

INTERNECINE SQUABBLING: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE DISSONANCES WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN THE U.S.

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After a prolonged spell of costly indecisiveness, the U.S. House of Representatives has finally elected a Speaker, Representative Mike Johnson of Louisiana. Recent weeks have seen convulsions rock the House as Republicans struggled to find a consensus candidate to lead the majority in the Lower Chamber of Congress. After the political debacle of the ouster of the previous Speaker Kevin McCarthy on October 3, laying bare the deeply factionalised landscape of the House Republican caucus, several party notables tried and failed to secure the confidence of the House majority in their bids for the top post. Initially, multiple closed-door meetings failed to produce a consensus candidate. Heavyweights including Tom Emmer of Minnesota, Jim Jordan of Ohio and Steve Scalise of Louisiana, were unable to secure the gavel by cornering the minimum of 217 votes, despite being nominated to the role. While Mr. Johnson has now emerged as the Speaker, second in line for the U.S. presidency, after much confabulations and voting, the politically messy process of his win signals serious deadlock in the party and the Chamber.

In a sense, the intra-party fractures that impeded the House Republican caucus from taking forward funding bills relating to the U.S. federal government, Israel and Ukraine, reflect the contradictions between the Congressmen who support and are supported by former President Donald Trump on the one hand, and those who are not in that category, on the other. Shortly after Mr. Emmer pulled out of the contest, Mr. Trump described him on social media as a “Rino”, or ‘Republican in Name Only’, who “never respected the power of a Trump endorsement or the breadth and scope of MAGA”, and that it would be “a tragic mistake” to support him. Trump acolytes in the House took their cue from the 45th President, it appears, and they are a sizeable cohort. Looking beyond the political embarrassment of this rupture, it portends trouble for the Grand Old Party in the 2024 presidential election. It certainly does appear at this time as though Mr. Trump will win his party’s nomination by a considerable margin. However, many “traditional” conservatives do not side with him on hot button issues, including criminal charges that he faces, for example for obstructing justice in seeking to delegitimise the results of the 2020 presidential election. If the House’s Speaker saga indicates anything, it is that the dissonances within the Republican Party will sooner or later be manifested in popular anger among conservatives, and that might be an even greater barrier to Mr. Trump’s political ambitions than the opposition he faces from Democrats.

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