

LOGICAL FORMATION: ON MEGHALAYA ASSEMBLY'S FRACTURE MANDATE

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March 07, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:10 am IST

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The term “fractured mandate” aptly describes the results of the [Meghalaya Assembly election](#). While the incumbent [National People's Party led by Conrad Sangma emerged as the single largest](#) with 26 seats (gaining seven since 2018) in the 60-member Assembly, the fact that there were seven other parties with at least two seats besides two independents presented a mandate which necessitated a deft post-election coalition. [Former Chief Minister Mukul Sangma](#) of the Trinamool Congress tried to orchestrate a new coalition without the NPP and the BJP (two seats), but his party had won only five seats, thus making such an alliance improbable. Any coalition stitched together with smaller parties would have been unstable. The BJP had come out of its alliance with the NPP and fought all 60 seats, seeking to garner votes by highlighting the corruption in the NPP-led regime, but the party promptly fell in line after the election to support the NPP. It is easy to see why the NPP prefers to align with the BJP — governments in the north-east are dependent upon central fund transfers and keeping the Union government in good humour is seen as an imperative. But for the BJP to promptly join the government after accusing it of corruption also suggests a desperation to utilise the loaves of power to expand its base. After some intrigue, the United Democratic Party, with 11 seats, and the People's Democratic Front, with two seats, offered support to the NPP, which was also bolstered by the endorsement of two independents and the two MLAs of the Hill State People's Democratic Party, giving the coalition a comfortable majority.

While the NPP did not win an absolute majority, it managed to expand its base beyond the Garo Hills with eight victories in the Jaintia Hills and the Khasi Hills regions as well. This has allowed it to supplant the Congress as the only force with a pan-State appeal. With such a mandate, the party must focus on addressing chronic development issues in the State, which still suffers from a high poverty rate — a NITI-Aayog report listed Meghalaya as India's fifth poorest with 32.67% of the population below the poverty line. Corruption, a bane, has hampered infrastructure development; there is much illegal mining in the mineral-rich State. A renewed and expanded mandate for Conrad Sangma, but one that is dependent upon the support of other parties, should ideally keep the government on its toes as long as the coalition partners are more interested in raising policy issues rather than seeking to partake in patronage.

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