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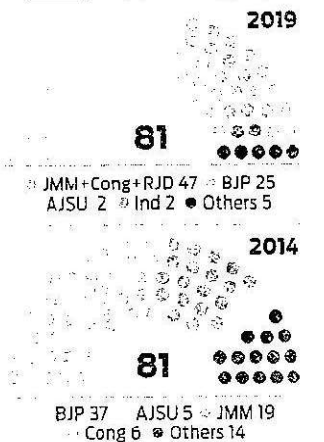
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ಪತ್ರಿಕಾ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: Indian Express ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE: 24/12/2019

Shrinking saffron



PARTY POSITIONS



Jharkhand jolt to the BJP, fifth to slip out

I.E. 24/12/19

Party pays for alienating former ally AJSU Party; tribals lose trust in CM; anger over tinkering with tenancy laws

MUKESH RANJAN @ Ranchi

A groundswell of distrust in the leadership of Chief Minister Raghubar Das, alienation of the Sudesh Mahato-led All-Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) and attempts to alter the twin tenancy Acts which shape tribal land rights seem to have brought about the downfall of the BJP and the victory of the JMM-Congress-RJD alliance in Jharkhand.

This is the fifth state in which opposition parties have managed to upstage and unseat the saffron party in the past one year, starting with Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh to Maharashtra recently. The only state where the BJP could form government again was in Haryana, that too after stitching together a post-poll alliance with the Jannayak Janta Party.

Das conceded defeat as the Opposition Mahagathbandhan won 47 seats while the BJP was reduced to 25 from 37 in 2014.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated JMM leader Hemant Soren,

tweeting: "Congratulations to @HemantSorenJMM ji and the JMM-led alliance for the victory in the Jharkhand polls. Best wishes to them in serving the state."



Hemant Soren to be CM

JMM leader Hemant Soren, the son of Jharkhand architect Shibu Soren, is set to take up the reins of the state for a second term

Tribal consolidation

Perhaps the biggest reason for the BJP's defeat was the alienation of the tribals, who constitute 36 per cent of the state's population. In 2017, the Raghubar Das government agreed to provide land to Adanis to set up a power plant in Koderma a tribal-backward caste dominated district. This was met with strong resistance from locals, leading to police firing and widespread outrage. Subsequently, his government sought to amend the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act, which had been in vogue since the British era.

The twin Acts protected the rights of the tribals wherein non-tribals could not acquire land. Das tried to attract big-ticket industries in tribal-dominated areas by amending the Acts.

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'Tribals angry at handing over land to corporates'

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The amendments were dropped in the face of Opposition fury and protests even by BJP legislators. But the Mahagathbandhan skilfully exploited the fears of tribals. "Local issues have been troubling the people here for the last several years, they cannot be fooled by talking about Ram Mandir and Article 370. The locals were angry at the handing over of tribal land to corporate houses by making changes in the Land Acquisition Act," JMM general secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya said.

AJSU factor

The breaking of the alliance with the All-Jharkhand Students' Union also proved to be a miscalculation. The AJSU,

dominated by the powerful Mahto caste, provided the bulwark for the BJP among OBCs. The shearing of their votes impacted both the parties, with the BJP's vote share coming down from 50.96% in the Lok Sabha polls in May to 33%.

The BJP won 25 seats, down from 37 in 2014. The AJSU's vote share fell to 6% and it managed to win only two seats, down from five the last time. The combined Mahagathbandhan vote share in the Assembly polls this time is about 36%.

BJP insiders also blamed the 'Maharashtra syndrome' for the distrust in AJSU. They said after the Sena allegedly backstabbed the saffron party and denied it a chance at regaining power in Maharashtra, the BJP was wary of AJSU's intentions.