

Together We Rule

Coalition governments are becoming the norm

Another round of elections has confirmed that ours is the era of coalition politics. Besides Kerala and West Bengal, states which have had stable coalitions for decades, Assam and Pondicherry will now have alliances in office. Tamil Nadu, which has never had a coalition government, narrowly missed the bus even though DMK, the party in office, is dependent on the support of allies. If the trend continues, single-party rule will soon become the exception rather than the norm in India. It is unlikely that we will have a single-party government at the Centre in the near future. The polity also has become comfortable with the idea of coalitions. The NDA completed its term successfully, and the UPA-Left alliance appears to have settled into a groove. Coalition politics is the outcome of two developments. One, the decline or absence of pan-Indian parties. Two, the emergence of regional outfits that address local concerns and issues. Congress, which is often described as a coalition of various caste, class, regional and ethnic interests, has been on the decline all over the country. Congress's revival as a party of governance at the Centre and states in recent times owes more to its new-found willingness to embrace coalition politics and not to an expansion of its political base. The BJP has failed to emerge as a credible alternative to Congress due to its failure to rise above its exclusivist ideology. The Left and various socialist groups continue to be limited to their pockets of influence.

The decline of the Congress coalition is as much an organisational failure as it is the inevitable fallout of the process of democratisation. Social groups that got empowered after Mandal and political groups that arose out of localised insurgencies, have carved out their space from Congress's social base. The old dispensation of patronage under the Congress umbrella has given way to new formulations which practise identity politics. In states like Tamil Nadu, DMK and AIADMK have replaced Congress as umbrella outfits, and now have entered into alliances with caste-based parties. In Assam, Congress has been forced to ally with a faction of Bodoland People's Progressive Front, a political platform of Bodos and independents. The Assam United Democratic Front, a coalition that claims to represent interests of local Muslims, has also offered support to Congress. The positive outcome of these developments is that governments are becoming more representative in their social character.

17 MAY 2006

V.P. Singh, Raj Babbar launch new Morcha



JOINING HANDS: The former Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, with Bollywood actor Raj Babbar at a press conference to announce the launch of "Jan-Morcha" in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: S. Subramaniam

To take up cause of farmers, workers, youth and women

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The former Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, on Sunday announced the formation of a new outfit 'Jan Morcha' headed by suspended Samajwadi Party (SP) Lok Sabha member Raj Babbar.

(Mr. Singh had launched a similarly named party during Rajiv Gandhi's premiership and later merged it with other parties to form the Janata Dal.)

The new Jan Morcha would be the political front of the Kisan Manch launched by Mr. Singh a few years ago. Several smaller parties have extended support to

the Jan Morcha that will take up the cause of farmers, labourers, youth and women, Mr. Singh told reporters here.

While Mr. Babbar has been named the national president of the Jan Morcha, Vinod Kumar, national general secretary of the Kisan Manch, would be its convenor. Mr. Singh himself is the president of the Kisan Manch.

According to Mr. Singh, the Jan Morcha, in adjustment with like-minded parties, would subsequently participate in elections and its first target would be Uttar Pradesh, slated to go to the polls early next year.

Mr. Singh said the Communi-

st Party of India (M-L) was supporting the cause of his party. Talks with other parties were also on. Rashtriya Lok Dal president Ajit Singh had agreed to be part of the Morcha, but since he was part of Samajwadi Party-led Government in Uttar Pradesh, the stand would have to be reviewed.

The Jan Morcha will have representatives from Lalu Prasad-led Rashtriya Janata Dal, Janwadi Party, Pragatisheel Manav Samaj, Rashtrawadi Samyawadi Party, farmers and others.

Asked if the new party meant he was entering active politics, Mr. Singh said he had been in

active politics, but ruled out contesting polls. Mr. Babbar said he would fulfil the responsibility bestowed on him. The Morcha will organise 'Dera Daalo, Ghera Daalo' programme in Lucknow on May 29 to protest against the State Government's policies towards these sections of society and increasing lawlessness and corruption.

On his continuing to be MP, Mr. Babbar said he would have quit had he deviated from the Samajwadi Party ideologies. "The others have and they know it. That is why they have not expelled me so far."

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CPM sings third front tune, Cong takes note

New Delhi: The UPA-Left coordination committee meets on Monday with CPM brandishing the "third front" scimitar as a bargaining chip ahead of talks on a slew of contentious issues ranging from India's Iran vote and FDI in the retail sector.

Left is likely to press for a discussion in parliament over the Iran issue before March 6, when the IAEA is to meet again on Iran.

The functionaries of the four Left parties will meet PM Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi with senior ministers at 11.30 am to discuss issues that have divided the two sides recently. Though both sides would not look for a confrontation with the budget session of parliament looming, the meeting could set the stage for some hard bargaining.

Though some of the bites from Left quarters are being seen by Congress as expected in view of assembly elections in West Bengal

and Kerala, the latest Marxist threat to "revive" the third front has been taken note of, even if this were only a signalling exercise.

Speaking in Guwahati on Sunday, CPM leader Prakash Karat said it would be best to build a third alternative to Congress and BJP. Addressing a rally, he said proposals had been sent to "democratic and secular" forces in UPA. However, he added the Left's outside support to UPA continued.

Within Congress, the view was that while Left's arguments and postures would be addressed, Karat's Guwahati flourish was essentially posturing. Other Left leaders felt that it was a gambit aimed at rattling Congress and not much more.

Even as CPM remains lukewarm to proposals like a no-trust motion on India opposing Iran's nuclear programme at IAEA, some of its leaders see the party's proximity to SP and other

regional outfits as a factor in its negotiations with Congress. The "third front" formulation is, at least for the present, more a factor in the Left-Congress power game than a political prospect. Having been pushed to the wall over Iran and airport privatisation quite ruthlessly by the government, Left is setting the stage for another war of nerves with UPA in the run-up to parliament and the budget.

"We are going to communicate to the UPA leadership our extreme concerns over the way the government has pushed aside our sensibilities on important issues," CPI secretary D Raja said.

The issues which are likely to dominate the morning meeting include India's position on Iran's nuclear programme, the government decision to open up the retail sector to foreign direct investment and PSU disinvestment.

CPM | Says US trying to make India a 'colonial state' and the UPA's 'obliging shamefully'

Third Front on, in touch with UPA partners: Karat

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 12

A day after his meeting with Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, CPM general secretary Prakash Karat today said his party was trying its best to build a third alternative to Congress and BJP.

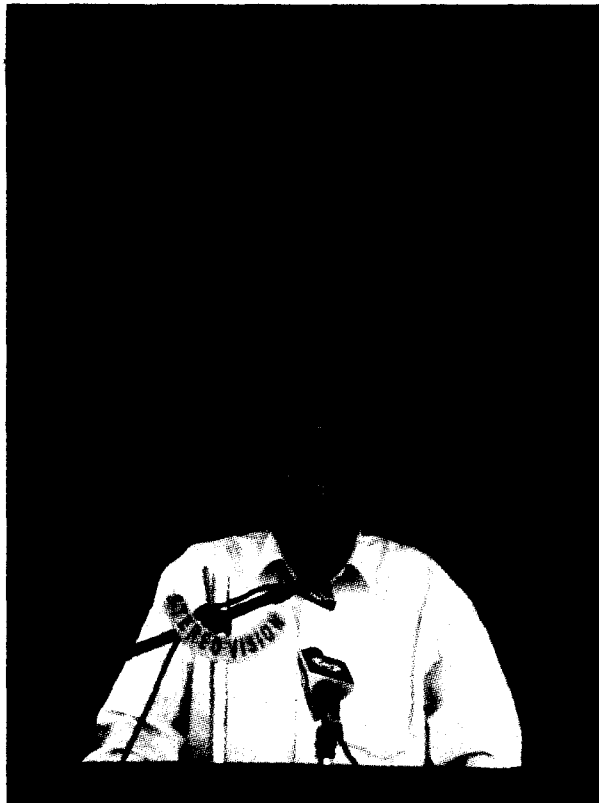
Addressing a public rally at the Judges Field here, Karat said proposals in this regard had already been sent to "democratic and secular" forces in the UPA. He did not name any political party.

The CPM, he said, would until then (formation of a third alternative) like the UPA government to continue with its support from outside.

Stepping up the attack on US Ambassador David C Mulford who wrote a letter to the West Bengal Chief Minister for criticising US George W Bush, Karat claimed that the US wanted to "make India a colonial state."

He accused the UPA government of "obliging (the US) shamefully" and showing willingness to change India's foreign policy at "the US behest".

"The US wants to make India a colonial state and that is why it is meddling in our internal affairs which the CPM will never allow", Karat said, adding that Mulford "has no



CPM general secretary Prakash Karat at the CPM rally in Guwahati on Sunday. Photo by Subhamoy Bhattacharjee

right to do so".

"This only shows that Congress is still a party for the capitalists and the CPM will strongly oppose it", he said.

"Our party will oppose privatisation of profit making public sector companies at any cost but will support any step of the UPA government that is in the interest of the

country", he said.

On his party's support from outside to the UPA government, he said it was the need of the hour as "we wanted a secular party (to be in power)".

"Our effort will always be to defeat the BJP as that party with the help of religion is destroying secular values", Karat said.