



INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: JANUARY 2018 DOSSIER

Dr. Klaus J. Voll looks into an array of domestic developments in India—the indomitable Modi-BJP, the reactions to *Padmaavat*, internal conflict within the Supreme Court, upcoming Karnataka assembly elections, and the PFI. Economic developments include Modi’s participation at Davos and R. Rajan’s take on the Indian economy. India’s foreign policy developments reached a milestone with an ASEAN summit and Netanyahu’s visit.

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**FEPS
STUDIES**
JANUARY
2018

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Part I India - Domestic developments

Dr. Klaus J. Voll analyses an array of topics – those that plague the Indian society in the form of intolerance by infringe groups towards the release of *Padmaavat* and the activities of PFI; on BJP's prospects and reasons for emerging strong; the conflict within the apex court of India; and domestic developments in general.

'Mood of the Nation': BJP still strong

The bi-annual survey *'Mood of the Nation'*, conducted on behalf of the political magazine *India Today*, is an important barometer about the situation in India. Some changes can be observed during the period between the first of July till the 31st of December 2017:

1. The personal popularity of PM Narendra Modi remains more or less intact. The economic performance of the NDA-government is still seen predominantly positive, irrespective of the dearth of employment opportunities, price rise and the agrarian crisis.
2. In the case of elections, the BJP and its NDA-coalition partners would still command a sufficient, although compared to today, a slightly reduced majority of seats.
3. In case of a thorough opposition unity, that means the combining of the three 'M's', e. g. Mamata Bannerjee and her *Trinamool Congress* (TC), Mayawati's *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) and Mulayam Singh Yadav's *Samajwadi Party* (SP) together with the *Congress*, BJP and NDA would loose their majority.

But the Congress as a party would only gain a slight advantage from such a constellation.

1. The performance of PM Modi is rated with 20% as *'outstanding'* and 41% as *'good'* by the sample of people interviewed. 26% speak of „*all talk, no action*“ and only 9% see him as „*pro poor*“.

As negative challenges, 23% view price rise – although the figures are far lower than during the UPA-regime – an equal number the lack of jobs, 15% farmers suicides and 11% the agrarian crisis. These are real warning signals, so that the economy could become the *'Achilles heel'* for the government.

As the biggest success of the government, the 'cleaning campaign' (*'Swachh Bharat'*) is regarded by a huge majority.

Yogendra Yadav, President of *Swaraj Abhiyan*, emphasizes, that these results centre mainly around the economy. „*The decline has begun, the negatives are piling up.*“

Yet, the journalist Manisha Priyam, maintains, that politics will remain supreme, also in the forthcoming general elections. She criticises the increasing lack of law and order.

The BJP spokesperson GVL Narasimha Rao sees after 3 ½ years of the NDA in power no signs of the so-called *'anti-incumbency factor'*.

Modi promised during the election campaign in 2014 millions of jobs and „*good days to come* (*'achay din'*)“. 53% are of the opinion, that the *'good days'* have not come, yet 39% believe so.

Irrespective of this, 56% say, that the NDA-government is showing a better economic performance than the former UPA-government.

2. If elections would be held today - with the political constellation like in 2014 – the according to this poll the NDA with a vote-share of 40% would win 309 seats (January 2017 = 360), the UPA with 27% 102 mandates and Others with 33% 172. The BJP would lose its own absolute majority with estimated 264 seats, whereas the Congress would win only 71 seats.

3. In the above mentioned scenario of a higher opposition unity (*Index of Opposition Unity*), the NDA would win, again with a 40% vote share, only 258 seats, whereas the UPA - including TC, BSP and SP - with 38% would win 202 seats and Others with 22% 83 seats. In this case, the BJP would win only 214 and the Congress 77 mandates.

But it seems to be very difficult for the divided opposition to come together. A simple addition of vote shares without an '*alternative narrative*' is not sufficient, particularly since such an alliance would have to hold together at the state and central levels, according to Yogendra Yadav: „*Alliances alone don't mean already change.*“ Manisha Priyam refers to the 'co-optation' potential of the BJP under Modi's leadership and his possibilities, to target the Dalit-votes. She envisages the biggest challenge for opposition unity in Uttar Pradesh.

Perspectives

With regard to the question, which politician is best suited to be the next Prime Minister, 53% favoured Narendra Modi (January 2017 = 65%) and only 22% Congress-President Rahul Gandhi (January 2017 = 10%).

In view of this poll, political experts say, that the Congress would be well advised, not to make the 2019 campaign a personal confrontation between Modi and Gandhi.

Professor Sandeep Shastri, who currently sees the Congress ahead in Karnataka, advises the Congress to raise specific topics in view of the widespread discontent, because with regard to popularity and style of governing Modi is far ahead of Gandhi.

If the three 'M's' would be really come together, then the BJP would be confronted with real problems in various states and most probably lose strength, particularly also with increasing farmer suicides in many BJP-ruled states.

Since the Congress would under the assumptions of 2 and 3 not substantially increase its mandates – in a bilateral contest with the BJP the figures might be higher – the party would most probably support a so-called „*Third Front*“ government, as it did between 1996 – 1998 (*'United Democratic Front'*), but with implications of political instability.

Congress-spokesperson Pawan Khera emphasized, that his party would make unemployment, price rise as well as law and order central topics. Pinaki Misra, *Biju Janata Dal* MP from Orissa (*Odisha*), stated, „*that the decline of social cohesion is frightening, also because of the emergence of lumpen elements. The population is very much affected by daily petty corruption.*“

Observers agree, that a real „*Team Rahul*“ is required, in order to confront the powerful BJP election machinery and the charisma of the PM.

In my opinion, Narendra Modi will try to propagate an employment strategy for the '*masses*' beyond the minimum employment guarantee scheme MNREGA, à la Hilmar Schacht/Adolf Hitler, in order to deviate attention from the prevailing '*jobless growth*', besides forcing the opposition into the defensive in 2019 through a religiously charged – *Ram Mandir* in Ayodhya – '*hyper nationalism*'.

It cannot be ruled out that the date of the *Lok Sabha* elections could be changed, so as to coincide with the Assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which are due at the end of 2018.

Domestic political developments

After the elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh there is a certain lull in domestic politics, which would certainly not last long, since there will be Assembly elections in February and March 2018 in several states in North-East India.

Frightening are the violent events with regard to the film '*Padmaavat(i)*', which has been cleared by the Censor Board. '*Right wing*' groups, like the so-called '*Karni Sena*', who appeal to the pride of the '*Rajputes*' ('Warrior Caste'), carried out in various parts of the country violent demonstrations, vandalism and threats of various kinds, like death and the '*the cutting of the nose*' of the main actress. They tried to stop the screening of the film, which had been cleared by the *Supreme Court*.

BJP-led state governments banned the screening of the film in view of their '*vote-banks*' and did not stop these agitations, not to speak of charging and arresting the main culprits.

It will be interesting to observe, how these state governments particularly in Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, will try to undermine the clear directive of the *Supreme Court* in favour of the screening of '*Padmaavat(i)*'. Lawlessness and the increasing power of '*lumpen-proletarian mobs*' ('*Mobocracy*') in public spaces are dangerous signals. -

On the 30th of January 2018, the new platform „*Rashtriya Manch*“ under the leadership of the octogenarian Yashwant Sinha will be launched, in order to propagate the interests of millions of farmers, who are in extreme distress all over India, as it is manifesting itself in the increasing farmer suicides and rural unrest. Will the BJP expel Sinha or will he resign from his party?

One should not underestimate such platforms in Indian politics, which are open for political parties and individuals, as the example of the '*Jan Morcha*' in the end of the 1980's against the utmost powerful ruling Congress demonstrated. Then, the Congress commanded an even bigger parliamentary majority than the current BJP/NDA, but this movement led to the electoral defeat of PM Rajiv Gandhi and the minority government under V. P. Singh in 1989/90. -

The BJP lost its MP Nana Patole from Maharashtra, who gave out of protest against the agricultural policy and the tackling of the interests of the so-called '*backward communities*' his mandate back and left the BJP. „*Modi showed Hitler-like tendencies, when I presented him the demands and topics of OBC's and farmers in a meeting. I was aghast, this triggered my leaving the BJP.*“

Patole, a former Congress politician, maintains, that farmer suicides have been increasing by 43%, citing as one of the reasons, that the Modi-government did not implement the recommendations of the M. S. Swaminathan-Commission, irrespective of its promises. „*Not only L. K. Advani and Yashwant Sinha are angry about Modi's style of governance. We will see more politicians, who will speak out against the government. Those, who are unhappy with the style of governing, will soon express themselves.*“-

In Maharashtra, the BJP's most long-standing ally, the regional *Shiv Sena* stated, that it will fight the *Lok Sabha* elections in 2019 and the following Assembly elections alone. But the junior partner in the BJP led coalition in Maharashtra will not pull out from the state government, at least for the time being. This step could lead to a new alignment in Maharashtra politics, with the Congress and the *Nationalist Congress Party*, a potential partner-in-waiting for the BJP, as the other major players.-

The campaign in Karnataka is already in full swing, about three months ahead of the election. The BJP started already its first offensive and attempts to polarise the electorate through its so-called „*Hindu-consolidation*“. It has to be seen, if the Congress is well advised to pursue a „*soft Hindutva line*.“ Yet, recently the top BJP leadership discussed the effects of this new Congress approach.

With certainty, the BJP will make the *Popular Front of India* (PFI) and its political arm the *Social Democratic Party of India* (SDPI) a major political issue, particularly after the *National Intelligence Agency* (NIA) presented incriminating material against members of the PFI.

The PFI, echoing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in his attacks against the BJP and RSS, demanded during its recent street protests in Bengaluru a ban of the RSS- and *Hindutva* organisations. The BJP reacted with a '*Jail Barao*' - '*fill the jails*' - movement.

Are radical fringe elements the new normal?

The film *Padmaavat(i)* portrays a historical woman – possibly even only a mythological figure - who is highly venerated by members of the *Rajput* ('warrior class') community in Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat etc.. But it implies interactions with an Islamic ruler and actually glorifies the *Rajputs*. Professor Irfan Habib, a well-known historian from the famous *Aligarh Muslim University*, describes the film as „*anti-Muslim*“.

Without seeing the film, members of the so-called '*Karni Sena*', a right-wing fringe group, went on a rampage for months on end and claimed in the name of '*Rajput honour*', that the film has been hurting the sentiments of the community, which is known for its pride and valour.

The clashes and vandalism, often with jobless people in the fore-front, escalated, the Mumbai-Agra highway got recently blocked for hours, a bus with school children in Gurgaon (Gurugram) - seat of many multinational companies - was attacked, death threats against the major actress Deepika Padukone had been issued. 10 crores (about 1.3 million Euros) have been offered for her '*beheading*'. The work of journalists got curtailed. The film critic Anne Vetticad opined: „*India is for journalists one of the most insecure places in the world.*“

But the BJP governments in all these states did not intervene at all, neither did they till recently arrest any of the known culprits, who often have criminal records. Critics insinuate, that they are

actually hand in glove with these protestors and even encourage them for electoral purposes, since bypolls and Assembly elections are around the corner.

The *Film Censor Board* modified the title from '*Padmaavati*' to '*Padmaavat*' and demanded changes in the script and in various scenes before clearing the film. After this, the *Supreme Court of India* ordered its release for the 25th of January 2018, when the India-ASEAN summit took place in Delhi and a day before the 69th *Republic Day*.

The state governments argued, that they had to study the order further and appealed against the SC order, whereas the fringe groups prevailed through threats on the cinema owners and film distributors, so that these backed out. But in BJP-ruled Maharashtra, the film has been screened right from the beginning in Mumbai under heavy police security.

A political analyst said: *„The order of the Supreme Court is nothing worth. The state governments are cooking a snook at the Supreme Court. They, together with the police, are the real culprits.“* Karuna Nundy, SC lawyer: *„The extreme fringe groups are the new normal. The agitations by the 'Karni Sena' have been popularised by the media. The 'Karni Sena' should be declared a terrorist organisation.“*

Nidhi Razdan, NDTV-moderator, observed, that the BJP ruled states don't act and have abandoned their responsibility. *„The right-wing ideologues insinuate, that the Supreme Court is 'anti-Hindu'.“* Profesor Mridula Mukherjee, a historian from the *Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)*, warned, *„this agitation stands for things, which are yet to come. It is part of a policy of polarisation and has nothing to do with history, but with politics.“*

Aamir Raza Hussain, a former member of the BJP and a well-known theatre personality, described the current situation as *„frightening. High-ranking ministers challenge the Constitution. There is violence against cinemas in Bihar and more can be expected. The fringe groups have become everywhere in the country the new 'mainstream'. Lines are crossed each day, there is no civil administration, no central government. These fringe groups are running the country, nobody gives a dam to Supreme Court orders.“*

The well-known and '*left oriented*' film actress Shabana Azmi demanded, *„that the state should suo moto arrest culprits. Instead, the state does nothing.“* Sanjoy Hegde, one of the leading and most articulate lawyers, is of the opinion *„that the rule of law and the state machinery have become hostage of the mob.“*

Apart from a few critical voices, the majority of Hindi-Filmmakers remains mum, quite contrary to similar confrontations and cases in *Tamil Nadu*.“

Suresh Prabhu, India's Industry and Commerce Minister, while together with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the *World Economic Forum* in Davos, where Modi presented India as an ideal destination for foreign investors, remarked, *„that these images will affect investors. The Modi government won't tolerate it. India's image takes a hit.“* Some observers maintain, that Modi's biggest enemies are within the *Sangh Parivaar*.

All this shows a society, which is increasingly not permitting any criticism. Critics say, *„that India is becoming a country without the rule of law and a rising cultural vigilantism.“* T. R. Kakkar, a former

Police Commissioner of Delhi, says, " that the state governments are hand in glove with the 'Karni Sena' and that they, in charge for law and order, keep the police under their thumbs".

Suhel Seth, an outspoken analyst, speaks „*of the silence of the complicit. Why are there no preventive arrests? The Supreme Court should dismiss the state governments.*

Karnataka: Opening a bitter election campaign

In April or May 2018, a new Parliament will be elected in the important state of Karnataka. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah holds one of the last Congress bastions. In case of a BJP win, the party would have practically achieved its aim of 'a Congress-free India' - except for Punjab - and could therefore transform the state into a new laboratory of its 'Hindutva-politics'.

Polarisation will certainly an important aspect in this BJP-strategy, along with how Muslims and their organisations, like in Karnataka the *Popular Front of India* (PFI) and the *Social Democratic Party of India* (SDPI) will be portrayed. (see following article)

Allegedly, there was an electoral understanding at the election of the Mayor in Bengaluru between the local Congress and the SDPI/PFI. In Gujarat the PFI allegedly supported the independent Dalit-politician Jignesh Mewani, who was also supported by the Congress in the recent Assembly elections there.

The BJP is planning a double strategy with its charismatic leaders Yogi Adityanath, who with his recent frontal attacks on the CM opened the election campaign, and Narendra Modi.

No doubt, Karnataka has real problems, which the BJP tries to take advantage of. The alleged deterioration of the urban infrastructure, like in Bengaluru, water issues (Cauveri), 3 500 farmer suicides, increasing criminality and the murder of 22 BJP- and RSS-activists during the last years in Karnataka, according to the BJP-spokeswoman Malavika Avinash, are highlighted by the BJP.

She maintains, that these murders have been committed by the PFI and alleges, „*that the state government is acting soft vis-à-vis the PFI.*“ In the meantime, the NIA charge sheeted several PFI members for these murders.

How tense the atmosphere is shows the reaction of Siddaramaiah: „*I am a real Hindu. The BJP is a party of extremists. BJP, RSS und Bajrang Dal (they venerate the monkey god 'Hanuman' and are the youth organisation of the 'Vishwa Hindu Parishad' ('World Council of Hindus') are all terrorists.*“ Besides, he equated the RSS with the PFI.

The BJP described Siddaramaiah as '*anti-national*' and launched a defamation case. The RSS ideologue Rakesh Sinha described the CM as „*a communal fascist.*“

The confrontation between the Congress and the BJP will certainly escalate in the weeks and months to come. What will be the role of the weakened third political force in the state, the *Janata Dal Secular* (JDS), under the leadership of the former Prime Minister Deve Gowda and his son Kurumaswamy? Can it play the role of a '*king-maker*' or will it be torn apart between the major contenders?

The reputed election analyst Sandeep Shastri, who teaches at the Jain University in Mysore, expects as a result of this polarisation long-term negative consequences for the state. „Till now the BJP does not react to the 'soft Hindutva approach' by the Congress and it has not made progress in central and southern Karnataka.“-

Activities of an identitarian movement

A 'Sting Operation' by India Today TV showed the double-talk of the *Kannada Rakshana Vedike*, an organisation appealing to the 'regional identity, language and pride' of the people of Karnataka. The movement, which is split in two camps, blocked a performance by the popular Indo-Canadian actress Sunny Leone – a former porno star with more followers than PM Modi – through militancy and public burning of her posters on the eve of the new year 2018.

Instead, in filmed conversations with an alleged agent of the actress, leading functionaries of the *Kannada Rakshana Vedike* agreed in January, to guarantee her performamnce and even recommended one on Valentine's Day. For this, they demanded a protection payment between forty and sixty thousand Euros, showing its face as a gang of blackmailers.

This organisation with an unclear political orientation also opposed in the past traffic signs in Hindi and demanded, that only Kannada is spoken in banks. All this happens in an atmosphere, in which the CM recommended an own flag for Karnataka.

According to the TV moderator Rajdeep Sardesai such groups with their often-unlawful practices are taking over increasingly public space.

Popular Front of India (PFI)

Ideology and aims of the PFI

The Popular Front of India (PFI) declares on its website its vision, "to create an egalitarian society, in which freedom, justice and security for all can be enjoyed, particularly for the weakest, e. g. Dalits, 'Tribals' (Adivasis), religious, linguistic and cultural minorities, so-called backward classes and castes as well as women."

The PFI holds the opinion that the existing socio-economic development models did not succeed to reduce poverty and backwardness in the rural areas. In their opinion, either the ruling establishment has been empowering the big enterprises or the urban and rural elites respectively dominant social groups have usurped the democratic process through cooperation with 'neo-colonial, fascist and racist forces'. Therefore, the PFI wants to coordinate its efforts, in order to achieve the socio-economic, cultural and political empowerment of deprived and oppressed persons and the nation as a whole.

With regard to the question of 'Triple Talaq', the PFI rejects the passing of a law, since it has allegedly not been discussed with various sections of Muslim society, besides that a request for a discussion between the Prime Minister and the President of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board has not been granted. Besides, this question would only affect a tiny section of Muslim women. Instead, the PFI favours the Supreme Court's decision, declaring 'Triple Talaq' illegal.

The PFI insinuates, that this legislation, having passed already the Lower House ('Lok Sabha'), and permitting imprisonment of up to three years for men, who do the 'Triple Talaq', "gives a further reason, to send more Muslim men to prisons and to demonise the Muslim community and its organisations."

In the opinion of the PFI, this draft legislation is an intervention into the civil rights and the fundamental rights of religious minorities, whereas the government propagates to the outside world gender equality and justice.

The overall critic of the PFI, which always emphasizes the principle of social justice, is directed against the 'Hindutva'-forces. The recent attack on Dalits in Bhima Koregaon / Maharashtra, allegedly initiated by 'Hindutva'-forces, has led to a confrontation between Marathas and Dalits and forms part of a 'Brahmanical oppression.' These riots paralysed Mumbai and large parts of Maharashtra. The PFI condemned the arrest of the *Bhim Army Ekta Mission*-leader Chandra Shekhar Azad Ravan under the draconic *National Security Act*.

Also the PFI condemns force and murders under the pretext of 'Love-Jihad' and supports the family of Mohammed Afrajul Khan , brutally murdered in December in Rajasthan.

The history of the PFI

The PFI started a joint platform, the so-called South India Council in January 2004, comprising the participation of activists and intellectuals from all the South Indian states. The original agenda focussed on reservation for Muslims, education and employment, in cooperation with the Confederation of Muslim Institutions in India during 2005-6 at the central and state levels.

The following regional groups participated in the *South India Council: Karnataka Forum for Dignity* (KFD), in Kerala the *National Development Front* (NDF) and in Tamil Nadu the *Manitha Neethi Pasarai* (MNP). These groups became constituting members of the Council. For the purpose of a better coordination and the approval from the base of their organisations the PFI has been launched on the 22nd of November 2006.

The PFI is considered as a 'reincarnation' of the banned *Student Islamic Movement of India* (SIMI). Abdul Rehman, the national chairman of the PFI, was the former national secretary of SIMI, whereas the state secretary Abdul Hameed Master was in the same position in SIMI. This holds true for the majority of the former SIMI-personal in leadership positions.

Structure and working style

The PFI-slogan is: "The new pathway: A new India" ('*Naya Karavan: Naya Hindustan*'). The members are predominantly Muslims, therefore the organisation is mainly active for this religious minority.

In January 2017, Eruppungal Abubacker has been elected as PFI-chairman. He is a former chairman of the *National Development Front* (NDF) and PFI, founder member and in the executive committee of the *All India Milli Council*. He contributed decisively to the foundation of the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) in 2009, the NDF and the PFI in 2006.

He worked in 2005 as secretary of the *All India Milli Council* and is a founder member of the *All India Muslim Personal Law Board*. Abubacker was also 'Managing Editor' of *Thejas Daily* in 2006 and

launched the *India Next Hindi Magazine*. Currently he heads the *Rehab India Foundation* in Delhi and is a member of the 'national Secretariat' of the SDPI.

In its *National General Assembly* (NGA), the PFI evaluates its organizational activities of the previous year and discusses the growth and development of the organisation. In various sessions, the social and political situation in India are discussed, also the effects of various national PFI campaigns. The NGA evaluates some demonstration projects, like the *School Chalo Campaign* and the *National Scholarship Scheme*.

As part of its claim to social justice, it focuses on so-called 'backward' sections of society, e. g. Muslims, *Dalits*, other religious minorities and *Adivasis*.

Ideologically, the PFI directs itself primarily towards what it calls "*fascist forces*" in India, e. g. 'Hindutva'-supporters, the "*destroyers of the Babri-mosque*", the RSS and the BJP, as well in general against the whole '*Sangh Parivar*'. Yet, the PFI organizational set-up corresponds more or less the one of the '*Sangh Parivar*'.

During a PFI-conference on the 15th of October 2017 in Bengaluru, E. Abubacker attacked Modi's policy of demonetisation, the high farmer suicides, the growing unemployment and the alleged price increase. He criticised, that the government, in view of its mistakes and not fulfilled promises, is compensating this through appeals to nationalism and attacks on so-called "*anti-national*" elements.

The National Women's Front (NWF)

The PFI's *National Women's Front* (NWF) is currently accused, to be a part of the so-called „Love Jihad“ through conversions in Kerala, which has 26.56% (2011 census) Muslims and for instance even a majority of the population in the district Malapurram .

The *National Investigation Agency* (NIA) interrogates currently the NWF-leader AS Sainaba with regard to her alleged role in „forceful conversions“, based on her statements during a '*Sting-Operation*' of India Today Television.

Sainaba defends herself, that this transmission was only the edited version of a long discussion. The NIA also traces the financial roots of such conversions. Yet women, who converted to Islam, deny the allegation of force.

One can regard the NWF as the quasi-counterpart of the *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* of the RSS or also the BJP's *Mahila Morcha*.

The NIA report about the PFI sister organisation *Sathya Sarani* in Malappuram, which allegedly conducts forceful conversions, allegedly in the case of Akhila Asokan, who converted to Islam and calls herself now Hadiya. Yet the Supreme Court of India in its judgement spoke in favour of her and her right to choose her husband and rejected explicitly the allegation of '*Love -Jihad*'.

Connections to Terrorism?

With regard to the NIA-report on the PFI, one should consider, that the NIA is under the BJP-led Home Ministry and that courts in some cases came to quite different conclusions.

The NIA submitted its report to the Home Ministry, in which "*terror-linkages*" of the PFI are alleged, so for instance training camps for terrorists and the making of bombs.

This report is regarded by some as a basis, to outlaw the PFI under the *Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)*.

Four cases have been cited by the NIA:

1. The attack on the 4th of July 2010 on T. J. Joseph, a professor for the language Malayalam in Idukki-district, whose hand was cut off for alleged 'blasphemy.
2. During a police search operation in Narath, in Kannur in Kerala on the 23rd of April 2013, swords and country-made revolvers as well as parts of handgrenades have been confiscated. A special court of the NIA sentenced in this case 21 members of PFI.
3. The daylight murder of the RSS-leader Rudresh in Bengaluru on the 16th of October 2016.
4. Plans for terror attacks in South India with the involvement of the group Islamic State Al-Hindi.

The NIA-dossier submits, that many PFI-founding members have earlier been associated with SIMI. This holds also true for the PFI-chairman E M Abdurahiman, who was in 1980/11 and from 1982-1993 All India SIMI-General Secretary, the Deputy PFI-chairman P. Koya, was part of SIMI in 1978/79 and the SDPI-President E. Aboobacker, who headed between 1982-84 the Kerala unit of SIMI.

According to the NIA, the PFI — which is present in 23 states of the Indian Union, the strongest in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka — possesses a well-oiled machinery, in order to pursue its aims. *"The organisation has trainers and experts, to produce crude bombs and IEDs, an intelligence wing and action units, in order to conduct violent activities. It possesses secret centres, where training in martial sports and indoctrination are taking place"*, so the NIA-dossier.

The newspaper reports about the PFI and its affiliated organisations are repetitive. 5 to 6 youths are fighting with the ISIS in Syria. A young Muslim from Kerala attempted to reach there via Turkey, but was later extradited to India. He was a PFI activist. He had a Facebook-page, in which he sympathised with Al Qaeda and ISI, according to the NIA.

After the first *'Sting'-Operation of India Today TV* with regard to the conversion of Hindu-women to Islam, which led to investigations of the NIA, the *'Operation Madrasa'* with secret filming showed the flow of funds from the Gulf region -especially Dubai, but also Oman and Qatar – for the financing of Madrasas.

This money does not flow via banks but through middle men and is called in the South *'Hundi'* and in North India *'Hawala'*. It is a well-oiled machinery, in order to channel the black money to the envisaged recipients.

These funds serve the purpose to propagate *'Wahhabi'*-Islam in various Madrasas, where allegedly videos of the preacher fugitive Zakir are shown and the ideology of the ISIS and the so-called *'Caliphate'* are propagated.

The BJP-spokesperson Sudanshu Mittal alleges, that in the Madrasas at the border between Uttar Pradesh and Nepal contacts to terrorists do exist.

The widespread appearance of these topics in the public sphere, amongst them the recent NIA-report, has certainly something to do with the upcoming Assembly polls in April/Mai 2018 in Karnataka, where the BJP is trying to split society along communal lines.

The Social Democratic Party of India

The *Social Democratic Party of India* (SDPI) has been founded as the political wing of the PFI in 2009. The SDPI put up in the Lok Sabha elections 2014 thirty candidates, who all lost. The SDPI has a presence in 23 states and won in local elections 6 mandates in Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu.

Because of its identity politics, it is practically not nominating any non-Muslim candidates, although its leadership claims, not to pursue sectarian politics. The party claims to speak primarily for Muslims and attacked the newspaper *Mathrubhumi* in Kerala, which published alleged insulting commentaries about the 'Prophet', which originally appeared on Facebook.

In Karnataka and Kerala, PFI and SDPI are a potential threat to parts of the vote-banks of the BJP and CPI-M.

Perspectives

The PFI has tried to distance itself from the "attacks and training camps", as mentioned by the NIA. The PFI tries to improve its image. The participation of the SDPI in elections could be one of the reasons for this attitude. Big attacks would certainly question its credibility. Yet, till now, the NIA cannot present big cases against the PFI or prove connections to the ISI.

With a view to the Assembly elections in Karnataka in 2018, one can assume, that communal tensions will build up, especially in the coastal areas.

After the recent murder of an RSS leader in Karnataka, the BJP demanded from the state government to ban the PFI, whereas the Congress government demanded the same from the central government. The RSS-ideologue Rakesh Sinha described on national TV the PFI "as the Indian version of the ISI." The BJP-spokesperson Shazia Ilmi demanded the ban of the PFI as 'an anti-state organisation.'

All this shows, how big the gap between the ruling establishment and sections of the Muslim community and how high the danger of escalating tensions and violence actually are.

Rebellion in the *Supreme Court*

The *Supreme Court* (SC) is one of the few institutions that still enjoys a good reputation in the eyes of the public, although insiders know since long, that all is not at its best even here.

Dushyant Dave, a reputed lawyer at the SC, that these negative conditions – including corruption - are known since decades, „but all the participants have been silent, since they have taken advantage of it.“ (NDTV, 12. 1. 2018)

The most for senior judges after the *Chief Justice of India* (CJI) conducted on the 12th of January 2018 a press conference – an absolutely unprecedented move – and addressed the nation directly. They alleged, that the CJI would misuse his power and act arbitrarily. „This poses a danger for democracy, We do not want to sell our soul.“

The four judges, known for their integrity, are Chelameswar, Ranjan Gogoi – most probably the next CJI – Kurien Joseph and M. B. Lokur. They accuse the acting CJI Dipak Misra, that he refers politically sensitive cases not to senior judges but to benches of junior ones, naming specifically Arun Mishra,

who allegedly is close to the BJP.

But there is unanimity, that the CJI „*is master of the roster.*“ Critics insinuate, „*that the CJI misuses his power, is pleasing the government in power and damages the opposition.*“ Dhave insinuates pressure by the government on the judiciary.

The tensions at the highest level of the SC are simmering since months. The four judges wrote quite a long time ago a seven pages letter to the CJI with their complaints, which remained unanswered.

This 'revolt' was ignited by the composition of the bench, which dealt with the causes of the death of the Maharashtra High Court judge Loya, who was in charge of the so-called Shorabuddin/Sheikh 'Encounter Case' - in which BJP-President Amit Shah was allegedly involved and was for a few months an under-trial. Loya died of a heart attack. Before he was allegedly offered by middle-men 100 crore Rs. (about 13 million Euro) and valuable land in Mumbai.

Ashwini Kumar, a former Congress Law Minister, opined: „*These developments put us all in shame. The CJI should observe the existing conventions and the government should clarify its position in this confrontation.*“

The former BJP Foreign- and Finance-Minister Yashwant Sinha, a staunch critic of Modi, said: „*If the highest court gets compromised, then democracy is in danger.*“

Prashant Bhushan, a prominent SC-lawyer, stated, that there is a recognisable pattern of fixing the benches, although the CJI is only the first amongst equals.

The former judge at the *Delhi High Court*, A. P. Shah, demanded corrective measures: „*The Supreme Court is the last hope for this country. The rule of law is in danger.*“

Dushyant Dave: „*Nobody speaks about the corruption at the Supreme Court. The government is interested in a weak judiciary. The decline of the SC is obvious since decades. As a nation we are not ready for reforms.*“

Dr. Subrahmanian Swamy, a BJP member of the *Rajya Sabha* ('Upper House'), demanded: „*The Prime Minister should intervene, since it is a question of governance.*“

Dushyant Dave believes, contrary to the still hopeful Ashwini Kumar, „*that the higher judiciary is beyond repair and the CJI helpless. He is completely under the influence of the executive.*“ Dave maintains, that the CJI is a „*serial offender and has presided over cases, in which he himself played a role.*“

Prashant Bhushan maintains, „*that these conditions only are the tip of the iceberg, since there are far more serious cases. The CJI should resign.*“

Contrary to these statements, Soli Sorabjee, a former Solicitor General, argues, „*that this press conference has created a very bad precedent.*“

Indira Jaisingh, a prominent lawyer, is of the opinion that, „*we should know about the influence of the executive. It is quite possible, that the Mafia has eliminated the judge. We are in a kind of emergency.*“

Why did the CBI at that time not object to the release of Amit Shah? A part of the judiciary executes the orders of the government. We should leave the politicians out from these disputes.“

Rajdeep Sardesai, *India Today*-moderator, opines: „*It is effectively a revolt. The judges acted in despair. But perhaps this shock will lead to reforms, since the system is seemingly sick. The belief of the public in the judiciary is shattered. Silence is no option.“*

It will be interesting to observe, which scenarios will be emerging. According to the *Times of India*, the majority of the 21 SC judges is backing the CJI. The BJP speaks of an internal problem of the judiciary.

But one thing seems to be clear, the whole judiciary and the *Supreme Court* require urgent reforms.

Part II India - Economic Developments

Dr. Joyce Lobo writes on Modi's emphasis on India's philosophy at Davos and defends globalisation. Dr. Klaus Voll gives a brief description on former Governor of RBI, Raghuram Rajan's take on the economic situation in India.

First Indian premier at WEF in Davos

In an 'by invitation-only', Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the first Indian Premier to attend the opening session of the 48th Annual meeting of the *World Economic Forum* (WEF) at Davos, Switzerland. The theme for this year was "*Creating a Shared Future in a Fractured World*".

In his keynote address at the plenary session on January 23, Modi referred to the 'fractures' in the world at three levels—in the minds of individuals, within nations and at the international level. Modi utilised the ancient Indian texts and ancient proverbs to suggest solutions to some of these problems. He articulated on such Indian thought as *Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam*—treating the world as '*one family*'. This philosophy blends with the WEF principles of moving beyond national boundaries and becoming international.

At the international level, Modi spoke of two pressing issues—terrorism and climate change. He took the opportunity to address the current retreat from globalisation to protectionism by certain nations.

Also Modi spoke extensively of the efforts made by India. One was bringing structural reforms bearing long terms effects—formalizing the informal economy, direct tax reforms, expansion of the tax base, banking reforms, Direct Benefit Transfer through Unique Identification number and Bank accounts, minimizing discretion, combating corruption and controlling inflation.

Second, he pointed to the use of technology to transform governance for an effective public distribution system and other services. Other efforts included upgrading of the physical infrastructure, upscale and improving the rules of governing economic activity, inclusive economic development etc.

Modi, the CEO of India

Modi has emerged as a CEO of sorts at all bilateral meetings with various countries or forums. At Davos, he held an interaction with about 64 CEOs, out of which 40 hailed from different parts of the world. These have a total market capitalization of about US\$ 3.6 trillion. Some of these CEOs expressed their satisfaction about the structural reforms, that have taken place so far in India.

However, the recently released report by *Oxfam India* pointed to a disturbing fact, that in 2017 about 73% of economic benefits trickled to the top 1% of Indians. This speaks for the economic injustices faced by people and goes against the idea of *Sabka saath, sabka vikaas* (Collective efforts, inclusive growth). The *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) has forecasted, that India will achieve a growth of 7.4% in 2018/19. IMF Chief Christine Lagarde, one of the panellists at the Davos annual meet, pointed for the inclusion of Indian women in the economy, especially those coming from the rural areas. India can achieve 27% in its economy if women were to match men in terms of workforce.

Bilateral Meetings

Modi and the President of Switzerland, Alain Berset, held a bilateral meeting, focussing on ways of expanding trade and economic cooperation. Both countries are negotiating for a *Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement* (TEPA). Currently the issues surrounding the TEPA have not been resolved between both the countries. India has its concerns in relation to access for skilled personnel as well as a data secure status for its IT companies. One of the areas, that both countries have shown cooperation, is in their commitment to international tax transparency through the automatic exchange of information (commencing from January 2019).

Similarly Modi in his bilateral meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau discussed trade relations. Trudeau is scheduled to visit India in February (17-23) this year with a big business delegation.

The WEF's has proposed to set the *Centre for Fourth Industrial Revolution* at Mumbai, which will focus on robotics, artificial intelligence, applied technology etc.

Modi's visit to Davos in a way was to preach to the world, especially the sceptics of globalization, on the need for an open economy. And second, to market India as a growing economy and destination for investment.

Economy: Long-term Optimism

Raghuram Rajan, a former Governor of the *Reserve Bank of India* (RBI) and currently Professor in Chicago, discussed with Dr. Prannoy Roy, founder and major shareholder of the TV station NDTV, the economic situation in India. (NDTV, 26. 1. 2018).

Rajan is in the middle and long term optimistic about the economic future of the country. *"But the rising oil prices are an issue, they will influence the scale of the Gross Domestic Product. - On the other side, there was a substantial decline as a result of the 'demonetisation'. Should the RBI be a fifth column? The 'Monetary Policy Committee' (MPC) is doing a good job. The macro-stability has been achieved, whereas the micro-stability, for instance land acquisition, important buildings, infrastructure and the energy sector are lacking behind. Where is the Delhi-Mumbai corridor?"*

Rajan is optimistic, *"that we will reach after the shocks 8% growth, but we need 9 to 10%, in order to improve the situation in the states with malnutrition. We need consensus for reforms."*

Rajan showed not much conviction, that the incomes of farmers can be doubled till 2022, as propagated by PM Modi. *"The loan-waivers are no solution. We need more investments in agriculture. We have to optimize the units. Rural industries have to absorb the redundant agricultural labourers. - Rising oil prices will lead to a higher inflation. There are constraints on the supply side. It is important to stick to the monetary policy and to tackle the fiscal policy cautiously. The interest rates are adequate."*

Raghuram Rajan, who predicted the financial crisis in 2008, showed concern with regard to the world economy and the role of 'Mutual Funds' and 'Pension Funds.' *"There is financial fragility. 'Bitcoin' is a sign of a bubble."*

Rajan mentioned in a short remark, that 60% of the biggest search engines in India are from China. Altogether he opined, *"that the RBI as an independent institution stood the test of time."*

Part III India - Foreign Policy Developments

Dr. Joyce Lobo writes on the affirmation of India and Israel ties especially under the BJP.

25 years of India-Israel Diplomatic Ties

India began formal ties with Israel in 1992. However, it continued a policy of supporting the Palestinian cause. What has changed today, despite the differences on the question of Palestine, is that both India and Israel are able to normalise ties short of strategic cooperation. This also speaks volumes about the Israeli patience towards India. Moreover this patience is to be read along with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's or Bibi's doctrine of "*what Israel has to offer the world*".

Secondly the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), the ideological mentor of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) under M.S. Gowalkar and the *Hindu Mahasabha* under V.D.Savarkar supported the creation of the state of Israel. The BJP-RSS were critical of Nehruvian foreign policy of refusing formal relations with Israel. Ram Madhav, the current national General Secretary of the BJP, terms Nehruvian policy as anti-Zionism and akin the historical situations of Israel-Palestine to that of India-Pakistan. The ties between India and Israel found more visibility during the BJP rule at the centre under A.B. Vajpayee. During this time Home Minister, LK Advani and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh visited Israel in 2000. Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon visited India on 9 September 2003. Home Minister Rajnath Singh visited Israel in November, 2014 while the Israeli Agriculture and Defence Ministers visited India in January and February, 2015 respectively. President Pranab Mukherjee visited Israel in October 2015 while his counterpart President Reuven Rivlin reciprocated in November 2016.

Personal chemistry between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Netanyahu has also added to this great visibility under the BJP. Modi became the first premier from India to visit Israel in July 2017. Though most of the significant visits have taken place during the rule of the right wing party the BJP, the defence deals were largely negotiated under the premiership of Dr. Manmohan Singh from the Congress Party.

In his article "*Modi, Pawar and Deve Gowda as CMs led India-Israel ties*" (The Indian Express, Jan 17, 2018) Nicolas Blarel, from the University of Leiden-Netherlands, points to the role played by the sub-national political entities in India in cultivating interactions with Israel devoid of "*political, ideological and institutional constraints*" that New Delhi faced. Chief Ministers since 1992 have directly been in contact with Israel to seek expertise and ties in terms of agriculture or water management. They have been the "*real agents driving the diversification and consolidation of the India-Israel partnership*", writes Blarel.

Apart from the personal chemistry that Netanyahu and Modi share, what one can attribute to Modi is that he de-hyphenated relations with Israel from Palestine. This began with the breaking of the long followed convention of meeting both the authorities on sidelines of any forum or foreign visits that have been clubbed. Modi met Netanyahu sans President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine in September 2014 on the sidelines of the *UN General Assembly*.

Ties with Israel do not mean that India will abandon its commitment to the Palestine cause or impair ties with the Middle East especially Iran. Trade with the Arab countries in 2016-17 accounted for 18.25% (US\$ 121 bn) of India's total trade while it is less than 1% (US\$ 5 bn) with Israel. More than 50% of the trade is in diamonds alone. One of the areas that both countries differ is the role of Iran in West Asia and unlike Israel, New Delhi refuses to impair ties with Tehran. India relies on Iran for oil,

fertilisers, connectivity etc. Also India has not recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and voted in the UN General Assembly against the move of the USA in recognising this. India stood its ground that Palestine should become a sovereign state with East Jerusalem as its capital. There is no reciprocity in terms of Iran between both India and Israel. Instead Israel has joined China's *Belt Road Initiative* (BRI).

As per the February 2017 SIPRI report, India's import of arms came in 2012-16 from Russia (68%), USA (14%) and Israel (7.2%). In terms of defence collaboration the *Barak 8* anti-aircraft missile system (for Indian Navy warships) is one of the largest between the *Israeli Aerospace Industries* and the *Defence Research and Development Organisation*. Israel comes with technology, expertise on intelligence related to terrorism. Particularly Israel has an edge over defence technologies that aid and assist the heavy weapons. Moreover its partnership is sought by India in areas such as diamond trade, agriculture, water, cyber-security and innovation. India comes with a huge market both in defence and non-defence areas.

Joint Statement

PM Narendra Modi who is an expert premier on acronyms declared '*I4I*' or '*India for Israel and Israel for India*'. PM Benjamin Netanyahu has spelled the ties as '*I squared, T squared*' or '*India-Israel Ties for Tomorrow*'. The current focus of Netanyahu's 6 day visit (Jan. 14-19, 2018) is largely to enhance business ties. He was accompanied by a 130 member business delegation. The visit also closes the 25 years of anniversary of Indo-Israel diplomatic ties. Both leaders held talks on Jan, 15 and issued a joint statement from which some of the highlights are mentioned in the following paragraphs.

A *Five Year Joint Work Plan* for strategic cooperation in Agriculture and Water is being worked out. Currently the three-year work programme in Agriculture (2018-2020) is in implementation as part of the development cooperation. About 35 *Centres of Excellence* are operational today in India in different states under horticulture.

The *India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund* (I4F) that were announced last year have completed formalities and launched the maiden call for joint R&D projects under this. This was much part of the *Indo-Israel Business Summit* (Jan. 15). Shortly both sides would begin working on nine joint R&D projects in the areas of big data analytics in health care and security in cyber space.

MoUs were signed under cyber security and oil and gas sector, while other agreements were in the areas of air transport, film co-production, medicine, space, etc.

During his visit, Netanyahu inaugurated the *Third Raisina Dialogue* under the theme, "*Managing Disruptive Transitions: ideas, institutions and idioms*". He and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj emphasised that terrorism was the major global disruption.

Part IV South Asia

While writing on the commemorative summit at New Delhi, Dr. Joyce Lobo analyses the India-ASEAN relations from an economic point.

India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit

The *Association of South East Asian Nations* as a bloc was founded in 1967 by five countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Today, it includes Brunei, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. These were mostly US allies or partners and India's foreign policy of non-alignment and unpreparedness did not permit it, to reciprocate the South-east nations' desire for its joining.

However, India's closeness to the Soviet Union sealed the fate between the former and the ASEAN till the end of the *Cold War*. Post *Cold Wars* India scrambling for partners for meetings its needs, investments and markets for its goods. This brought in a slew of measures, affecting both the economy and the foreign policy of India. Economic reforms with an aim to open India to the world economy and the creation of partnerships, that hitherto India had been cautious or lukewarm, were revived or newly started.

Particularly in the 1990s, former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao took a bold step with the '*Look East Policy*'. The ASEAN became the key pillar of this policy. The sectoral dialogue established with ASEAN in 1992 moved upwards— full dialogue partnership in 1995, summit partnership in 2002 and strategic partnership in 2012.

Observing this partnership of 25 years and the strategic partnership of 5 years, India and ASEAN commemorated the occasions with a wide range of activities, both in India and through its Missions in ASEAN Member States. This culminated in a *Commemorative Summit* on the theme "*Shared Values, Common Destiny*" in New Delhi, with a focus on three pillars— political security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation. Leaders of ASEAN spoke on these themes during the plenary. In attendance were the heads of all the ASEAN states and as a mark of respect, they were Chief Guests at the Republic Day celebrations on January 26.

At the 14th Summit in 2014, Modi re-named the policy towards South-East Asia as '*Act East Policy*' with a focus on commerce, connectivity and culture. This has both economic and strategic connotations for India. The ASEAN has a 650 million population and a GDP crossing \$2.8 trillion, approximately like India.

Economic Relations

India and ASEAN trade amounts to \$70 billion in 2016-17, which is small compared to China (US\$ 346 bn), Japan (US\$ 239 bn), the EU (US\$ 228 bn), and the USA (US\$ 212 bn) in a rank order. Moreover, this two way trade is showing a declining trend against the US\$ 80 bn trade in 2011-12. China's investments in ASEAN are ten times more than India's (US\$ 1bn) in 2016. Again, Singapore is the major investor amongst the ASEAN countries with a cumulative total of about US\$ 30 billion (98%). A cumulative FDI outflow from India to ASEAN countries, from April 2007 to March 2015, as per data maintained by the Ministry of Finance, was about US\$ 38.67 billion. Connectivity projects such

as *Kaladan Multi-modal Transport Corridor* through Myanmar's Rakhine province and the *India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway* have incurred delay.

India's trade with ASEAN: 2005-6 & 2015-16 (in US\$ million)

Country	2005-6	2015-16		
	Total trade	Export	Import	Total trade
Brunei	44	28	554	582
Cambodia	25	143	54	197
Indonesia	4,388	2,841	13,068	15,909
Lao	05	38	180	218
Malaysia	3,578	3,707	9,084	12,791
Myanmar	637	1,068	984	2,052
Philippines	730	1,369	542	1,911
Singapore	8,779	7,722	7,306	15,028
Thailand	2,287	3,009	5,510	8,519
Vietnam	822	5,270	2,560	7,830
Total Asean	21,295	25,195	39,843	65,038
Total World	252,257	262,031	380,665	642,696

Source: Department of Commerce, Govt. of India; <http://commerce.nic.in/MOC/index.asp>

As per the *Department of Commerce-Government of India* (<http://www.assochem.org/upload/docs/ASEAN-STUDY.pdf>), in 2005-6, Singapore accounted for more than 50 % share in India's total exports to ASEAN. The other countries to follow were: Indonesia (13%), Malaysia (11%) and Thailand (10 %). In 2015-16, India's export shares were: Singapore (31%), Vietnam (21%), Malaysia (15%), Thailand (12%) and Indonesia (11%). At an aggregate level, the ASEAN share in India's total exports fell from more than 10 % in 2005-06 to 9.6 % in 2015-16. Similarly, the combined share of 4 countries (Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia & Thailand) in the total imports from the ASEAN to India has fallen from 91 % in 2005-6 to 88 % in 2015-16.

India's lead exports to the ASEAN in 2015-16 were: Petroleum products (14.9%), meat products (10.5%), transport equipment (8.5%), chemicals (6.7%), mechanical appliances (6.4%), etc. The lead imports from ASEAN were: palm oil (14.5%), coal (12.2%), electrical & electronics (10.4%), mechanical appliances (9.4%), chemicals (7.7%), petroleum products (7%), etc.

In 2015-16, India has incurred a trade deficit with ASEAN amounting to US\$ 14.6 bn. India has better trading with countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand. In terms of air connectivity, India is better linked with Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand; and in maritime connectivity with Singapore and Malaysia. Since the USA has rolled back the *Trans-Pacific Partnership*, with 12 members, the other economic partnership available is the China-led *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership* (RCEP). India is reluctant to join the latter, as it is not comfortable with the idea of being dominated.

Former *Foreign Secretary of India* Shyam Saran ("India-Asean ties: A cup half full?" *Hindustan Times*, January 24, 2018) concludes the above observations by saying, that the "*political*

relations [between India-ASEAN] have outpaced the economic, commercial, cultural and people to people relations”.

Bilateral meetings

Myanmar: Modi and the State Counselor, Aung San Suu Kyi discussed the operationalisation of the Sittwe Port, the trilateral highway and other cross border trade. India had proposed the construction of houses in the Rakhine state, which was part of the discussion. The Rohingya Crisis was not considered by the ASEAN leaders for talks during the formal meeting.

Vietnam: The strategic partnership was upgraded to a *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership* in 2016. PM Nguyễn Xuân Phúc and Modi discussed defence and maritime cooperation, operationalisation of the \$100 million Line of Credit, which involves the manufacturing of *Off-shore Patrol Vessels*, bilateral trade and investment. Both leaders signed MoUs on increasing cooperation and information in communications and the other was an implementation agreement on an *ASEAN India Center of Satellite Tracking and Telemetry Station*.

Philippines: President Rodrigo Duterte was accompanied by a huge cabinet delegation. He discussed terrorism, intelligence sharing, capacity building on countering terrorism, drug trafficking, pharmaceuticals, etc. In terms of defence cooperation, Duterte expressed his country's interest in seeking India's experience in ship building and offshore patrol vessels. Also, he showed his country's keenness for private Indian companies to participate in infrastructure development.

Thailand: In conversation with Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Modi discussed about ASEAN per se. Prayut explained his country's '*Act West*' policy. Next year, Thailand takes over as the country coordinator of ASEAN. Other areas that both leaders discussed were the *Mekong-Ganga Cooperation*, BIMSTEC, enhancing regular ship visits and exercises, prospect of cooperation in coastal surveillance radar systems and offshore patrol vessels, proposals for greater cooperation in maritime natural resources and tourism.

Singapore: Singapore is the current chair of the ASEAN. Both Modi and Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong discussed reducing costs of transactions and enabling a cashless economy through India's Rupay and Singapore's fintech and their complementarities. Other aspects of talks revolved round a *Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia* (CICA), civil aviation, smart cities, IT and Innovation, etc. Modi particularly requested his counterpart, to start air connectivity between the north-east (Guwahati) and Singapore.

Brunei: The Sultan and Modi discussed health, IT, pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, etc. Brunei has evinced an interest in India's participation in its oil and gas sector, in return, it agreed for greater exchange and security in defence cooperation and cultural and sports cooperation including Polo.

In all these meetings, members from the *Ministry of External Affairs* (MEA) clarified, that the ASEAN countries appreciated India's role in strengthening ties and creating conditions for a regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific region and enhanced cooperation in general. ASEAN members also sought India's joining the 16 member-RCEP, to know more on India's growth story, on unique identity (Aadhar), and for greater trade and investment.

Leaders' Retreat Session & Delhi Declaration

The retreat session focussed on '*Maritime Cooperation & Security*'—humanitarian and disaster management, security cooperation, and navigational freedom. There is an understanding to establish a mechanism for greater cooperation in the maritime domain sector and also on the need to address all kinds of challenges. Maritime cooperation has been a running theme in all discussions, especially in the recently held *ASEAN India Connectivity Summit*, a *Workshop on Blue Economy*, and regular dialogue mechanisms. Despite all this, India can't expect a condemnation by the ASEAN countries of China's *Belt and Road Initiative*. However the joint statement of the summit focussed on the South China Sea, especially where the members supported the effective implementation of the *Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea* (DOC) and to an early conclusion of the *Code of Conduct in the South China Sea* (COC).

The *Delhi Declaration of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit*, aimed at timely implementation of the *Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (2016-2020)*. Apart from maritime cooperation, that found the larger emphasis, other areas were terrorism, piracy, cyber security, effective implementation of the *ASEAN-India Free Trade Area*, etc. The ASEAN members expect, that the RCEP is concluded by 2018. Moreover in terms of economic cooperation, both sides have agreed to explore cooperation in the blue economy.

Cambodia PM State Visit

PM Hun Sen visited India as part of the summit and also as a state guest to India (24-27 January). He held bilateral talks with Modi on January 27, especially on enhancing trade ties. Cambodia mostly welcomes Indian investment and companies for collaborations in IT, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, horticulture and SMEs.

Both sides signed agreements on cultural exchange, a credit line, mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, and prevention of human trafficking. The signing of the *Bilateral Investment Treaty* is deferred to a later period.

The much awaited *India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway* is to be connected to Cambodia. Talks revolved over this, air connectivity and tourism. India is a partner in the restoration and conservation of heritage sites and temples in Cambodia. This has been one of the aims of India with many of the ASEAN countries, that have Hindu or Buddhist temples, as part of its cultural diplomacy.