

Gujarat BJP dissidents to float Sardar Patel Samiti

Rebels in Gujarat's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by former chief ministers Keshubhai Patel and Suresh Mehta are set to float a new body, the Sardar Patel Utkarsh Samiti.

But it is unclear what, if any, kind of tie up the Samiti will have with the Congress during assembly elections in December or whether the rebel leaders and their supporters will end up joining the main opposition party in the state.

Political sources say the Samiti's formation is bound to impact the battle of the ballot that Chief Minister Narendra Modi is determined to win despite rising intra-party dissidence.

The BJP rebels are making common cause with the Congress - bound as they are by their common hatred for Modi and a desire to see the end of his seven-year-long rule.

Goverdhan Zadaphiya, a former BJP home minister of Gujarat and one of the main campaigners against Modi, told IANS from [Ahmedabad](#) that the Samiti will be a 'non-political front'.

'This will be a non-political front. We will go around Gujarat to educate farmers how Modi has caused their ruin,' Zadaphiya said, without elaborating.

But other BJP sources argued that the Samiti could be the first step to work out some electoral understanding between the rebels and the Congress.

Some Congress leaders, including general secretary in charge of Gujarat B.K. Hari Prasad, Congress president Sonia Gandhi's political secretary Ahmed Patel and Textiles Minister Shankersinh Vaghela are now gathered in the state.

Some leaders in the Congress oppose the entry of BJP rebels in their party, citing the association of these rebels with the 2002 communal violence.

There are others in the Congress who argue that it will be better to make them join the Congress. Indeed, according to one source, some of the BJP rebels are keen to get into the Congress.

Congress sources point out that the party has to already contend with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and thus the Congress will be left with very few seats to contest if the Samiti remained an independent body and chose to fight the elections.

'A government formed by a front of disparate political entities on whose support the Congress may be dependent will be hampered by autonomous groups working outside the Congress,' said one Congress source.

A BJP MP ranged against Modi explained why the name of Sardar Patel had been incorporated into the Samiti.

'The BJP and more so (L.K.) Advani and Modi have tried to use the name of Sardar Patel to promote their agenda in Gujarat,' said the MP.

'We will educate the people on how Sardar Patel espoused the cause of the farmers and helped in their progress and development,' he added.

Supporters of Keshubhai Patel say that Patels have led Gujarat politics for decades but are feeling marginalized since the advent of Modi as chief minister.

Although Sardar Patel was a prominent Congress leader, BJP leaders, Advani and Modi in particular, often take his name while attacking the Congress as well as its president Sonia Gandhi.

The Samiti could help remind the Patels, who had switched their allegiance to the BJP after the death of Congress veteran Chimanbhai Patel, of their earlier links with the country's oldest party, explained a BJP rebel.

Faraz Ahmad (© IANS / India eNews)