper column, "chemistry has the potential to subsume arithmetic."

Right strategies, focused campaign and a galvanized cadre can have the potential for the Congress to subsume a difficult mathematical problem. The Congress leadership probably wants to play on the strength of its leaders than go purely by electoral arithmetic and cede turf to not too dependable potential ally.

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