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# In Bihar, a 'referendum' on Nitish's hitch-switch politics

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PATNA: The ongoing marathon Lok Sabha elections, nationally seen as a fight between PM Modi and the opposition, is here a referendum on chief minister Nitish Kumar, who has managed to stay in office since 2005 by changing sides twice in the past six years.

Nitish first snapped ties with BJP in 2013 after Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat, was declared NDA's PM candidate. A bitter Nitish called Modi a "jumlebaaz" while the latter said "betrayal" was in the Bihar CM's DNA. The barb came in 2010 when Nitish, at the last minute, called off a dinner he was to host for BJP delegates over an advertisement showing the two leaders holding hands. But that's just water under the Mahatma Gandhi Setu now.

Nitish's decision to end his 17-year alliance with BJP was marked by a crushing defeat at the hands of Modi and his followers in the 2014 LS election. The next year, Nitish went to friend-turned foe Lalu Prasad for a tie-up in the assembly election. Four years later, as he again leads the JD(U)-BJP combine in the LS polls, Nitish is all praise for the PM and seeks votes for him in the name of fast-track development of Bihar and national security.



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Nitish too has much at stake this time — BJP has given JD(U) an equal number of seats (17) to contest despite JD(U) winning only two seats in 2014. Nitish is the NDA face of development in Bihar and at every rally, he has been seeking his “wages from the people for work done in the past 13 years under his leadership”. Added to that, he harps on the PM’s deft tackling of terrorism and assures the electors that the country will be safe in the hands of Modi.

Lalu’s RJD, on the other hand, is demanding that Nitish be taught a lesson for ditching the alliance and defying the mandate of 2015 and going on to form the government with BJP.

Former colleague and former CM Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) chief Jitan Ram Manjhi agrees. “This may be Nitish’s last LS election... People applaud when we ask them to punish Nitish for cheating the electorate. This is proof enough that people will vote against his misdeeds and for choosing immoral allies to remain in power,” he says.

“Nitish feared Lalu’s son Tejashwi might become CM because RJD had more MLAs than JD(U). That is why he dumped RJD and jumped on Modi’s bandwagon again.”



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In 2015, RJD had won 80 seats compared to 71 by JD(U) and 27 by Congress. The three parties had fought together against BJP-led NDA in which Manjhi was also a partner before he joined the opposition mahagathbandhan.

Dismissing charges of political opportunism, JD(U) secretary general K C Tyagi says Nitish’s and Modi’s governance priorities are very much in line. “We have both chemistry and arithmetic in our favour. If we count the vote share of BJP, JD(U) and LJP in the 2014 general election, NDA this time will win 38 out of 40 LS seats in Bihar. Plus, the marginalised sections are with Nitish. It

is a referendum on five years of the Modi government, its performance strengthened by Nitish's good governance and development work," he says. Women too are with Nitish, say JD(U) leaders, with the ban on liquor saving households.

BJP spokesperson Rajeev Ranjan echoes the view: "Our tally will improve from 31 in 2014. Bihar has the highest GDP rate (11.3%) because Nitish has successfully implemented 130 central schemes launched by Modi."

But RJD spokesperson and Hilsa MLA Shakti Singh Yadav maintains that voting in the three phases has gone against Nitish. "There is antiincumbency and people have not forgotten how he turned down the people's mandate. The youth are angry over the failed promises of Modi and Nitish," he says

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