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Dreams and a Desperate Terrain!

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Excellent electoral strategising, coupled with the political charisma of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has produced an electoral majority for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in coalition with its ally the All Jharkhand Students' Union (AJSU), in the Indian state of Jharkhand. After winning that majority, BJP has formed a government, naming Raghubar Das, a five-time legislator from East Jamshedpur, as the first non-tribal Chief Minister. The state, which has seen nine governments and three interludes of President's rule in 14 years, has given a decisive mandate this time. This is clearly a vote against political instability and a vote for better governance.

Jharkhand is a state rich in natural resources — forests, minerals and abundant land. According to India Brand Equity Foundation, the state accounts for 35.5 percent of India's known coal reserves, 90 percent of its coal deposits, 40 percent of its copper, 22 percent of its iron ore, 90 percent of its mica and huge deposits of bauxite, quartz and ceramics.² Jharkhand is also known for political instability, poor governance, corruption, and scams rather than

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² Jharkhand State Report, About Jharkhand: Industries, Mining, Economy, Exports, Tourism, Climate, Geography, www.ibef.org/states/jharkhand.aspx, (accessed 30 December 2014).

development orientation. As a result of frequent political changes, officials have very short tenures. They are in a rush to “make money” before the government changes, and they are transferred. Despite the instability, BJP has been at the state’s helm in one way or the other in the last 14 years. So, what does a decisive mandate this time mean?

Clearly the Modi factor and his development agenda has worked in BJP’s favour. The hope of development (that has been elusive otherwise) had caught the people’s imagination. Soon after the release of the Jharkhand poll results, Prime Minister Modi tweeted that the people of Jharkhand have voted for stability – the prerequisite for development and reaching its full potential. Indeed, the electorate of Jharkhand has signalled to BJP to deliver more than merely identity politics.

Modi had created an aspirational environment that promises development with the focus on fulfilling basic but forgotten necessities and amenities. The next five years would be vital for the progress of Jharkhand, and it will depend entirely on how BJP can deliver on its promises.

To communicate its promise of an agenda of good governance and development in Jharkhand, BJP leaders sought the help of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)³, and its affiliate, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA). VKA works for tribal development and offers services like education, health, promotion of tribal culture and tradition, and protection of tribal rights to water, forests and land.⁴

Modi has made big promises for development, good governance, and jobs. Jharkhand lags behind other states on most development indicators – it fares poorly on the Human Development Index (HDI), ranking sixth amongst the least developed states of India. Basic amenities in the state are equally poor: essential services such as safe drinking water, access to toilet, and sanitation facilities remain limited.⁵ According to a UNDP report, only two-

³ www.livemint.com/Politics/BjYxyLqIIDziqDajMm8sZN/Development-better-governance-push-social-identity-to-the-b.html_br (accessed 30 December 2014).

⁴ Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram: RSS product changing lives of tribals, www.theforthright.com/vanvasi-kalyan-ashram-rss-product-changing-lives-tribals/_br (accessed 30 December 2014).

⁵ As Poor As Haiti, Jharkhand Awaits New Govt - Yahoo India Finance, https://in.finance.yahoo.com/news/poor-haiti-jharkhand-awaits-govt-000000165.html_br (accessed 30 December 2014).

thirds of the population have access to improved sources of drinking water, and only one out of four households in the state has access to toilet facilities.⁶

A stable government in harmony with the central government will give confidence to investors and encourage them to partner in the development of the state. Reform measures at the centre should open doors for transparent allocation and bidding for mineral resources. An open and judicious policy in the state will effectively deploy its well-endowed environmental resources in the hands of responsible investors who will help generate employment.

Left-wing Maoist extremism remains one of the biggest challenges and a significant hurdle to attracting investment into the state. Jharkhand has the highest number of incidents of Naxalite violence, incurring the largest number of deaths in gunbattles in recent years. Therefore, mitigating the potential drivers of violent extremism should be a priority for the newly-elected government. This would be necessary to create a conducive environment for investment and employment.

Corruption and lawlessness were the other important election issues. The promise of a transparent and corruption-free government by Modi has generated a huge expectation among the people. BJP's focus on e-governance as an effort to address the issue could address the menace effectively.

The people of Jharkhand have voted the BJP to power on the hope of economic development in the state. It is expected that a stable government under the experienced leadership of Das will fulfill the aspirations of the people. It will change the face of the state if BJP keeps its promises. Lest, BJP is reminded of poet Dushyant Kumar's lines, *Sirf hungaama khada karna mera maqsad nahin, saari koshish hai, ki yeh soorat badalni chahiye!* (*Rabble rousing is not my aim, the whole effort is to bring a change*).⁷

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⁶ About Jharkhand , UNDP in India, www.in.undp.org/content/india/en/home/operations/about_undp/undp-in-Jharkhand/about-Jharkhand/_br (accessed 30 December 2014).

⁷ Translation by Nishta Tripathi, Aag jalni chahiye by Dushyant Kumar, <http://nisthaonweb.com/blog/2013/09/aag-jalni-chahiye-by-dushyant-kumar/> (accessed 30 December 2014).