

Editorial

Monday, March 19, 2018

PS issue now stands as a litmus test for N. Biren Singh leadership

No one can predict the fate of the 12 Parliamentary Secretary, which the Chief Minister of Manipur N. Biren Singh had stated that they have already resigned following Supreme Court verdict.

The indication of the Chief Election Commission of India to a delegate of Manipur Congress MLAs during its meeting on March 16 at New Delhi showed that the CEC will act as according to the provision of the Constitution of India. This means chances of similar treatment to the 12 parliamentary secretary is high.

Hearing of the writ petition filed by MLAs Surjakumar Okram and DD Thaisii, at Manipur High Court praying of annulment of the impugned Manipur Parliamentary Secretary (Appointment, Salary and Allowances and Miscellaneous Provision) Act 2012 is scheduled on March 27.

Recent verdict of the Supreme Court of India which stated that legislature cannot overrule judgments by amending a law retrospectively as such overrule will amount to violation of the principal of separation of powers among the three organs clearly indicate that, the Repeal Bill of the Parliamentary Secretary Act is unlikely to get consent from the governor of Manipur. This also is a worrisome for the 12 Parliamentary secretaries appointed by the state government as there seems to be no escape route for them. A petition is filed by AAP government challenging the ban for MLAs disqualified for contesting the election for 3 years. Well, whether the 12 parliamentary secretaries can once more contest if disqualified depends on the ruling of the case going on at Delhi High Court.

Speculative Analysis: If the 12 MLAs are disqualified then the number of BJP and alliance MLAs will reduce to 26. Of this, 7 are from the BJP, 1 Independent, 1 from Trinamool Congress and 3 from NPF. What is more interesting is the stand of the eight congress MLAs who had joined and supported the N. Biren Singh led government. However the eight congress MLAs - Thounaojam Shyamkumar (Andro), Ginsuanhou Zou (Singhat), Ngamthang Haokip (Saitu), Yengkhom Surchandra Singh (Kakching), Oinam Lukhoi Singh (Wangoi), Sanasam Bira Singh (Kumbi), Kshetrimayum Biren Singh (Lamla) and Paonam Brojen (Wangjing Tentha), have not been given recognition as BJP members by the state legislative assembly, neither the there is no petition to the Manipur legislative Assembly for their disqualification for violation of the 10th Scheduled of the Indian constitution (Except against Shyamkumar who is a Minister in the government, and MLA Y Shurachandra).

If Chief Minister N. Biren Singh manage to tackle the issues by keeping intact the congress MLAs and followed the rules of law of this land. Then the number of BJP and alliance is still more than the number of Congress MLAs. Congress will be 21 and the strength of the BJP and alliance it is upto the Speaker's tribunal to maintain the number game.

Will the Congress strike? This is what every people of the state particularly the political analysts are keenly observing. As mentioned in this column earlier, the politics in Manipur always depend on who is in power at the center. Luckily, BJP still is in power at Center and the withdrawal of the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) is not going to give any impact as the BJP led NDA's number 314. Earlier the NDA strength was 336

The NDA had stormed to power with 336 seats in 2014, of which the BJP alone claimed 282 seats. However, a series of by polls that went against the saffron party meant that its tally in the Lok Sabha currently stands at 274 seats. When one adds the 11 allies the BJP still has by its side - Shiv Sena, JD(U), Apna Dal, LJP, SAD, RLSP, PDP, PMK, SWP, NPP and AINR Congress - the tally rises to 314.

For N. Biren Singh led government it is upto his wisdom on how to regain power even if by election is made compulsory.

The issue of Parliamentary secretary is a serious issue and its fall out after High Court verdict will be a litmus test for N. Biren Singh government.

Ration Card (NFSA) lost

I have lost my Ration Card (National Food Security Act) bearing number 389754 issued by Department of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of Manipur somewhere between Khewa Bazar to Lamlong Bazar along Tinsid Road on March 17, 2018. Finders are requested to handover it to the undersigned.

Sd/-
Ningthoujam Mema Devi
Moirangkampu Khewa Bazar
Imphal-East
Mobile No. 9615865655

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Rahul Gandhi just doesn't get it; beyond trashing Modinomics, there's nothing in Congress' economic resolution

By: Seetha
Courtesy: Firstpost

The Congress party's economic resolution, adopted at the party's eighty-fourth plenary session, ends with this line: "We have heard the clamour for change. It is now time for change." It would have raised some hopes had the resolution started with these words. But because they appear at the end of a document that only offers the same old cliches, it clear that the party under Rahul Gandhi just doesn't get it.

How else does one explain a proposal, in an accompanying resolution on agriculture, employment and poverty alleviation, that the party will "create a National Poverty Alleviation Fund and would impose a 5 percent cess on the incomes of the top 1% richest Indians", and use this money to provide scholarships to the underprivileged?

The Congress party has always occupied the centre-left space and it has clearly decided to stay there. Seen in that light, the five tenets of its economic policy doctrine are predictable, though trite:

1. Prosperity for all through equal economic opportunities without the fear of economic oppression, tax terrorism and overbearing regulation.
2. Carefully designed programs that focus on the needs and aspirations of the poor and the middle class.
3. Large investments by the State in education, healthcare and social safety nets and an efficient public service delivery system.
4. A conducive social and policy climate to foster business confidence, reward risk-taking and promote employment with security.
5. Focus on human development indicators along with economic indicators.

Much of the economic resolution presents vague generalities, apart from - quite naturally - the section that lambasts the Narendra Modi

government's economic management record. It rightly promises a simpler GST framework. It urges the government to strengthen both internal and external regulation and oversight of banks, but is silent on what it plans to do if it comes to power. It says the public sector is relevant, but does not say what must be done to revive it, or "place it on par with the private sector". It is completely silent on disinvestment. It laments languishing exports and urges the government to do something about it, but does not tell us what, it thinks, needs to be done.

When it does get into specifics - in the resolution on agriculture, employment and poverty alleviation - it treads on dangerous ground, trying to out-left the communist parties.

Does the Congress seriously think that its 'snatching from tycoons and giving to thea-wallahs' strategy will work? That, after all, is what the National Poverty Alleviation Fund is all about. As economist Ruchir Sharma said, while speaking at the News18 Rising India Summit: "Since 2014, 23,000 millionaires have left this country. Last year, 7,000 millionaires left India. The year before, it was 4,000. A major side-effect of this is that you need your own people to invest in your country. This affects domestic markets." If a 'suit-boot sarkar' has had this effect on the suited and booted, will not the so-called rich-ness lead to a further flight of capital from the country?

Now, do consider another proposal, which aims to strengthen the legal and penal provisions against traders who buy agricultural produce from a farmer below the minimum support price (MSP). Has any thought gone into how this will be implemented and what the consequences will be? Or has it been put there just to win some brownie points?

Agriculture is one issue on which both the resolutions have lit into the

present government. Fair enough. But what exactly will "a permanent Kisan & Krishi Majdoor Welfare Ayog with a constitutional status to oversee the welfare of the farmers and farm workers, guaranteeing them social security in old age" do? Will it ensure that the huge number of recommendations (many of them for market-friendly reforms) made by sundry commissions and committees will be implemented? And will creating a separate fisheries ministry ensure that the right policies are framed and, more importantly, implemented? The Modi government was rightly mocked for adding 'farmers welfare' to the name of the agriculture ministry. It was a meaningless gesture. The Congress proposals are also likely to be equally pointless. Why not, instead, throw the party's weight behind specific recommendations that have been part of public discourse for decades?

What is also surprising is the promise to "bring a loan waiver scheme for all small and marginal farmers in the country on the pattern of the farm loan waiver program of the UPA gov't in 2009 benefiting 3.2 Cr farmers"? This is a question that has been asked many times and bears repeating: if that had been so successful, why are farmers again in distress? This article shows how the 2008 loan waiver was not the success it was made out to be. Indeed, none other than Abhijit Sen, a member in the Planning Commission during the United Progressive Alliance's (UPA) rule, pointed out in this interaction with Firstpost, "debt cannot be seen as a continuing problem; it is rather the accumulation of other problems and solving that does not solve the underlying problem". There is precious little, in the doctrine, on these underlying problems and how they will be addressed.

There are some good points about helping farmers to shift to allied activities like animal

husbandry, floriculture, poultry farming and set up a network of food parks and special agricultural zones, and replicating Karnataka's success in electronic agricultural trading and renting farm equipment. But there is silence on reforms of state-level regulations on marketing and land leasing (two major hurdles in addressing agricultural distress).

The resolution talks about a comprehensive law on contract farming, but worryingly, this is focused on ensuring that farmers' rights are protected. Now, it cannot be anyone's case that farmers should be at a disadvantage in contracts, but a contract farming framework needs to provide a win-win for both sides. An overtly pro-farmer bias in the law will only see companies staying away or striking informal arrangements with farmers; it is the farmer who will lose in both situations.

To be fair, the resolutions do talk about reviving manufacturing, giving entrepreneurs more freedom, ending tax terrorism, providing a stable business environment. But the overall tone is that of a command-and-control mindset. The country certainly needs change - towards a more open and liberal economy. The Narendra Modi government's record on that front has been extremely patchy; it has, at best, been a more efficient UPA-3.

Earlier this year, K Raju, the head of Rahul Gandhi's office, in an interview, said: "I think he will be echoing the economic vision of Jeremy Corbyn of UK. It could be a blend of Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Dr Manmohan Singh's policies with a sharper focus on job creation." A party that mocked the current government for 'pakodonomics' appears set to usher in 'kicheidonomics'. The Indian economy doesn't need either. Meanwhile, the country's wait for a party that is genuinely right-of-centre in its economic policy continues.

National & International News

No-confidence motion not taken up; Govt says ready for discussion

Agency
New Delhi, Mar 19: The notices for no-confidence motion against the government could not be taken up today in the Lok Sabha as noisy protests by members from various parties disrupted proceedings, leading to adjournment of the House.

Amid the din, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the government was ready for discussion on any issue, including on the no-confidence motion.

As soon as the House met for Zero Hour after the Question Hour was washed out, members from TRS and AIADMK trooped into the Well carrying placards. While the TRS was demanding a rise in quota, the AIADMK was pressing for immediate setting up of the Cauvery river management board.

Soon after papers were laid on the table amid slogan-shouting by unrelenting members, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the government was ready to discuss any issue.

Some members have given notices for no-confidence motion and the government is ready for discussion on that as well, he added.

He also requested all parties to cooperate so that discussion can be taken up.

Speaker Sumitra Mahajan repeatedly requested the more than 25 members from the AIADMK and TRS standing in the Well to return to their seats.

As the uproar continued, Mahajan said she was duty-bound to take up the notices for no-confidence motion but could not as the House was not in order.

"Since the House is not in order, I will not be able to bring it... I am

sorry," she said before adjourning the proceedings for the day.

The notices have been given by YSR Congress member Y V Subba Reddy and two members from TDP - Thota Narasimham and Jayadev Galla. Both parties have been demanding special package for Andhra Pradesh, an issue on which the TDP quit the ruling NDA alliance last week.

While today was the 11th consecutive day that the proceedings were washed out, this is the second day that Speaker was not able to take up notices for no-confidence motion.

Earlier during Question Hour, members from the TDP, YSR Congress, TRS and AIADMK protested over various issues, including the banking scam,

leading to adjournment of the House till 12 noon.

Since March 5, when Parliament had reassembled for the budget session after recess, the Lok Sabha has been witnessing disruptions every day.

Last week, the House had passed the Finance Bill and the appropriation bills without any discussion amid similar protests.

SC dismisses PIL against Bihar CM Nitish Kumar

Agency
New Delhi, Mar 19: The Supreme Court today dismissed a PIL seeking Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's disqualification as an MLC on the ground that he had allegedly suppressed the fact that a murder case was pending against him from the poll panel.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra considered the chief minister's submission that he had disclosed the fact about the pendency of the criminal case to the Election Commission in 2012.

"We do not find any merit in the petition. It is dismissed," said the bench, also comprising Justices A

M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud.

"Election Rules say that he (Nitish) should declare it after the trial court takes cognisance of the case," the bench said, adding that it has been done.

The chief minister's counsel informed the court that the trial has been stayed by the Patna High Court. Moreover, no illegalities have been committed by the chief minister, the counsel said.

The PIL, filed by advocate M L Sharma, had alleged that there was a criminal case against the JD(U) leader in which he was accused of killing a local Congress leader

Sitaram Singh and injuring four others ahead of the Lok Sabha by-election from Bihar's Barh constituency in 1991.

The lawyer has sought cancellation of Kumar's membership of the state Legislative Council in accordance with the Election Commission's 2002 order that it was mandatory for candidates to disclose criminal cases against them in their affidavits annexed to the nomination papers. He claimed that the Bihar chief minister did not disclose the criminal case pending against him in affidavits since 2004, except for 2012.

Five killed in 24-hour Philippine hotel blaze

Agency
Manila, Mar 19: Five people have perished in a raging inferno that tore through a hotel and casino complex in Manila, authorities said Monday, after firefighters battled more than 24 hours to douse the flames.

Rescuers said billowing smoke, sometimes so dense it obscured the 22-floor Waterfront Manila Pavilion, had hampered their efforts to contain the blaze which started Sunday

morning. The dead were all casino employees, and another of the workers was still in critical condition. About 20 people were injured.

Some 300 guests and staff were evacuated safely, hotel and fire officials told a press conference. "We are hoping no one was left behind in the rooms. Our firefighters have not yet gone up all parts of the building," Metro Manila Development Authority

acting chief Jojo Garcia said. Some firefighters were treated after inhaling the dense smoke, which shrouded the chaotic scene on Sunday. "The smoke was so big, so you can just imagine, there was zero visibility and our firefighters had difficulty breathing. Even outside the building there was zero visibility and it was much harder to operate inside," Manila district fire marshal Jonas Silvano told radio DZBB.