

MEGHALAYA TO HAVE A HUNG ASSEMBLY

Elections to the 60 member Meghalaya Legislative Assembly being held today would throw up a hung verdict leaving the field open for parties to cobble together a meaningful and workable arrangement for the next five years.

In a pre-poll survey conducted by Peoples Pulse, a Hyderabad based political research organization, the ruling Congress emerged as the single largest party with 19-24 seats. The NPP would follow with 10-13 seats. The UDP would get 6-9 seats and the BJP would get 2-5 seats. Independents and other regional parties would get 7-12 seats. For any survey there is a margin of error of + or – three percent. The report did not factor last minute developments, which might have influenced the voter.

NPP, though labeled as a national party, is basically a Garo Hills based party. Yet it is not performing well in its area of influence. Our survey showed that in the 24 seats in Tura region the Congress would get 8 seats, NPP would get 7, BJP would get 3 and Independents would get three with the GNC, NCP and UDP would get one seat each.

It's pertinent to mention here that the Congress stood as the only party have a pan-Meghalaya appeal while all the other parties are limited to various regions of the state.

Peoples Pulse conducted a pre-poll survey from **February 15 to February 19** with a sample size of **1,200**. The survey was conducted in 20 Assembly constituencies selected on the basis of Population Proportionate Size (PPS) methodology. On the same basis three polling stations from each Assembly constituency and 20 samples from each of those polling stations were selected. Caste and ethnicity was represented on the basis of their proportion in the population and gender was given equal representation.

NEHU, Shillong political science research scholars did the fieldwork. NEHU's Prof RK Satpathy, Peoples Pulse senior associate and Phd from CPS, JNU, Dr Sajjan Kumar trained the research scholars. NEHU Miss Mary Kurbah supervised the fieldwork. University of Hyderabad's doctoral scholar Mr Bathula Suresh Babu did the data entry, analysis and report compilation.

What could bother the BJP, which is striving for a meaningful presence or its potential allies, is the fact 70 percent of the voters does not want any regional party to have a post-poll alliance with the BJP. This is a literal extension from the response we got on pre-poll alliance. Here 74 percent rejected the idea of any pre-poll alliance with the BJP.

45 percent of the voters ticked development as the single largest issue in the 2018 elections. The next issue was unemployment with 25 percent of the voters identifying it.

When it came to the important criteria they consider before making their choice, **53** percent of the voters said the candidate was the most important criterion. **22** percent and **15** percent of the voters said that state government's performance and the party were the other most important criteria.

Now given the importance the voter is attaching to the candidate, it needs to be mentioned that a considerable number of Congress leader have moved to other parties. It needs to be watched the kind of impact this would have.

Here, when asked if the Mukul Sangma government should be given another chance 38 percent said 'No' and 22 percent said 'Yes'. Interestingly as many as 40 percent of the voters said 'Can't Say'. Further on whether they would re-elect their present MLA 38 percent said 'No' and 34 percent said 'Yes'.

Mukul Sangma stood tall among all the others when it came to the people preference as the next Chief Minister. 16 percent preferred him back again. When asked to rate his performance, 50 percent said it was okay and 17 percent found it good. Almost a third of the electorate, 32 percent rated it as bad.

We also asked about the National Green Tribunal banning rat-hole mining to protect the environment. 71 percent did not support it, while 28 percent backed it.

On the issue of delivery of government schemes 71 percent said they did not benefit from any scheme. 28 percent said they have availed a government scheme.

The BJP has apparently hamstrung itself with issues like beef ban, denial of visas, attacks on churches, etc have added to the perception that it is an anti-Christian party in a Christian dominated state. The NPP did not help its cause as it allowed itself to be seen as the 'B' team of the BJP.
