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COVID-19 and politics in Assam

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Abstract---Politics is a very much dynamic phenomena. It is latent in every aspect of our lives. We all are directly or indirectly involved in politics. Sometime politics is very expressive in its way. The very recent COVID-19 pandemic also shows how people can use even a disease for their diverse purposes. In democracy also political leaders can try to distract people from main focus to other unnecessary issues which benefit the political parties in a larger way. Sometime common masses also do not understand the political agenda of party in power. Even in democracy a government can emerge as very powerful even to the extent of controlling people's attention to fulfill its own political purposes. Political leaders make vows in front of people but after winning the election most of the time they fail to keep the promises and people becomes dissatisfied. Political leaders never leave a single thing to make it politicize and that's why they utilize to do politics with every things.

Keywords---Campaigning, COVID-19, demonstration, lockdown, manifesto.

Introduction

In December 2019, Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, became the first city to announce a corona virus outbreak. The World Health Organization declared it as pandemic on March 12, 2020, due to the global spread of SARS-CoV-2 and thousands of deaths caused by coronavirus disease (COVID-19). To date, the globe has paid a heavy price in terms of human lives, economic consequences, and increasing poverty as a result of this pandemic.

The COVID-19 epidemic had caused massive devastation throughout the world. Thousands of people died, parents lost their children, and many children were orphaned as a result of the disaster. Untold numbers of people have lost their jobs. Daily wage earners had to deal with empty bellies, hunger, and

unemployment, all of which resulted in the deaths of innocent individuals. The World Health Organization has likewise failed to cope with the world's devastation, and the pandemic is still ongoing. New versions of the corona virus are continuously being developed, which is why people are still terrified.

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc in India as too. On March 24, 2020, India declared a nationwide lockdown. The pandemic killed and afflicted many Indians. In India, almost 4.31 crore people were affected, with 5.24 lakh people dying (Dutta, 2021). The pandemic in Assam, like in the rest of India, took a tragic turn. The first positive case in Assam was reported on March 31st at Silchar Medical College (Karmakar, 2020). By the 16th of April, the total number of cases had risen to 34 and was steadily increasing.

Objectives of the paper:

1. To analyze the political dynamic of COVID-19 pandemic in Assam.
2. To highlight the political purposes of Ruling political party of Assam in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To see if the pandemic helped the party in power in winning the election in an indirect way.

COVID-19 and Assam

On March 24, 2020, the Indian government issued a countrywide lockdown to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdown, the COVID-19 pandemic claimed the lives of 7,986 people in Assam. Total cases registered to date are 7.24 lakhs, with a relatively high recovery rate. Covaxine and covishild vaccinations were given to the participants. Many measures were done in Assam, and other medical emergencies were prepared prior of the pandemic's outrage. Assam's then-health minister took an active role in coordinating and managing all of these medical needs. The administration of Assam declared war on the pandemic even before any cases were reported. Seven medical colleges were converted into COVID-19 treatment zones. Oxygen cylinders for the patients, PPE kits for the medical workers were imported from the foreign countries also (Hazarika, 2021). A fund named ArogyaNidhi was also initiated for collecting moneys from the government employees (Dutta, 2021). Under the initiative of Dr. HimantaBiswaSharmah the National Health Mission office was turned to 24x7 Centre. The government of Assam reportedly imported more than 50,000 PPE kits from China (Hazarika, 2021).

Politics of COVID-19 in Assam

Many political analysts and opposition party leaders claim that there was a lot of politics going on behind the scenes of COVID-19 in Assam. Despite the fact that the virus was global in scope and the entire world battled it, many people continue to question the involvement of the state government and the ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. DebabrataSaikia, the leader of the opposition party, stated in front of the media that the BJP used the outbreak as a political tool and that the price of necessary commodities was rising in the name of COVID-19. Political scientist of Assam Dr. AkhilRanjan Dutta in his recently

published book 'Hindutva Regime in Assam: Saffron in the Rainbow' discusses behind the politics of COVID-19 in Assam.

In Assam, there was a massive mobilisation of anti-CAB turned anti-CAA movements prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. The CAA took effect on January 10, 2020. It provides citizenship to undocumented immigrants, mainly Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Christians, and Parsis fleeing religious persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. Some critics say that the CAA is discriminatory among Muslims because it denies Muslim migrants the same citizenship rights as other migrants. The indigenous groups in the northeast argue that it will increase the migration and settlement of non-indigenous communities, mainly Hindus from Bangladesh, in the region. The protests were attended by people from many walks of life. The pandemic's sudden onset and imposition of lockdown on March 24th declined protests and demonstrations (Dutta, 2021). During the anti-CAA movement, many expressed their disappointment with the national and state governments, claiming that the act will alter the demography and cultural identity of Assamese people. It is seen as a threat to Assamese identity by the people of Assam. Assamese people were united against the imposition of this act as it violates the historic Assam accord. When the BJP initially came to power in Assam in 2016, they vowed in their election campaign to deport illegal migrants from the state. After forming government in Assam, the BJP broke its pledge and attempted to introduce the contentious Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016, which sparked a large-scale mobilisation in the form of an anti-CAB movement to protest the government's action. Akhil Gogoi, the leader of the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, was an active participant in the mobilisation, as were other Assamese student union leaders. Under the UAPA Act, Akhil Gogoi was arrested and sentenced to prison (Choudhury, 2021).

The pandemic has hijacked Assamese people's attention from CAA to covid. The ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, made excellent use of this time period. Himanta Biswa Sharmah, the state's health minister, worked tirelessly to ameliorate the state's covid status from upper to lower Assam.

Because of imposition of nationwide lockdown gathering and other demonstrations declined. It was beneficial for the party in power. The people who earlier criticized the health minister for his support to the CAA appreciated his role in managing the COVID-19 crisis effectively. He emerged as the protector of people in the situation of crisis. COVID-19 has made many people unemployed. The lives of daily wage earners became very challengeable. Many small businessmen lost their capital; those who had loans could not return their money.

.Despite the state's severe economic collapse as a result of the pandemic, the government of Assam developed certain pro-people programmes for specific groups, such as the Orunodoi scheme and the Arundhati scheme, among others. Many individuals believe that these populist measures were all part of the Bharatiya Janata Party's election agenda (Dutta, 2021). During the campaign for the 2021 election, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharmah stated that women who borrowed money from microfinance banks would not be required to repay their debts, and

that the government would refund their money. The impoverished and needy women were overjoyed when they heard this announcement.

Some members of society and well-informed people still believe that Dr. HimantaBiswaSharmah's activism during COVID-19 made him an undeclared hero, and this helped him to earn the public faith in the 2021 general election. Even though SarbanandaSonowal was the chief minister at the time, most eyes were on HimantaBiswa Sharma.

When the first covid positive cases were reported in Assam, religious questions arose again, as the TabligiJamatis were tested first after visiting Delhi. Many people began to blame the jamatis for the spread of covid in Assam (Kidwai and Sahar, 2020).

Throughout this period, Health Minister HimantaBiswaSharmah was effective in presenting himself as a pandemic warrior. Many people expressed their love and admiration for him. A poem was also delivered by a child who addressed him as Himanta mama, and it went viral on social media, directly or indirectly benefiting Dr. HimantaBiswaSharmah. Opposition parties leaders were also united with the government to combat the pandemic.

Lockdown was proclaimed shortly after the election of 2021. People were dissatisfied this time, and they took the pandemic less seriously than before. Some claim that the government is uninterested in holding examinations, but that they can hold elections on time. The informed citizens demonstrate how students are dealing with issues and how their academic losses may affect their future. Even some people blamed the government for exploiting the pandemic for their own gain, claiming that the government willingly increases testing rates when necessary, which is why the positivity rate rises.

Currently, the younger generations are not taking the pandemic seriously. Some of them describe it as a government drama, and some students even scoff at posts about the COVID-19 outbreak on social media. The discovery of the COVID-19 sickness has sparked a flurry of jokes.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can conclude that even in democracy a government can emerge as very powerful even to the extent of controlling people's attention to fulfill its own political endeavors. The ruling party of Assam was somehow successful in adoption the pandemic as its tool of victory in the then election. The active and constant efforts that were adopted by the then health minister of Assam further helped him even to hold the chair of Chief Minister of Assam. However, the decision of governments regarding issues of education like opening of schools, commencement of examination etc. showed their less concerns over the importance of education. Besides, HimantaBiswaSarmah's efforts or attempts to bring PPE kits from China introduced the new dynamics of health paradiplomacy in India (Hazarika, 2021). Similarly, to address the then mounting pressure of medical Oxygen requirement, Government of Assam has also

approached to the Government of Bhutan for the supply of at least 40 MT Oxygen daily to deal with the then crisis situation of Assam (Singh, 2021).

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