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- ❖ **Civil Society & State in Central Asia**
- ❖ **Higher Education in India**
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**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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# Wither Opposition!

**P**olitical discourse in contemporary India is missing a sound and effective Opposition. Divested of the accurate characteristics of an opposition, the present Opposition in India is in disarray and can be described as a conglomeration of heterogeneous groups which are fundamentally and ideologically opposed to each other.

The co-called national parties like Congress, Left parties, JD (U) etc have become almost like regional parties with their influence being confined to a few states. Regional satraps like TMC, RJD, AIADMK, Biju Janata Dal, TDP, SP, and BSP are strong contenders for power in their respective states and this has proven in recently held assembly polls. As and when these regional satraps have come together to oppose the ruling dispensation at the Centre and offer an alternative, they have seldom survived long. Janata experiment of the 1970s and UDF experiment of the 1990s is a stark example of failure of the Opposition to offer a viable, stable and durable alternative. The electoral opportunism by regional satraps just to oppose the ruling party and hardly based on any set principles is neither viable nor durable. One is reminded of Nehru when he said, “They (groups) hold together, I suppose, because of the stress of circumstances and sometimes, there are marriages of convenience, sometimes followed by rapid divorces and on the whole, we find these strange bedfellow consorting together because of a certain spirit of opposition to the majority group”.

The spectacular win of Nitish Kumar in Bihar in 2015 and a convergence of anti-BJP forces, including JD (U), RJD, the Congress and the Left parties, christened as Mahagathbandhan, was seen by political pundits as a build-up before the formation of a grand anti-Modi alliance in the country. While not entirely impossible, the alliance was fraught with inherent contradictions and required a lot of effort to stay relevant. This spirit of Mahagathbandhan soon evaporated in the assembly elections held in May 2016 where, on the one hand, Congress and the Left parties had joined hands against the incumbent TMC in West Bengal; while on the other hand, both were rivals in Kerala. The BJP has emerged as the major political force in the country, having been in power at the Centre and also government of its own in nine states and as a ruling ally in six states/Union Territories (UTs). Some opposition parties are nurturing the notion based on simple arithmetic: The BJP received 31.3 per cent vote-share in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and if the major opposition parties rally against the BJP in 2019, they stand the chance of defeating the BJP.

Working on this logic, RJD, JD (U) and the Congress joined hands in 2015 Bihar assembly elections and defeated the BJP. Emboldened by the success of Bihar model, anti-BJP/anti-Modi forces comprising Congress, the Left parties along with other regional parties may try to form an all India anti-BJP front in the 2019 LS polls, nevertheless, the viability and survival of such a front seems doubtful on various counts. Leading a grand alliance of regional parties from the front may look easy for the Congress on paper; albeit, grounds realities are very different. There is an acrimonious history of some of the parties. SP and BSP can't be expected to ride on the same boat. Similar is the case with AIADMK and DMK, TRS and TDP, Shiv Sena and NCP. The Left and the Congress are the main contenders in Kerala and Tripura, and their previous experiment with Congress-led UPA in 2004 is not very pleasant.

Apart from lacking a common ideology, regional parties have leaders nursing prime-ministerial ambitions. This may lead to the difficulty of arriving at a consensus on the declaration of a PM candidate. Besides, the BJD and the AIADMK have maintained a non-Congress, non-BJP stance for some time now and are unlikely to join. Either of the following groups of parties may not join - SP/BSP, NCP/Shiv Sena, TDP/TRS making the alliance weak and hence difficult to dislodge BJP. Serious and sincere efforts based on common minimum programme are required to forge a potent grand anti-BJP/anti-Modi alliance in 2019. Nevertheless, events preceding the 2017 UP assembly polls will signal as to which way the political wind will blow.

— BK