

Editorial

Friday, January 19, 2018

The haunting shadows

There has been a visible increase in the development works being initiated in the state of late. These activities, if being brought to a fruitful conclusion, should propel our small state into one with adequate infrastructures and public amenities for replicating the success stories of places like Thailand, Singapore and even Vietnam which was considered a poor man's tourist destination only a few years back, but which have managed to accelerate their tourism-centric infrastructures to such an extent that there has grown a number of exotic tourist destinations which only the well-heeled could afford.

The potential for our state to be developed into a thriving tourist hotspot cannot be stressed enough, and it undoubtedly will become one, if the Act East policy comes into full effect, whether we are prepared for it or not. The niggling doubt that has been occupying the minds of the people who are eagerly awaiting the promised changes is a definite time frame for successful completion without the cost overrun that has been the hallmark of public infrastructure development.

However, a deeper look into the causes would reveal a dark undercurrent that is threatening to engulf the whole strata of public dealings in the state. The looming shadow of violence and influence has permeated every contract and supply works to the extent that every development work are now being allotted according to the hierarchy at which a contractor, immaterial of whether registered or not, has reach and proximity.

Credibility and sincerity has become the least important criteria for allotment of works, while the number of shadows one has behind one's back is the one most important factor that clinches the deal - any deal.

Money speaks louder than honesty and mammon worship has become the new religion of choice. It would not be much farther from the truth to state that material gain and not progress is the most important consideration, whether while governing the state or mobilizing the naïve public by certain vested interest for their own material gains, taking advantage of the lacunae in the administration and spawning sky-high ideologies.

The gullible people, meanwhile, ended up being caught in the crossfire, a collateral damage that will be written off and entered in the books of statistics. The convenient oversight of the Government on the innumerable undesirable things that is taking place in the administration needs to be checked. The earlier those at the helm of affairs realize this anomaly and actually initiate action to rectify it, the better will it be for all. And the onus of proving that the government has enough political will and strength to come out of this quagmire rests with the leaders who have doled out enough promises and hopes with folded hands at the election rallies, else the multiplying shadows behind their backs will obliterate them as well.

Natl. & Intl News

GST Council reduces tax rates on 29 goods and 53 categories of services

New Delhi, Jan 19: Goods and Services Tax Council has reduced the tax rate on 29 goods and 53 categories of services by bringing them in lower category. The new rates will be effective from 25th of this month. The GST rate on tailoring service has been reduced from 18 to 5 percent and tax on entry services to theme parks, water parks, joy rides, merry-go-rounds, go-carting and ballet from 28 percent to 18. The tax rate on construction of metro and monorail projects has been brought down from 18 percent to 12 percent. Besides, the rate on job work services for manufacture of leather goods and footwear has been reduced to 5 percent. The GST rate on transportation of petroleum crude and petroleum products including ATF has been cut down from 18 percent to 5 percent without input tax credit and 12 percent with it. The GST rate on Common Effluent Treatment Plant services of treatment of effluents from 18 percent to 12 percent. The GST rate on the Works Contract Services provided by sub-contractor to the main contractor to governments and local bodies has been lowered. The GST Council has also given tax exemption to services provided by and to FIFA and its subsidiaries related to any of the events under FIFA U-20 World Cup to be hosted by India. Briefing media after the council

meeting in New Delhi yesterday, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said, the Fitment Committee has recommended to the GST Council about this which were considered. Mr Jaitley said, it was also discussed to simplify the return filing process by merging all three types of GST returns into a single return. He said, Nandan Nilekani gave a detailed presentation on simplification of return filing process. He said, the Council veered around to the idea of registered entities continuing to file the return in GSTR 3B Form while moving to a system where supplier invoice captures details of the transaction. The Finance Minister said, the new process would be finalised in the next meeting of the GST Council after a written formulation is circulated to the states. Mr Jaitley said, the Council also reaffirmed the implementation of e-way bill system from 1st of next month. He said, the traders will have to mandatorily upload the e-way bill after its rollout. The new system will apply on inter-state road transport of goods beyond 10 kilometres with a value of 50 thousand rupees and above. This will bring uniformity across the States for seamless inter-State movement of goods. Mr Jaitley said, as many as 15 states have also decided to implement the provision for intra-state movements as well.

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Regional News

Nagaland stands divided on assembly election announcement

Courtesy TNN

Kohima, Jan 19: The announcement of election dates on Thursday invited a polarised response in Nagaland, with political parties welcoming the move and local organizations strongly protesting against it - with the apex tribal body of the state threatening to boycott the electoral process.

The demand for a resolution of the Naga crisis, talks for which have been on for decades, before the assembly polls has been gaining ground in the state. The Naga peace talks have centred around the creation of Nagalim, or greater Nagaland, encompassing Naga-dominated areas of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. In 2015, the Centre signed a framework agreement with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah). Since then, the Naga people have been hoping for a resolution and had expected it to come by the end of 2017, especially after President Ram Nath Kovind hinted at the possibility in December last year.

A team representing the Naga Hoho, the apex body of Naga tribes in the state, is in New Delhi to meet central officials about the demand. After the election dates were announced, it threatened to boycott the polls. "We urge the Naga people from different walks of life to gear up and defend their inherent rights, and disallow the holding of election in their hand," the Naga Hoho said. It added, "The Centre should understand that the Nagas were extending a helping hand to solving the decades-old Indo-Naga political problem, not asking for favours."

The powerful Naga Students' Federation (NSF) also announced that it will go ahead with the protest rally against the elections on January 23 as planned earlier. "The Election Commission declared the poll date without heeding the calls of the Naga people," NSF president Kesosul Christopher Ltu said. Ground-level work for the agitation has already begun, with posters - saying 'No Solution, No Election', '20 years of negotiation is enough', 'Naga solution for better tomorrow' and 'We want solution, not election' - plastered across the state. "The Nagas' struggle for their sovereign

right is bound not by the individual interests of political leaders but by the future interests of the Naga people," the NSF stated.

Amid the protests, political parties are clearly focussed on preparations for the election. "Though NPF has always wanted an early solution to the Naga political problem, it had been prepared to participate in the elections," party press secretary Sebastian Zumvu said. On Wednesday, party president Shurhaziel Liezietsu had said NPF would not want a repeat of what happened in 1998, when a demand for postponement of election eventually led to the party being derecognized and the Congress was handed the government as a "free gift".

For NPF, looking to hold on to power, party leadership issues stand resolved as of now. With Neiphiu Rio's departure to the newly-launched party National Democratic Progressive Party on Wednesday, the reins of the party now lie with TR Zeliang. As far as the alliance with BJP is concerned, Zumvu said any decision regarding renewal or severance of ties with the saffron party will be taken by the "appropriate authority". He added, "It is most likely that the NPF will go to the polls with other like-minded parties."

Congress was also not opposed to the announcement. "Party president Rahul Gandhi will officially launch our election campaign in the last week of January in Kohima with a mega rally," president of the state unit of Congress K Therie said. Congress said it may not field candidates in all 60 seats. BJP, on the other hand, was confident that it will have a key role in the election. "BJP will play kingmaker in government formation," party spokesperson K James Vizo said, adding that it will get more than 10 seats in the 60-member House. JD (U), which will initiate its maiden poll venture in the state, said this is set to be one of the complex elections in the history of Nagaland. "JD (U) is gearing up to take part in the election with a meaningful and pragmatic manifesto," convener of the Nagaland unit of JD (U) NSN Lotha said.

India to watch key North East polls with bated breath

Courtesy Indian Express

Kohima, Jan 19: Elections to the 60-member assemblies in three North-Eastern states—Tripura on February 18, Nagaland and Meghalaya on February 27—have never been so closely watched.

Nor would the March 3 results have ever been so awaited. It has little to do with the fact that Election Commission under CEC AK Joti has broken from tradition and EVMs would have 100 per cent VVPAT coverage. It's more political than that: The BJP is posing a challenge to entrenched ruling parties in all three states. Manik Sarkar's long-standing CPI-M Government in Tripura, the NPF's stranglehold over Nagaland and the Congress rule in Meghalaya, all are up against the BJP's ambitious foray into the North-East.

In Meghalaya, the BJP's plan to erase any Congress footprint in the NE comes riding partially on the shoulders of Conrad Sangma's NPP and two other regional outfits (though NPP denies there's any alliance).

In Nagaland, it's going against its own oldest ally, the ruling NPF, by propping up ex-CM Neiphiu Rio as the joint candidate of the fledgling NDPP and BJP. In Tripura, it's a direct fight between the Left and the saffron.

Manik Sarkar and Tripura are like what Jyoti Basu and West Bengal used to be: The general and an impregnable red-fortress. However, of late, the determined push Amit Shah has been giving has not shaken the CPI-M out of its comfort zone, but brought it close to contemplating a dire, restless future. Besides ethnic animosities, the BJP is banking heavily on the 10,000 school-teachers whose jobs the Left Government in Tripura could not regularize, and the 1.5 lakh government employees who have been denied their 10th Pay Commission hike.

Law and order is another factor. A CPI-M leader in the state quipped, "Even if there's a road accident, the BJP is blaming us for it."

Nonetheless, in the backdrop of two journalist killings, the law-and-order issue is finding resonance on the ground. However, the decade-long relative peace in Tripura, and

his delivery of water-roads-school-healthcare, is what Sarkar feels would offset all the negative campaigning. That it's a tough fight, even the CPI-M is not denying.

The BJP is most upbeat about Meghalaya. But surprisingly, its main ally NPP's Conrad, told TNIE that his party is "fighting elections alone—53 of 60 seats—no alliance with anyone, neither BJP nor any regional party. How can I deny tickets to my own MLAs? I've to run my party here."

Conrad refuses to explain why he has chosen not to contest all 60 seats. Whether he may opt for an alliance with the NCP, his father P A Sangma's former party, is also not clear. The BJP, meanwhile, too is contesting all seats and is confident of forming the government. The Prime Minister himself kicked off the campaign even before the dates were announced with an Rs 90,000 crore package for Meghalaya.

The Congress is fighting with its back to the wall. But a prominent N-E MP close to Rahul Gandhi, when asked about the Congress strategy for Meghalaya said, "We're only focusing on Karnataka."

In Nagaland, however, the Congress has been haranguing the ruling NPF for its "doublespeak": for breaking away from BJP in the state, while supporting it in Parliament. The break came after NPF suspected an Arunachal kind of plan to destabilise its government.

On record, neither Chief Minister TR Zeliang nor his leaders want to confirm if they are not in alliance with the BJP. The Naga accord is expected to play a vital role. "Even if the one-party rule of NPF in Nagaland does not end with this election, the BJP will come into its own in the state," despite it being a Christian majority one, says an old Nagaland negotiator.

Name Changed

I, the undersigned, **Thiyam Suneeta Devi** (New name) previously called **Thingujam Ongbi Suneeta Devi** (old name) doing Nursing Sister and wife of Thingujam Achouba Singh of Uripok Bachaspati Leikai Imphal, West, Manipur, solemnly declare that, I wholly renounce/ relinquish and abandon the use of my former name **Thingujam Ongbi Suneeta Devi** and in place thereof, I do hereby assume from this date the name **Thiyam Suneeta Devi**.

Sd/-
Thiyam Suneeta Devi

Political Parties of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Tripura welcomes announcement of Poll Schedule

Agency

Kohima, Jan 19: Political parties in Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura welcomed the poll schedule announced by the Election Commission yesterday and said they are fully geared up for the assembly polls. Meghalaya and Nagaland will go to poll on February 27, and

Tripura will vote on February 18. In Nagaland, the Naga People's Front is leading the government, while the Congress is ruling in Meghalaya and the Left is in power in Tripura. The NPF said that it supported early settlement of the Naga issue, acceptable to all sections of the people. The Congress in

Meghalaya while welcoming the poll schedule, expressed hope that the poll would be conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner, and hoped that it would retain power in the state. The ruling CPI-M in Tripura said the party would extend all cooperation for conducting a smooth and peaceful election.

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