



NAME OF THE NEWSPAPER

THE ASIAN AGE

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Mr Kejriwal has a party

The birth of a new political party can hardly be deemed to be news in a country in which all manner of platforms emerge in months preceding elections. Apparently, there are some 900 registered parties in the country, though not all enjoy status with the Election Commission. But the party led by Arvind Kejriwal, which on Saturday was formally given the name of the "Aam Aadmi Party" by its promoters, is noticeably different from the run-of-the-mill outfits that dot our political skyline.

It has come in the wake of a year and a half of sustained public protests — which more often than not took on dramatic forms — on corruption within the nation's political and administrative systems. Not surprisingly, the forerunner of the party was the forum led by the high-profile septuagenarian, Maharashtrian social activist Anna Hazare, that went under the banner of "India Against Corruption". Mr Kejriwal was Mr Hazare's chief lieutenant. Organisationally they recently parted company

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when Mr Hazare took the view that a forum against corruption might stand in danger of losing its soul if it converted itself into a political party. Mr Kejriwal found himself unable to accept such a proposition.

From first appearances, AAP seems to be an attempt to create a party structure that will gather around it educated middle-class Indians and professional people that typically emerge from this class, namely those who have kept away from party politics. In part they have kept away because they have been busy making their professional (including business) dreams come true, partly also because they disdained the idea of rubbing shoulders with those beneath them in the urban and rural hierarchies, and in some part because gaining entry into political parties for people like them was not easy.

The present juncture appeared propitious for the launch of a new idea in the shape of a political party because corruption has indeed grown manifold, and fighting it in a comprehensive manner became a catchy slogan.

Back in 1885 the Indian National Congress had also been formed by the minuscule educated sections in a colonial setting. It had to plunge into mass struggle by mobilising and inspiring all classes, including the peasantry and the nascent working class, to become meaningful and begin to play a role that was history-making. The Communists were also led by middle-class intellectuals in the main. The Jan Sangh, the precursor of the BJP, took its rise in the Hindu nationalist ideology of the RSS and attracted urban lower middle classes and small traders, to begin with. The Lohia socialists were a medley of the Congress and the Communists with an accent on caste, not class. The AAP's programme and ideology remain unclear.