

Cong mending fences with outside allies

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Looking back and assessing the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's performance in the last four years seems to be the flavour of the week as it enters its last year.

The government, planning a low-key celebration as usual, is going to release a report card on its performance as it has already done on the last four occasions, followed by a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The only digression this year being an invitation each to the Samajwadi Party, with whom the Congress, the UPA's main constituent, shares a bitter-turned-better relationship, and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), with which it blows hot and cold.

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Both the parties support the UPA government from outside.

It is a sign of changed times that the Congress is mending fences with the SP, while the BSP has refused to attend the "coalition" dinner. BSP's parliamentary party leader Gandhi Azad confirmed that the UPA has sent formal invitations to all the BSP MPs as well as the party's senior leaders in Lucknow. "It's UPA's job to invite us and our prerogative of not attending the party," he said.

However, improving relations with the Samajwadi Party is one of the few bright sparks in what has been a dismal year for the ruling coalition. "It is very clear that the Congress has managed at least one political task, that of breaking up the Third Front before it could coalesce into an alliance," said a senior Congress leader.

Beset by troubles such as inflation and price rise and a growing economic slowdown globally, the UPA will be assessing its performance carefully watched by its Left allies. Left-inclined social sector organisations led by Annie Raja, wife of CPI leader and MP, D Raja, will be presenting their own report card on the government.

A group of NGOs have launched the Wada Na Todo (don't break promises) movement.

The BJP too has decided to issue a report card of what it terms as the failures of the government. "From price rise to the failure to handle terrorism, the UPA government has failed on all fronts and has even failed to complete the last 10 per cent of the Golden Quadrilateral project, such is the state of incompetence of the government," said BJP spokesperson Prakash Javadekar.