



Political uncertainty in N. Biren Singh government; But nothing is impossible in Politics

Everything is fair in love and war. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh anguished and seemingly frustrated announcement at which he stated that - "I will get the result for what I did; they will get for what they did" indicated possible change in the government soon. For the first time in Manipur's political history, a Chief Minister announced the media that reshuffle in the government will be done within this month. The announcement by Chief Minister is significant as it coincided with rumours talking around about the anger of some BJP top profile leaders on the differences of opinion regarding the allotment of portfolios in the propose reshuffling of the Ministry.

The apprehension among the coalition partner NPP - as there is a possibility of dropping some of the Ministers, all this development in the post 17th Lok Sabha Election says that there is political uncertainty in the N. Biren Singh led government.

Now, political analysts saw two groups emerging in the BJP led government. When media speculated a crisis over the allotment of portfolio, political analysts on the other hand are serious over a probable change of Chief Minister. However, they are of the opinion that such a change could only be happened as per the wisdom of the Central leadership.

The downfall of the Congress party across the nation is also one factor that is giving impact to the Manipur's political theatre. The resignation of the top profile Congress MLAs from their respective post at the MPCC also talks volumes even though they declared they will continue to work for the congress party.

"Nothing is impossible in politics and this is politics", former Chief Minister of Manipur Radhabinod Kojima once said while talking to reporters soon after he joined Samanta Party to become the Chief Minister of Manipur in early 2000. And the then Chief Minister is still right, nothing is impossible in politics, particularly in Indian politics. The tenth schedule of the Indian Constitution is now converted as a toothless tiger. The person in the chair of the speaker of the house who is the guardian of the constitution and legislative affairs is now above everything - on whether to follow the Tenth Scheduled of the anti defection law enshrine in the constitution of India or not.

People appreciated when law makers they elected no matter they violated the constitutional provisions, nobody showed seriousness when MLAs illegally defected from their party to get benefit of their own by joining other political party.

'Ideology' is a joke of the Manipur's politicians and anything they did is forcibly justified as everyone is after money and power.

Points wanted to bring here is that will there be a change in the leadership of the BJP legislative wing by replacing the present one? Or will the matter settled after the visit of central BJP leaders?

BJP National Secretary, in charge of North East states, Ram Madhav has arrived in the state along with organization Secretary Ajay Jamal to take stock of the new development in the state.

Interestingly, Ram Madhav is the one who announced N. Biren Singh as the leader of the BJP Legislative Party during a crucial party meeting held soon after the Assembly election at Hotel Classic Grande. In that meeting Prakash Goel, Ram Madhav, Prakash Javedkar and Prahar Patel were the main decision makers of the BJP.

The crack in the state BJP which emerges in the BJP led government need to be mended, but how? Will it be the top profile BJP leaders from the state or will it be those Central leaders who will decide on how to mend the crack? This is a million dollar question.

As for the present Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, he is aware of what is a happening in his government. His frustrating announcement regarding reshuffle after the cabinet meeting held at Ukhrul this week can be interpreted in two ways. One - he is confident in protecting his seat; Two- he want to sent message to dissidents on how hard is him. But both showed that his chair is shaky.

A stitch in time save nine, remember the proverb - and instead of hot decision better remain cool and stitch the crack by understanding the anger of his colleague, or else - people will only say that 'Everything is fair in love and war' if in case there is a change in the leadership.

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Oxford English Dictionary defined stratagem as a plan intended to outwit an opponent.

After reading and following the exchanges of Nagaland's most followed political writer Mr. KK Sema (Retd. IAS) with the NSCN-IM and also the southern Nagas represented by its younger populations. I am compelled to conclude for time being that the GOI first stratagem is the plan of setting up of statutory body named Pan-Naga Cultural Body empowered with Executive authority, Budgetary and negotiating powers to function without territorial limits in all Naga inhabited areas as per the salient contents of Framework Agreement (FA) without territorial integrations. The Pan-Naga Hoho body will have a special and separate budget to cover all the Naga inhabited areas. GOI knowing such proposal without land integration is likely to be opposed not only by the Naga populations but more sternly by the neighbouring states who have warned GOI that any attempt to disrupt their respective states cultural, economic and political lives will not be tolerated has agreed to set up Pan-Naga Cultural Body.

GOI second stratagem is to do nothing but delay signing the final agreement seeing the Naga factions refusing to make any compromise on their earlier stand, for instance, separate flag and separate constitution to be incorporated in the Constitution of India. By now, Nagas ought to be wise enough to know the limits of their strength and whether it will do the people any good by going back to the Jungles in this age. Compromise is the essence of diplomacy.

I may be wrong but so far any available information's we have on this Pan-Naga Cultural Body is from the article first appeared in Morning Express on 16.09.17 titled Pan-Naga Hoho under Indo-Naga Framework Agreement by Mr. KK Sema (Retd. IAS).

I present the following ten points reminding the Naga factions, Naga legislators, Tribal Bodies, CSOs, state politicians (active and retired), Church bodies, public-spirited individuals, student and youth bodies to vigorously initiate inclusive public discourse upon such proposal to reach at consensus preface to defeat the GOI stratagem before things go out control:

1. Can all factions mutually agree to this Pan-Naga Cultural body without territorial integration, in case of opposition from some factions, will GOI forced factions to agree to this set

Protective thinking: Government of India Stratagem

up as part of the final settlement or leave the factions to decide by themselves through violent confrontations like in the past?

2. Can all the factions have equal representations to Pan-Naga Cultural Body?

3. Will the Nagas of Nagaland and Nagas in surrounding states agree to be governed by this Pan-Naga Cultural Body without territorial integration? Before territorial integration is materialized.

4. Will this Pan-Naga Cultural Body replaced the Nagaland Legislative Assembly? If so, will the legislators and the electorates agree to such settlement? What about Naga legislators/elected members of Autonomous council in surrounding states?

5. In case all factions agree to send representations to Pan-Naga Cultural Body, how will the factions represent, under the name of their factions or on behalf of the people/tribes.

6. Has Naga legislators, tribal bodies given enough pressure to all the factions to agree to this Pan-Naga Cultural Body or are legislators and tribal bodies secretly plotting along tribal and regional lines. I believe only the sincere and courageous efforts of Naga legislators and tribal bodies can help bring any settlement or another round of chaos.

7. Can all factions after agreeing to

this Pan-Naga Cultural Body without territorial integration sincerely seeks democratic process to achieve territorial integrations as GOI have made their position clear again and again that territorial integration can only be achieved by following the democratic political processes?

8. In case all factions make use of Pan-Naga Cultural Body, how will they deal with opposing neighbouring states?

9. Are the legislators and tribal bodies doing enough to make different factions work side by side for the common good and not see each other as mortal enemies filled with vengeance?

10. How long will the interim period be? More importantly, when the interim period is over, will the civil government be established following a fair democratic process? If the above mentioned ten points need thorough deliberations followed with right actions at the right time if the above-mentioned stakeholders are really sincere in their approach to protect the future of the economically and educationally backward Nagas living in the Indian Sub-Continent. Or will the factions carry on their power struggles among themselves by claiming to represent the voice of the entire Nagas without even checking the number of followers in their designated camp.

The 2019 Elections Came Down to Money, EVM Machines and the Media

Courtesy The Wire
By : M.G. Devasahayam

Within a week of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections coming to a close, the Election Commission (EC) constituted working groups headed by senior functionaries to review specific areas of concern. The EC need not have bothered with this post mortem; it is clear to everyone that this election was dominated by three 'M's: money, machine and media. The fourth 'M' - the model code of conduct - was reduced to waste paper.

Money
The total expenditure on this election is estimated to have been a staggering Rs 60,000 crore, making it the most expensive in the world and more than double the 2014 polls, according to the Centre for Media Studies (CMS). As per the report, out of this the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party spent close to Rs 27,000 crore - or 45%.

CMS chairperson N. Bhaskara Rao, said, "The Mother of all corruption lies in the spiralling election expenditure. If we are not able to address this, we can't check corruption in India." Sadly, the major source of this money is corporate, that too dubious.

This has happened because of the introduction of electoral bonds - a retrograde measure that radically alters the transparency of electoral funding. By obscuring the identity of a bond's purchaser and recipient from everyone but the State Bank of India, there is an unfair advantage to the party in power at the Centre, undermining the EC's oversight role and depriving voters of their right to determine if the ruling party is unduly favouring its donors. In the absence of transparency, one does not know how much money went into the BJP's coffers through this devious route.

Recently, *Gfiles Magazine* made a disturbing revelation: "The resources by BJP were collected mainly through NRIs, a big base of the BJP and top industrialists. BJP and Modi do not believe in conventional fund collection. Sources disclosed a whopping collection done mainly by three highly profitable fund holders- the chemical and liquor lobby, the tobacco lobby and the arms supplier lobby. All powerful lobby facilitators were in touch with BJP party president Amit Shah... Guess how much has been collected? One source close to

the arms lobby put the figure at around two billion dollars..."

This has not been repudiated.

Machine
The electronic voting machine (EVM) is a device with no transparency. Its integrity has been challenged since its introduction in 1999. The controversy flared up in 2009, soon after the United Progressive Alliance's repeat victories in parliamentary elections. The most well-articulated challenges to the EVM's integrity then came from those aligned with the BJP - G.V.L. Narasimha Rao, presently Rajya Sabha MP, maverick Subramanian Swamy, and the party's founder and senior most leader L.K. Advani. But with the BJP's victory in 2014, these EVM haters suddenly turned EVM worshippers.

Even the basic premise that the micro-controllers used in EVMs are 'one-time programmable' is under serious challenge. They contain three kinds of memories, including 'flash' memory (which can be electrically erased and reprogrammed), which allegedly makes it open to data manipulation. Voting on EVMs also does not adhere to democratic principles in the same way as the paper ballot system, which can be examined while casting the vote and verified during counting. In the interest of democracy, these machines should have been abandoned long ago. But the EC has been holding on.

On October 8, 2013, the Supreme Court directed the EC to have a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) system attached to all EVMs. The main purpose of this was to bring some semblance of examinability and verifiability in the casting and counting of votes. Therefore, without counting VVPAT slips in a significant percentage of polling stations, this purpose will remain unrealised.

In defiance of this basic principle, through its letter dated February 13, 2018, the EC directed state chief electoral officers to mandatorily verify VVPAT paper slips in only one randomly selected polling station (a sample size of just 0.5%) in each assembly constituency. This defeated the objective of installing VVPATs in all EVMs.

Representations to the EC by the Forum for Electoral Integrity and Constitutional Conduct Group of retired civil servants seeking a sample size of at least 25% went in vain. This was despite our meetings and engagement with chief election commissioner O.P. Rawat until he retired on December 1, 2018. We were supported by an expert opinion on statistical sample size - S.K. Nath, former director general, Central Statistical Organisation - and an international consultant who had suggested a sample of up to 30%.

We found out later that this move towards EVM integrity was being sabotaged from within the EC itself. The matter then went before the Supreme Court in a writ petition in which I was the lead petitioner. The court admitted our petition in early January 2019, and issued a notice to the EC. It was at this stage that 21 political parties entered the fray by filing a separate PIL seeking 50% VVPAT slip count.

The deputy election commissioner (DEC) in charge of EVMs filed a counter-affidavit making false claims. He even used the absurd report issued by a three-member Indian Statistical Institute committee, which took elections in the entire country as a single event and said that tallying votes in 479 random booths (0.05%) was enough to verify the fairness of the elections.

On verification it transpired that this "committee" was not one set up by ISI Kolkata and the report submitted in the Supreme Court was not official. It was a private one done carried out by the director, ISI Delhi at the request of the DEC to resolve the issue of VVPAT sample size, associating two other 'experts' on an individual basis. Our expert (Nath) was not consulted. The Supreme Court, though, had no time for democratic principles, public confidence and electoral integrity. So, in an abrupt judgment dated April 8, 2019, the court granted a sample size of five booths per assembly constituency - increasing it from a microscopic 0.5% to a minuscule 2%.

We had asked for a reasonable 30% and political parties wanted 50%. We, and the political parties, then filed a review petition in the Supreme Court with evidence of EVM-VVPAT fraud and malfunctioning in the first three phases of the 2019 elections. We also

brought up the misrepresented report submitted by the DEC. The court summarily dismissed the review petition on May 7, 2019.

In utter desperation, the 21 political parties pleaded with the EC to at least manually count the measly 2% VVPAT slips upfront and do the verification before the main electronic count so that the integrity of the electoral process could be tested. But the EC rejected this demand and pushed the "verification" to well past midnight. On May 23, not a single VVPAT slip was counted and verified before the entire electronic count was done, results announced and celebrations finished. Now there are reports of a possible mismatch or excess counting. Tallying a reasonable number of VVPAT slips with the electronic count is a way to convince people of the integrity and fairness of the elections. Even without the demand, the EC should have done this *suo motu* as soon as doubts surfaced about EVMs.

Media
On the media front, the BJP and Narendra Modi exercised a near-complete hegemony. The mainstream media behaved like mercenaries without once questioning the integrity or fairness of the electoral process. As is known, the BJP spent a fortune during this election. There was not a single street, circle, road, petrol station, highway, social media site or newspaper not flooded with the pictures of the prime minister and his election slogans. All TV channels that are members of Indian Broadcasting Federation were issued release orders by the BJP.

The Centre's track record during the last five years and its serious acts of commission and omission are well known. Yet, the mainstream media's role in all this was at best condescending, not critical. They not only failed the people in the critical task of informing them of this collapse, some even rationalised and justified these excesses and failures.

People were also not informed that a corrosive combination of the three 'M's could hijack democracy. Now that this has happened, are we stuck with an abtoss around our neck? The jury is still out.

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