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Challenges before the new Manipur government

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The recently held state assembly elections in Manipur were mired with widespread proxy voting and mass manipulation of photos leading to not only one but two re-polls. Despite the poor handling of the 120-day economic blockade imposed on the two national highways by Sadar Hill Districthood Demand Committee (SHDDC) and a counter blockade by United Naga Council in the latter part of 2011, an 11-party opposition alliance during the elections, and a ban of Congress candidates from contesting and joining its rallies or campaigns by Coordinating Committee (CorCom) of the six valley insurgent groups, the Congress comes out victorious capturing an overwhelming 42 seats out of the 60 assembly constituencies. Their success in the valley is mainly attributed to the party's vocal stand on the territorial integrity of the state. The other added advantage to the state Congress is their party being in power at the centre.

As soon as the Congress resumes the state government it makes a clear statement that roads and electricity would be their first priority in this tenure. While other states in the region are talking about all-weather road, the better roads in Manipur are potholed and most of the block and inter-village roads are unmetalled. It is a common experience that newly metalled roads started developing cracks within few months. Recently a locality in Imphal stalled the black topping work of their locality's road due to substandard works. They claimed that the non-adherence to prescribed work quality has resulted in cracks and cave-in even before black topping work of that stretch of road is completed. Such sub-standard quality of black topping is the result of corruption from top to bottom in the level of hierarchy in such projects with many external interferences.

It is a well known fact that Manipur has a bitty two hours of electricity supply per day. The common people blame the government for such erratic power supply. And the government blames the people for non payment of electricity bills and rampant power theft. A day after a PIL was filed in the electricity department, a massive electricity bill collection drive was launched last year in greater Imphal area where lakhs of rupees was collected and two dozens jailed for power pilferage and also electricity bill defaulters under the Electricity Act, 2003 (amended in 2007).

Expectations from the present government will be enormous for the Kukis who have elected eight Congress MLAs out of the nineteen seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes. The SHDDC had withdrawn the indefinite bandh imposed on the two National Highways after 92-days when a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by representatives of the Manipur government and SHDDC leaders on October 31, 2011. The MoU promised for the declaration of the Sadar Hills areas as a district as soon as the Committee on Reorganisation of Administrative and Police Boundary (CRA&PB) submit its report. The CRA&PB was to submit its report in three months time but it sought for another three months. By this time the CRA&PB is expected to have its final report and as soon as the state government stabilises itself politically and financially the decision on Sadar Hills is expected. If this is delayed again Manipur may have to face another bandh from SHDDC.

The present Congress government in the state has also the additional burden of initiating dialogue and resolving the more than two decades old Kuki insurgency during this tenure. There have been rumblings from different groups who have signed Suspension of Operations under Kuki National Organisation and United Peoples Front on August 22, 2008 to initiate political dialogue since last year.

While the hope for territorial integration of Naga inhabited areas in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam with Nagaland is dim with the central government's stance not to break the territorial integrity of the present states, the Manipur government will have to deal with the demand for "Alternative Arrangement" for the Manipur Nagas within Manipur.

The rising level of crime rate and corruption in the state is of great concern. In recent times there have been increasing incidences of rape, murder, rampant extortion by militant groups, the involvement of state forces in smuggling of narcotics and illegal trade, corruption of functionaries in all departments of the state, etc. The end or continuance of this grim situation depends on how well the newly inducted Home Minister of the state, Gaikhangam Gangmei fares with his portfolio.

To slowly wipe-out the prominent description about Manipur in the existing literatures and media reports as a state with "perpetual cycle of insurgency, community conflicts, drug trafficking, abductions and killings", the present government needs to take a proactive role and commit itself towards achieving the goals of resolving conflicts, combating corruptions and emphasising good governance.

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