

Polling for 6 Assam, Meghalaya assembly seats ends largely peacefully



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The voting under by-polls in six assembly constituencies of Assam and Meghalaya, conducted to fill up the vacant seats (as the respective legislators had shifted their focus to the national politics after winning the recently conducted Lok Sabha polls), ended largely peacefully on Wednesday evening with a satisfactory over 70% voters' turn out. The fate of all candidates is stored in the electronic voting machines, which will be opened on 23 November next. Along with these seats, by-polls for over 40 assembly constituencies (along with two Lok Sabha seats) in other parts of India are on the card along with the State assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand before the counting day.

Assam's Samaguri assembly constituency remained in the media headlines for wrong reasons since the poll date was announced by the Election Commission of India. Frequent tussles between the supporters of various political parties were reported from the constituency in central Assam. Political violence even claimed the precious life of a BJP supporter and left many others injured. An incident of firing was also reported from Mari Puthikhaiti village targeting Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislator Jitu Goswami. Three journalists were also allegedly intimidated by the Congress supporters.

No doubt, a number of claims and counter-claims were raised by both the ruling BJP and opposition Congress leaders. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, also in charge of the State home portfolio, criticized the opposition Congress for resorting to violence under cover of darkness to frighten the BJP workers. The saffron leader however asserted that no one will be allowed to sabotage or undermine the democratic process in the State. It was responded to by the Congress leaders alleging that the BJP workers were creating troubles to garner support for their candidate in the by-polls.

Samaguri assembly seat, represented by Congress veteran Rakibul Hussain for five consecutive terms, was vacated after he won Dhubri LS constituency (defeating AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal by over 10 lakh votes). Now Hussain wants to hand over the Muslim majority Samaguri constituency to his young son Tanzil Hussain. The ruling BJP also fielded a young leader and incidentally Diplu Ranjan Sarma was the only non-Muslim candidate in Samaguri as other parties (including Aam Aadmi Party) batted for minority leaders for the by-polls. As the Muslim-centric AIUDF avoided the electoral race in Samaguri, it's expected to be a frontal battle between the Congress and BJP candidates there.

Dholai (SC) and Behali seats continue to be favourable for the ruling party, where the first one was vacated by Parimal Suklabaidya to fight successfully in LS polls from Silchar Parliamentary constituency and the second one was left by Ranjit Dutta to fight for Sonitpur LS seat fruitfully. The BJP has fielded Nihar Ranjan Das in Dholai (contested by Congress candidate Dhrubajyoti Purkayastha and others) and Diganta Ghatowal in Behali assembly constituency (electorally challenged by former saffron leader Jayanta Bora, Asom Sanmilita Morcha supported CPI(ML) candidate Lakhikanta Kurmi and others).

Sidli (ST) assembly seat was vacated by Jayanta Basumatary (United Peoples' Party-Liberal) to get elected from Kokrajhar LS seat. Now Nirmal Kumar Brahma is fighting to retain the seat for the BJP ally against the challenges primarily from Congress nominee Sanjib Warle and Bodoland People's Front (BPF) candidate Suddha Kr Basumatary. Another important ally to the ruling BJP alliance Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) put Diptimoyee Choudhury for Bongaigaon seat against Brajenjeet Sinha of the Congress.

A recent talk show, telecast by a Guwahati-based satellite news channel DY365, discussed various electoral issues reflecting in Assam ahead of the by-polls in five constituencies. Anchored by senior television journalist Snigdha Sikha, the show highlighted different perspectives of elections in the State with a serious observation that the electoral system in India needs an urgent reform. Joining the discussion, aired live and repeated telecast next day, this writer argued that all five assembly constituencies needed the polls as the legislators participated in the last general elections successfully and shifted their focus to the Parliament. It could have been evaded if the political parties prevented these legislators from fighting in the national polls till term is over.

Senior media personality Adip Phukan expressed serious concern over the incidents of pre-poll violence in the State, which was otherwise unheard of across the region. He also remained critical to AGP leader Phani Bhusan Choudhury who had recently won from the Barpeta LS seat and thus a by-election was necessitated in his assembly constituency Bongaigaon. But surprisingly, the AGP put Choudhury's wife as the party nominee in the by-polls. Phukan lamented that Choudhury represented Bongaigaon assembly constituency for four decades together and when it was time to hand over the responsibility to another party leader he (also the leaders of AGP) could repose faith on a house wife only.

Not only Choudhury, the same tendency was shown by Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma also, as he put his wife Mehtab Chandee Agitok Sangma in the by-polls for Gambegre assembly constituency in Garo hills locality. National People's Party (NPP) nominee Mehtab Chandee is challenged by the Congress candidate Jingjang Marak, BJP nominee Bernard Marak, Trinamool Congress candidate Sadhiarani Sangma etc. The by-election became necessary as the influential legislator Saleng A Sangma of the Congress joined the Lok Sabha as its member from Tura Parliamentary constituency (defeating CM Sangma's sister Agatha in the last general elections).

Similarly, the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) won both the seats scheduled for by-polls in the tiny State as the opposition candidates withdrew their nominations. State chief minister Prem Singh Golay's son Aditya (Tamang) Golay won from Soreng-Chakung assembly seat as his lone opponent Prem Bahadur Bhandari of Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF, led by former CM Pawan Kumar Chamling) preferred not to contest. On the other hand, Namchi-Singhithang seat went to SKM nominee Satish Chandra Rai as lone opposition candidate Danial Rai of SDF left the race. The 32-member Sikkim legislative assembly is now fully dominated by the SKM with no space for the opposition.

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