

A poll to rise like sphinx or sink like stone

Written by Administrator
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By Sidharth Mishra Saturday city is set to witness a political battle which would be fought in hand-to-hand combat mode on all the 70 seats of assembly with BJP's *karyakartas* pitted against Arvind Kejriwal's volunteers. BJP president Amit Shah, who has taken charge of the campaign, has strategized to put his team of combatants with a designated leader on each polling booth. On the other hand Arvind Kejriwal's party too has decided to fight till the last man standing.

Despite a very short history, Delhi's tryst with electoral politics is all set to see a major milestone in the making. In less than 25 years of the existence of legislative assembly, it's not just the hue of the leadership of the contesting parties which has undergone a metamorphosis but the city has also witnessed rise of a political force, which has come to represent aspirations of a substantial section of the electorate.

However, the X-factor in the polls would be the voter turnout. In 2013, with 67 percent of the electorate casting vote, the Capital broke the 61.75% turnout record it set in its very first assembly elections of 1993. The biggest beneficiary of this huge turnout was the newbie Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). With the Capital going for polls for a third time in 15 months, parties will have to watch out against any fatigue among the electorate especially with

corruption and price rise having not remained as passionate an issue as it were in 2013. No wonder the poll campaign this time was largely underlined by personality clashes.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP's mascot in all the assembly polls which has followed the May Lok Sabha elections, was perceived to be not cutting much ice with the voters, the party decided to pitchfork former police officer Kiran Bedi, a comrade of Arvind Kejriwal from the Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement, as its chief ministerial face. However, this too doesn't seem to have worked much to the advantage of party as the local leadership showed tell-tale signs of resentment at leaders and candidates being para-dropped by the high command.

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On the other hand, with its arsenal largely being the goodwill among the city's poor and socially disenfranchised Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Admi Party managed an edge as far as the perception about quality of candidature and preparedness of the party went. From carrying the cross of being the party which set the world record of the number of seats it forfeited security deposit on during parliamentary elections last May, AAP has bounced back to give the Bharatiya Janata Party a run for its money in just nine months time.

Incidentally what initially was believed to remain largely a bipolar election, nevertheless, in the last phase has shown signs of the third force emerging with the Congress raising the level of its campaign. Going by conservative estimates, the Congress, which ruled the city uninterrupted for 15 years, has managed to turn the fight triangular on about 20 seats. Their performance could make or mar the fate of the two protagonists.

On February 10, when the poll results are declared it could see Kejriwal rise like a sphinx or sink like a stone. For the BJP, a victory would be very hard-earned face saver but a defeat would certainly diminish the omniscient and omnipotent aura of prime minister. Whether his ministerial colleagues agree or not, Delhi polls are going to be referendum on the policies of Modi government as much on the politics of the Aam Aadmi Party.