

## Chiranjeevi's 'chariot' campaign set to roll next month

After the roaring success of his maiden public rally, Telugu superstar Chiranjeevi is gearing up for a state-wide tour atop a 'chariot' to popularise his new party Praja Rajyam.

The tour, likely to begin in the first week of September, will cover all 23 districts and is likely to serve as the campaign for assembly elections scheduled early next year.

With the mammoth crowds at the party's launch in Tirupati proving beyond doubt his star appeal, Chiranjeevi's aides were busy making plans for the 'yatra' and holding consultations on constituting the party executive and other committees to build an organisational structure.

The special vehicle, which will take the superstar to different towns and villages, has been designed on the lines of the famous 'rath' of matinee idol N.T. Rama Rao, who took state politics by storm when he launched the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 1982.

Chiranjeevi has been holding talks with his close aides, including brother-in-law Allu Arvind, brothers Naga Babu and Pawan Kalyan and party spokesperson Mitra.

They reviewed the Tirupati meeting and the lessons to be learnt, especially in crowd management. The stampede at the meet injured 50 people as the over 3,000 volunteers deployed by the party failed to control the frenzied fans.

Even the actor had a tough time in returning to his car after the meeting.

The core committee discussed ways to make the campaign tour more effective and the steps needed to control the crowds.

It is not yet decided whether Chiranjeevi will address public meetings at selected places or conduct road shows, touching as many towns and villages as possible.

The 53-year-old actor, from the Kapu community, will be focussing on nine districts in coastal Andhra as 100 assembly constituencies in the region have a sizeable Kapu population.

The actor will then cover the Telangana region, where the demand for separate statehood is again picking up momentum. After making remarks in favour of Telangana at his first meet, the actor will be eyeing support in the region that sends over 100 legislators to the 294-member assembly.

Though Chiranjeevi, or Chiru as he is fondly known, launched his party from Tirupati town in Rayalseema region, it is the ruling Congress that seems to firmly in the saddle in all four districts of the region.

Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy hails from Kadapa district while TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu comes from Chittoor.

Observers feel Chiranjeevi's party will alter the equations in state politics, dominated by two parties ever since thespian NTR launched the TDP.

NTR had then created record of sorts by coming to power within nine months after launching the party. Chiranjeevi's fans are confident that history will repeat itself.

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