

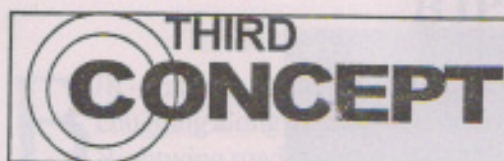
THIRD CONCEPT

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Editor

BABUDDIN KHAN

THIRD CONCEPT aims at providing a platform where a meaningful exchange of ideas can take place among the people of the Third World. The attempt will be to communicate, debate and disseminate information, ideas and alternatives for the resolution of the common problems facing humankind. We welcome contributions from academics, journalists and even from those who may never have published anything before. The only requirement is a concern for and desire to understand and take the issue of our time. Contributions may be descriptive, analytical or theoretical. They may be in the form of original articles, reactions to previous contributions, or even a comment on a prevailing situation. All contributions, neatly typed in double space, may be addressed to:

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BJP's Predicament

BJP – nation's principal opposition party – is confronted with an existential dilemma — to keep chugging along on the Centrist-Right path or revert to the original communal and unambiguously Rightwing road with Narendra Modi in the driving seat to sail through the 2014 general election.

The inevitable exit of JD-U from the NDA as a fallout of elevation of Narendra Modi as chief of the BJP's election campaign committee has perhaps come as a blessing in disguise for the embattled Gujarat chief minister. However, a section of the BJP believes the weakening of the NDA would not augur well for the saffron party in crucial states like Uttar Pradesh, which sends as many as 80 MPs into Lok Sabha.

Whatever else Narendra Modi, chief minister of Gujarat, accomplishes in his fiercely ambitious drive to lead the Bharatiya Janata Party and to become prime minister of India, he has succeeded in creating rifts galore — within civil society, within his party, with the party's allies and in the country itself. Commenting on Modi-Advani rift, one BJP leader close to the L K Advani camp is reported to have said: "It is a paradox in politics. You end up helping your worst enemy when you think you are harming him or her."

In this context, it is worth recalling that when the troika Sharad Pawar, P A Sangma and Tariq Anwar walked away from the Congress in 1999 raising the bogey of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, the exit of the three leaders weakened the rebels and strengthened Sonia's grip in the Congress. The rift within the BJP can only undermine its prospects of success in the 2014 general election. Despite two defeats, in the 2004 and 2009 elections, Advani still nurses ambitions. His calculations might be: in the event of a split vote within the party or a deadlock between rival parties, he might be accepted as an elder statesman.

Nevertheless, it is now well recognized that the days of single-party rule are *vieux jeu*. In the foreseeable future, coalitions will be the norm in India. A party which emerges as the single largest party in the Lok Sabha will attract allies. The smaller parties will shed reservations of old to share power. Advani is simply not seen as one who can help the party to win that position. Narendra Modi's rise is due to the belief in the demoralised BJP that he can achieve the miracle. Modi will thus wield powerful influence in the selection of the party's candidates for 2014 election to the Lok Sabha. They will be beholden to him for the party ticket and will vote for him in the election to the leader of the parliamentary party eligible to be called in to form a government, if the BJP musters the required strength.

The interesting thing is almost all the current crop of leaders who enjoy 'the connect' with their people at the regional level are prime ministerial aspirants in 2014. Everyone is positioning himself or herself in subtle ways already. Narendra Modi is no different in this context as his appeal is based on a cocktail of Hindutva and Gujarati Asmita. However, historically, there is no example yet of a strong regional leader—enjoying immense popularity based on either caste or language grouping—having made it to the Prime Minister's post, except in some accidental manner as in the case of Deve Gowda.

Even the BJP does not have a system whereby regional leaders with massive popularity gain ascendance in its central leadership and then become candidates for prime ministership. For instance, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani were always positioned as national leaders. That is the reason why there is resistance within the BJP to Modi's ascendance to New Delhi. The explanation is not as simplistic as some central leaders vying for the same job. The issue is that the BJP is not quite certain of how well their only ace in the pack, Modi, will play out on the national scene. The BJP's presence is negligible in as many as 152 Lok Sabha seats, spread out in many states. However, it is the Hindi heartland, especially Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where the BJP can hope to reach the magic number of cobbling together a 24-party government.

—BK