

**By Sidharth Mishra**



Last fortnight at a function organized by the Delhi Jal Board to lay foundation stone of nation's biggest sewage treatment plant, changing political environment of the city became so visible. Union Minister for Jal Shakti, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat shared dais with Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, where the latter took everybody by surprise by profusely thanking the Centre for the support.

It did not stop there. When Shekhawat pointed out that all hoardings on way to the venue gave credit only to the Delhi Government whereas the project was being funded by the Centre, Kejriwal accepted the error and said credit should be given wherever it was due.

Let's do a quick flashback. The onset of winters last year had witnessed an unusual freeze in the relationship between the BJP leaders (including Central Ministers) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Delhi Government. On November 4 last year, the much-delayed Signature Bridge was finally inaugurated. The inaugural ceremony saw a terrible fracas between the Chief Minister and the local MP and state BJP president Manoj Tiwari, who was not invited for the function.

The Signature Bridge inaugural, and the two inaugurations before that of the Rani Jhansi flyover and the ITO Skywalk, made news not for the engineering marvel being given to the city but for the bitter political dialogue. Both Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi BJP president Manoj Tiwari, or for that matter Centre's designated Minister for Delhi Hardeep Singh Puri in his capacity as the in-charge of Urban Development, had little to do with the completion of these projects.

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These projects were started years back when Sheila Dikshit was in power but that did not stop them for fighting for the portions of publicity pie. AAP and the BJP over the past five years have fought bitterly not just on these occasions but otherwise also.

Kejriwal never left an opportunity to bring charges of corruption against BJP leaders including bigwigs like Arun Jaitley and Nitin Gadkari; and on several occasions charging the Prime Minister of plotting his assassination. The Delhi CM albeit had no qualms in putting his tail between his legs and apologize to Jaitley and Gadkari, when the duo took the matter to the court.

Even during the course of the Lok Sabha campaign earlier this summer Kejriwal brought charges against the BJP of trying to break his party and also diabolically blamed political newbie, former India cricketer Gautam Gambhir of running a slander campaign against his party's candidate Atishi Marlena.

However, ever since the poll results have come out, there is a palpable shift in Kejriwal's stance vis-à-vis the BJP. This emanates not just from BJP's massive victory but also the fact that Kejriwal's party has been pushed to the third position even behind the Congress.

He probably knew of losing on a large chunk of public support, therefore in the run-up to the polls he made desperate attempts to tie-up with the Congress. However, under the leadership of Sheila Dikshit, the Congress saw a fair chance for its own revival and managed to improve its position emerging on the second spot on all but one of the seven seats.

If exposure of flanks in Delhi was not enough, Kejriwal also realized of the loss of support in the non-BJP pantheon with Telugu Desam Party being routed in Andhra Pradesh and Trinamool Congress facing a tough challenge in West Bengal. With two of his strongest benefactors, TDP leader N Chandrababu Naidu and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on the back foot themselves, and the Congress refusing to hold his hand, Kejriwal today stands completely quarantined.

Given the aggressive mode of politics which the BJP is pursuing in its present avatar, which includes subtle use of the Central agencies to deflate the rivals, Kejriwal must have thought it prudent to present an olive branch lest skeletons from his cupboard too start to tumble out.

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In fact soon after Narendra Modi took office for the second time, Kejriwal paid him a courtesy call. More importantly, after the meeting with the Prime Minister, Delhi CM gave a statement on the need for collaborative and cooperative governance, something which he himself failed to practise in the past five years.

Why such change of heart? Given the constant fall in AAP's vote percentage since 2015, when Kejriwal led his party to a stupendous victory in Delhi assembly polls, the AAP MLAs today are troubled souls, with elections just six-months away. With the BJP leadership showing no reservations in encouraging MLAs of the other parties to come over to its side, Goa and Karnataka being the recent examples, Kejriwal too fears fall of his government with MLAs jumping boat.

While on the one hand he is trying to quell dissidence through a stick and carrot policy, Kejriwal on the other is trying to build bridges with BJP's central leadership lest their wrath fall on his government. One should not be surprised, given his track record, if Kejriwal soon starts singing paeans to the BJP leadership.

But will the BJP take the bait? Unlikely given the recent aggression on their part by bringing corruption charges against the Kejriwal government of a scam in the building of the school classrooms. Education and Health are two areas about which the AAP government trumpets much about.

While Health Minister Satender Jain is already facing CBI enquiry in a money-laundering case, the school classrooms scam could also bring Deputy CM Manish Sisodia under scrutiny. Given his frailty under the changed circumstances, Kejriwal probably finds option of friendship as the best choice. But the fascia is too thin and his game plan can be easily seen through it.

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