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# THIRD CONCEPT

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## INSIDE

Editorial	
Unite or Perish!	5
<i>B.K.</i>	
Unified Korea – A stepchild of Asia	7
<i>Joseph H. Chung</i>	
ASEAN and Theories of Regional Integration	11
<i>Dr. Hina Hassan Khaki</i>	
Media literacy – The real, interactive way	16
<i>Sabahudin Hadžialia</i>	
Police Reforms in India: Problems and Prospects	18
<i>Dr. Shiladitya Chakraborty</i>	
Sir Robert Filmer & John Locke’s Social Contract theory	24
<i>Vanlalvenpuia</i>	
Impact of Microfinance on Socioeconomic Development	30
<i>Ms. Yasha Bothra &amp; Dr. Ritu Sapra</i>	
Home Science: A magical field of self-management	37
<i>Dr. Anjuly Sharma</i>	
Socio-economic status of Tribes of Wayanad (Kerala)	40
<i>Dr. P. S. Joseph &amp; Raimol Pappachan</i>	
Role of SHGs in Tamil Nadu	47
<i>R. Nirmala Devi</i>	
Geodiversity for Biodiversity Conservation	52
<i>Dr. Pramod Ch. Sahu</i>	
Blockchain Technology & Banking Industry	56
<i>Oliver K.M. Aziator</i>	

### Unite or Perish!

The recent swearing-in ceremony of Karnataka chief minister H D Kumaraswamy, heading the Congress-JD(S) alliance government, had brought together opposition leaders in an unprecedented show of strength against the BJP-led Centre in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. This gathering is touted to convey the message that non-BJP opposition is one and in 2019 the country will witness a major change in national political situation. The ceremony was attended by national leaders and regional satraps, including Congress president Rahul Gandhi, his mother and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, JD(S) patriarch H D Deve Gowda, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, BSP supremo Mayawati and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and NCP chief Sharad Pawar.

The highlight of the ceremony, which took place exactly a year ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, was when leaders posed for a group photograph, clasping each other's hands and raising them, a show of solidarity being perceived as a possible harbinger of a broad-based anti-BJP alliance to take on the ruling NDA next year. While slamming the Congress-JD(S) combine + as an "opportunistic alliance", the BJP, on its part, described the presence of a host of opposition leaders at Kumaraswamy's swearing-in ceremony as a "celebration of corruption". Ahead of the ceremony, N Chandrababu Naidu and Mamata Banerjee called upon all regional parties to come together on a common platform to strengthen federalism. The TMC supremo asserted that they would keep in touch with all the regional parties so that they could work for the development of the nation, development of the people and development of the federal set-up. On being asked by the media persons whether the coming together of leaders of so many non-BJP parties heralded a common front against the BJP and NDA, the TDP leader said, "We want to promote more and more regional parties. We want to strengthen (regional parties). That is Mamata ji's and our party's mission and that's how we are working."

Undoubtedly, some critics point out that it is not yet clear as to how some of these parties would come together — like the TDP and Congress in Andhra Pradesh or a TMC and CPM in West Bengal —; nevertheless, in the wake of the kind of political re-alignment that has been seen recently (SP-BSP in UP, Congress-Janata Dal (S) in Karnataka and RJD-Janata Dal United in Bihar even if for a brief period), these critics concede that sworn enemies have come together when faced with a certain existential crisis in face of brute force of the BJP. According to one expert, none of the non-BJP opposition parties are in position to help each other: Say, SP in Karnataka or West Bengal or TMC in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, or TDP in Madhya Pradesh. Besides, the Opposition has till date not worked out common programmes or policies to offer to the people to seek a mandate for an alternative government in 2019.

Some analysts opine that bulk of the parties comprising non-BJP front are faced with an existential crisis and currently anti-Modism or anti-BJPism is their only guiding mantra, which is unlikely to let them thrive in 2019. Besides, these parties don't have a towering leader that can be acceptable to all the parties and effectively communicate with other regional leaders. No single opposition party is in a position to take on the electoral juggernaut of the BJP on its own. If the election results appeared to point to the need for opposition unity, the post-poll machinations and the swift and effective Congress-JD (S) resistance to the BJP's coup in Karnataka seems to affirm the possibility and feasibility of such unity. The Opposition's wait for the Modi bubble to burst on its own during the past four years didn't occur. And Opposition's failure to offer any serious and sustained opposition to the BJP on the ground made them drift towards a grand anti-Modi alliance as a last resort. Nevertheless, developments in Karnataka have altered the terms of alliance game in which the regional parties will now dictate the terms because the only choice is either unite or perish.

— BK