



INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: APRIL 2018 DOSSIER

This month's edition draws on a variety of domestic challenges that grapple India. The spate of brutal child rapes and the dilemma of death penalty, problematic Parliament, upcoming Karnataka elections, fake encounters, CPI/M, etc. The economic performance of Karnataka is also covered under the economic development section.

PM Modi's triple European tour attempts a balanced relation between traditional and new partners. Great bonhomie presented by Modi and Xi at Wuhan. Also PM Oli of Nepal resets relations with India albeit with a different equation.

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Part I India - Domestic developments

Dr. Klaus Voll covers a variety of issues that have political ramifications—child rape and death penalty, fake encounters, chaos in north/central India, CPI/M, problematic Parliament, problems in NDA alliance, Lingayat religion, and upcoming Karnataka assembly elections.

Karnataka: a '*hung*' Parliament?

The TV station *India Today* (13. 4. 2018) presented a recent poll survey, according to which none of the three major parties in the state will win an own majority.

According to this, the Congress would win with a vote percentage of about 37% 90 to 101 mandates, the BJP with 35% 78 to 86 and the Janata Dal Secular (*JDS*) with 19% 34 to 43.

In case, this prediction will hold true on election day, the 12th of May 2018, then the JDS would be in the role of a '*king-maker*', although the party is de facto only a '*subregional party*', according to the TV-moderator and leading election analyst Rajdeep Sardesai.

The 84 years old JDS-chairman and former Prime Minister Deve Gowda and most of his followers favour in such a scenario an alliance with the Congress, most probably without the current CM Siddaramaiah, whereas his son and former CM Kurumaswamy tends towards the BJP. A rotation offer to the JDS for the position of the CM on behalf of the BJP cannot be excluded in such a case.

It has to be seen, if the risky play of the Congress with regard to the *Lingayats* as a separate religion (see the following article) with an implicit minority status, e. g. privileges in the educational sector for the influential religious *Mutts*, will pay off for the Congress.

The renowned election analyst Professor Sandeep Shastri believes, that the 2% lead in its vote-share should be a reason of concern for the Congress, although till now, there is no visible real „*anti-incumbency*“-factor recognisable. Shastri opines, that the Congress, emphasizing the local, performs better in the rural areas, whereas the BJP is ahead in the urban areas, particularly given the reputation of PM Modi amongst these sections of society. According to Shastri, the region of the so-called *Mumbai Karnataka* could be the key to decide, which party will be finally ahead.

Prakash Javadekar, a BJP-cabinet minister, points to the extremely difficult situation of farmers with about three thousand suicides, an alleged „*goonda raj*“ and a complete „*anti-incumbency*“ in Karnataka. The former union environment minister described the Indian IT-Metropolis Bengaluru as „*garbage city*“.

Piyush Goyal, energy- and railway minister, is chief strategist of the BJP in Karnataka. He is of the astonishing opinion, that the BJP will realistically win 150 seats and 50% of the votes and „*that the Congress will reach its lowest level. This government is the most corrupt in Karnataka and in India. On the lowest levels there is a big 'anti-incumbency'.*“

How far the caste-arithmetics will play a role, only the verdict will tell. Dalits count for 19% of the population, Lingayats 17%, other OBC's 16.1%, Muslims 16.1%, Vokkaligas 11%, Kurubas 7%, Adivasis 5%, Brahmins and Christians 3% respectively.

Karnataka: *Lingayat* as a separate religion?

The campaign for the Assembly election on the 12th of May 2018 in Karnataka with its 60 million inhabitants is already in full swing. The outcome of this election has a special bearing for the *Lok*

Sabha elections in 2019. For the Congress it is a fight for survival.

The state government under CM Siddaramaiah uses a daring strategy. The influential group of *Lingayats* comprises about 17% of the population and was in the past predominantly inclined to vote for the BJP, whose CM candidate Yeddurappa belongs to it.

The religious tradition of the Lingayats

Lingayats are followers of the social reformer Basavanna, who rejected the Vedas and other hinduistic text.

On the other side are the *Veerashaivas*, who as a *Shaivite*-sect follow Hindu rituals and the ideals of Basavanna.

Basavanna:

- Basavanna, also known as Basaveshwara, was born in 1131 as a son of Brahmin parents.
- He studied the Vedas, Puranas and Shastras and commanded Sanskrit as well as Kannada.
- Basavanna rejected the ideas of caste, multiple gods, Vedic rituals and temple-centric prayers.
- He despised the exploitation of non-Brahmins in the name of god. He preached and practised social equality.
- He called his followers *Sharanas* – 'citizens of a welfare state' – and wrote *Vachanas* (Verses) in Kannada and not in Sanskrit. These verses propagated a reformist ideology.
- Basavanna established an *Anubhava Mantapa*, where *Sharanas* discussed socio-economic and political questions. These discussions became a part of the *Vachanas*.

Tenets and writings:

- Lingayats venerate the *Ishtalinga*, a stone, which symbolizes a formless god.
- The ceremony to wear the *Ishtalinga* – 'Lingadharane' – takes place, when children are 3 to eight days old. They wear it for the rest of their life.
- Lingayats believe in a caste-less society and are strict vegetarians.
- They follow Basavanna's principles of *Kayaka* – efforts of the body to liberate the soul - and *Dasoha* – selfless service to improve society.
- Lingayats bury their deads in a meditating position of the *Dhyana Mudra* with the *Ishtalinga* in the left hand.
- Besides the *Vachanas*, the texts of the Lingayats contain also *Shoonya Sampadane*, a collection of *Vachanas* from the 12th century, and *Karane Hasuge*, written by Channabasavanna, the nephew of Basavanna.

Prominent Lingayat Mutts:

There are about 1 100 Lingayat Mutts in Karnataka, amongst them some prominent ones:

- *Jagadguru Sri Suttur Veerasimhasana Mutt*, Mysuru

Established in the 11th century

Training institutions and a hospital with 1 800 beds, daily free meals for 50 000 believers.

- *Sree Siddaganga Mutt*, Tumkur

Founded in the 15th century

126 educational institutions in Karnataka, 6 000 free meals daily to students and pilgrims.

- *Sri Jagadguru Tontadarya Mutt*, Dambal-Gadag

Founded by Keladi-rulers in the 16th century

About 100 educational institutions, three free daily meals for needy persons.

Veerashaivas:

- Veerashaivas are a *Shaivite*-sect. They follow Vedic traditions and pray in temples.
- The founders of *Veerashaivism* – the *Panchacharyas* – are regarded as the incarnations of the *Shivalingas* in the five monasteries of the sect in Balehonnur, Ujjini, Kedar, Srisailam and Kashi.

(Source: Prathima Nandakumar: *Identity Crisis. The Week*, April 1, S. 45 – 50.

The security situation in Karnataka

In the final phase of the election campaign in Karnataka, communalist clashes and attacks by radical Hindu and Muslim groups cannot be fully ruled out.

The Coastal region of Karnataka

Amongst the six regions of Karnataka, the coastal region is the most sensitive and prone to violent clashes. *Coastal Karnataka* is considered as a stronghold of the BJP.

Yet attacks on churches and pubs by Hindu-fundamentalist groups harmed the BJP in the Assembly elections in 2013. Then, the Congress won 14 of the 19 seats and the BJP only 5. The districts in the coastal region include *Uttara Kannada* (Nord-), *Udupi* and *Dakshina Kannada* (Süd-).

Coastal Karnataka is the centre of communalist violence in Karnataka. „*Many of the youth killed belong to the numerically strong Billava community, which dominates the hindutva brigade in the state. The accused in retaliatory attacks on Muslims, too, belong to the Billava community, which resents the Congress for its 'minority appeasement'.*“ (Prathima Nandakumar: *No stone unturned. To win the Karnataka elections, the BJP is relying on hindutva politics, booth management and social engineering.* *The Week*, April 15, p. 18)

In this election, the BJP made the killings of BJP- and RSS-cadres one of the important topics and alleges, that the Congress is acting soft on Muslims. The demand for the ban of cow-slaughter is another emotional topic.

Current security situation

Currently there are no incidents or a negative security situation, which indicate potential rioting.

Shobha Karandlaje, *Lok Sabha* MP from Udupi-Chikamagalur, alleged in July 2017, “*that 23 Hindu-activists have been killed by Jihadi-elements since 2014.*” She accused the Congress government to protect Muslim organisations.'

But findings revealed, that one person assumed to be dead still lives, two committed suicide, two have been killed by their own sisters and in several cases not a single Muslim had been involved.

The majority of cases were based on personal rivalries, ownership issues and political rivalries. Yet several cases were based on the rivalry between the *Popular Front of India* (PFI) and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) respectively its affiliated organisations like the *Bajrang Dal*, *Hindu Jagrana Vedike*, *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* etc. In these cases the accused are from the PFI.

A District Collector (highest Indian Administrative Service (IAS)-officer in a district) pointed out, “*that these are murders related to criminal activities in the garb of communal conflicts. Most of those accused in the PFI versus Sangh clashes have criminal backgrounds.*” (Source: Sruthisagar Yamunan, “*Ground report: Behind Karnataka BJP’s ‘jihadi’ murder list, more than Hindutva and Islamist clashes*”, *Scroll.in*, March 21, 2018. URL: <https://scroll.in/article/872528/ground-report-behind-karnatakas-trail-of-murders-a-deepening-communal-divide-and-rising-greed>)

The collector said, “*It is a potent immunity given the political game being played.*”. Another officer said, “*that rather than calling it communal politics, we should be calling it land-sand politics,*” ... “*How do you think they pay for their communal agenda? Nothing works without money.*”

CM Siddaramiah made till now sure, that no killing led to violence. He has ensured an adequate security and applies *Section 144*, and threatens to apply the so-called *Goonda Act* with preventive detention, in order to avoid potential communal clashes, which the BJP could use for its own purposes.

On the other hand, many of the accused PFI-members are on bail, which the BJP makes an emotional topic under its master strategist party president Amit Shah.

Members of the police, be it of Hindu or Christian belief, have a clear aversion against Muslims and treat them in a severe manner.

Currently, the Christian community does not feel threatened and most probably will predominantly vote for the Congress, since they mistrust the BJP and the RSS. The churches and their leadership, including the organisations formed by lay-men and lay-women, try to create awareness for a high electoral turn-out and they appeal to their people, not to vote for “*anti-Christian parties.*” (Major inputs by Dr. Joyce Lobo)

Violence in North- and Central-India

On the 2nd of April 2018, there have been major violent clashes in North and Central-India, but also in some cases all over the country (*'Bharat Bandh'*), with around ten deaths. Madhya Pradesh in particular had been affected.

The reason for this outbreak of violence was the recent decision of the *Supreme Court*, that accused under the *Scheduled Castes und Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act* should not be anymore automatically arrested. Allegedly, this should prevent a misuse of the law, which was enacted during the regime of Congress-PM Rajiv Gandhi.

Although the BJP-led government of Maharashtra supported this decision of the *Supreme Court*, the central government contested this decision, particularly after its prominent cabinet minister Ram Vilas Paswan, socially a Dalit, and various Dalit BJP MP's like Udit Raj protested.

The protests were mainly led by Dalits and several of their organisations, unclear is, how far so-called violent '*lumpen-elements*' mixed with the protesters. Trains and public traffic had been stopped, cars and shops burnt. Weapons were demonstratively shown and even used.

Paramilitary forces and also the army intervened, in order to avoid a complete breakdown of law and order. State governments suspended the internet.

Mayawati, supremo of the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) and a former CM of Uttar Pradesh, accused the BJP, „to support communalist elements.“ She condemned, like the young Dalit-icon Jignesh Mewani, an independent MLA from Gujarat, the use of force. Dalit-spokespersons maintained, that movements by Dalits always passed peacefully in the past.

For the BJP and NDA, these protests are dangerous in view of the upcoming state and *Lok Sabha* elections. It could damage its tediously built contacts to sections of the Dalit community. The *Janata Dal United* (JDU), its coalition partner in Bihar, supports the Dalit-protests.

In view of the chaos and violence the question arises, what really still binds the Indian society together. It will not be easy to find out, if these incidents have been spontaneous or even organised outbreaks of violence. Certainly, such pictures contribute to a loss of reputation of India internationally.

Standstill in Parliament

The second part of the budget session of Parliament led de facto to a complete „wash-out“. It was the most unproductive session since 2000. The *Lok Sabha* functioned 4% of the available time and the *Rajya Sabha* 9%.

Dinesh Trivedi, *Lok Sabha*-MP of the *Trinamool Congress*, reiterated, „that it is the fundamental duty of the government and the Speaker, that the Parliament is in session and is functioning. There was no attempt by the government, to initiate a discussion. Why should the opposition not wish a discussion?“

The former minister for railways and health criticised, that no action was taken against the AIADMK-MP's, who as the only ones systematically disturbed the proceedings. He argued, it could be assumed, that this was used by the government for its purposes. „Thereby Parliament gets discredited and arguments in favour of a presidential system respectively a take-over by the army or for a dictatorship are favoured.“

CPI/M-Party Congress in Hyderabad

The 22nd Party-Congress of the *Communist Party of India (Marxist)* – as a result of the division in its leadership one of the most critical in its history – was opened by the speech of its general secretary Sitaram Yechury. Yechury emphasised „the manifold challenges of the communalist Hindutva-forces.“ He appealed to all secular and democratic forces to defeat the BJP in the centre.

The guest speaker Sudhakar Reddy, General Secretary of the *Communist Party of India* (CPI), alleged, „that the BJP-government leads the country to fascism and this enemy should not be underestimated.“

Besides the CPI, Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist, the Forward Block, Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) send delegations.

The CPI/M and Indian Communism

Definitely since the *Lok Sabha* election in 2014, it is clear, that the CPI/M is only a very marginal force at the national level. In 2018, the CPI/M also lost power in its stronghold in Tripura and currently only rules in Kerala.

Already in 2000, Indrajit Gupta, former general secretary of the oldest Communist Party of India (CPI), former home minister in the 'United Front'-governments 1996/97, lamented, „that the communist movement has become sectarian.“

In my opinion, this has not changed since then. Ideological renewals, perhaps after the pattern of the erstwhile 'Euro-Communism', but adapted to the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the Indian multi-ethnic state with its different sub-nationalisms, are not recognisable.

Marginal influence at the national level

The times, when the former CPI/M-general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet was a much sought after discussion partner and mediator between political parties – this hold true for the Congress as well as for major regional parties – are since long over under his successors Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury.

The CPI/M committed the „big historical blunder“, to reject in 1996 the offer to hold the office of Prime Minister under the 'United Front' for its long-term and reputed CM of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu.

The following table shows the dramatic decline of the Left during the last 15 years. The vote percentage of the CPI/M reduced between 2004 and 2014 nearly by a third, which led to an absolute low in votes and seats. Also the Communist Party of India declined dramatically during this period.

Together they received in 2014 only 2.68% of the votes and are only minimally represented in both houses of Parliament.

Left Performance in Lok Sabha General Elections: 1951-2014

General Election	CPI(M)		CPI	
	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)
2014	09	2.16	01	0.52
2009	16	3.10	04	0.83
2004	43	5.66	10	1.41
1999	33	5.40	04	1.48
1998	32	5.16	09	1.75
1996	32	6.12	12	1.97
1991	35	6.16	14	2.49
1989	33	6.55	12	2.57

1984	22	5.87	06	2.71
1980	37	6.24	10	2.49
1977	22	4.29	07	2.82
1971	25	5.12	23	4.73
1967	19	4.28	23	5.11
1962	--	--	29	9.94
1957	--	--	27	8.92
1951	--	--	16	3.29

Source: Election Commission of India

Left members in the Rajya Sabha		
Year	CPI(M)	CPI
2002-04	12	05
2004-06	12	--
2006-08	14	03
2008-10	15	05
2010-12	13	05
2012-14	11	02
2014-16	08	01
2016-18	05	01

Source: www.rajyasabha.nic.in

http://www.rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/publication_electronic/rsstatis_inf52-03.pdf

With regard to the current efforts to form a so-called „third– or federal front“, in my opinion the CPI/M does not play any role and is more seen as a disturbing factor, particularly because of its

antagonistic role vis-à-vis the *Trinamool Congress* in West Bengal.

Also, the leaders of regional parties are nowadays far more experienced and self-confident and know, how they have to interact with each other – irrespective of existing „*ego clashes*“. They know about their mutual expectations and don't need the advice of relative political newcomers like Karat and Yechury, whose socialisation mainly took place in the leftist *Jawaharlal Nehru University* (JNU) and not in urban or rural '*class struggles*', besides that they have no governmental experience at all.

Pro + contra: An alliance with the Congress?

At the recent by-elections in West Bengal the BJP occupied the second position and thereby advanced as the major challenger for Mamata Bannerjee and the *Trinamool Congress*, irrespective of the still big vote differences.

The CPI/M landed at position N. 3, whereas the Congress reached as a far distant No. 4. Does such „*a coalition of losers*“ then really make sense?

In Kerala, the ruling CPI/M views still the Congress as the real political adversary, far less the BJP, which still has to really establish itself as a real power in '*God's own country*'.

The debate and voting in the Politbureau and Central Committee about a limited going together between the CPI/M with the Congress – '*Yechury-line*' – respectively as an alternative equi-distance to Congress and BJP – '*Karat-line*' – took place before the voting out of the Left Front government in Tripura.

Roughly speaking, the West Bengal unit gathered around Yechury and the Kerala unit around Karat. The Kerala-unit, led by CM Vigayan, sees the Congress as a party with „*neo-liberal economic policies*“ and therefore at the same step like the BJP.

Yechury advocates a greater flexibility for the various state units of the CPI/M, in order to decide about understandings with the Congress or other parties.

After the political bureau sanctioned the resolution draft, which rejected any cooperation with the Congress, the Central Committee voted in its 22nd session on the 21st of January 2018 with 55 in its favour and 31 against it, including Yechury.

After this defeat, Yechury offered his resignation as General Secretary. Besides basic ideological and tactical reasons, ego-problems did certainly play a role between Karat and Yechury.

Sitaram Yechury opined: „*If one accuses me as pro-Congress, then I can in return charge the others as pro-BJP,*“ insinuating, that non-cooperating with the Congress objectively strengthens the BJP.

Contrary to the CPI/M, the CPI advocates an alliance respectively a tactical understanding with the Congress.

Reaction by the Congress

The Congress had given up hope for an alliance after the resolutions of the CPI/M political bureau and its central committee, irrespective of the alleged good personal relations between Rahul Gandhi and Yechury.

The Congress in the meantime is even of the opinion, that the CPI/M is in the current stage of alliance building even a disturbing factor, since the communists will create problems both in West Bengal and in Kerala.

'Social-democratised' Communists

The CPI/M is committed to parliamentary democracy. In my opinion, it is the last bastion of *'political Brahmanism'*. It failed to integrate articulate representatives of OBC's, Dalits and Adivasis into its party and into top positions during the last decades.

Irrespective of its pursued orthodox ideology – Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao still greet the visitors in its headquarter - the CPI/M in practice is de facto „*social-democratic*“ and part of the rule of the *'state class'*.

The CPI/M advocates land reforms, which according to T. K. Arun from the *Economic Times* „*are quinessential of a capitalist nature.*“

The CPI/M does not have real charismatic leaders, although it is rooted mainly amongst urban workers through the *Center for Indian Trade Unions* (CITU) and, as recently demonstrated by the march from Nashik to Mumbai by upto 50 000 small farmers and landless labourers, via its *All India Kisan Sabha* under the leadership of the articulated Ashok Dhawle.

22. Party Congress in Hyderabad

The 22nd party congress took place over five days in Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana, with about 750 delegates between the 18th to the 22nd of April 2018. It is the highest decision-making body of the CPI/M.

A declaration by the political bureau of the CPI/M ahead of the congress underlined the economic slow-down after demonetisation and the dangers of a recession.

Low GDP-growth rates, a low industrial growth and overall stagnating exports as well as an increase in *Non-Performing Assets* (NPA's), the deepening of the agrarian crisis and growing unemployment justify from the CPI/M point of view such a pessimistic assessment. „*The economic policy of the Modi government is catastrophic for the country.*“

The communists are of the most probably illusionary opinion, that only the *Left* can form an opposition on the basis of alternative politics vis-à-vis the *Sangh Parivar*.

Yet Sitaram Yechury conceded, that a certain alienation took place with young supporters, for instance in Tripura. „*After the BJP-victory in Assam the penetration of the RSS in the Northeast has fast increased. We must stop the communal polarisation.*“

Yechury contradicts decisively the thesis, „*that the Left is threatened by demise, quite contrary to the objective reality. It has become increasingly clear, that the Left alone is the principal opposition platform for the population. Its relevance in politics can only grow.*“ (Frontline, March 30, 2018)

Sumit Chakravarty, editor of the left weekly *Mainstream*, speaks about „*a battle of two lines*“, whereby the *'Karat-line'*, mainly supported by the Kerala unit, rejects any relations with the Congress, whereas the position represented by Yechury advocates an open relationship to the Congress and other parties.

Chakravarty did not rule out during the Hyderabad congress a possible resignation by Yechury and speculated, that Brinda Karat, the only female member of the political bureau and wife of Prakash Karat, might replace him.

Chakravarty envisages no real innovation potential or any new strategic orientation within the CPI/M and also does not see a good scope for a successful performance in the 2019 *Lok Sabha* elections.

Perspectives

The Hyderabad congress avoided a possible split of the CPI/M. In the end, the compromise reached favoured Yechury's arguments and he got re-elected for a second term.

The future of '*communism*' respectively a '*left*'-oriented party should face a fertile ground, given the prevailing social and economic conditions in India. This could lead to a renewal of the CPI/M, like the „*nine lives of a cat*“ (T. K. Arun).

Yechury is rather realistic, when he points out to the immense finances available to the "*bourgeois parties*" BJP and Congress, which, with 1 034 crores respectively 235 crores in 2017, have been far ahead of the CPI/M with its meagre 2.08 crores, this is 0.13% of the total means.

But thanks to the unpredictable Indian voters, as shown in the past, it cannot be ruled out, that a till now not recognisable little *David* might one day appear like a phoenix from the ashes, in order to challenge the mighty *Goliath* BJP, perhaps with the communists as part of such an alliance.

Much will depend, if India's communists will be in a position, to formulate in an understandable manner programmatic, tactical and content-wise alternatives, which holds also true for other intellectually exhausted parties of the system of the democratically elected „*state classes*“, which is ruling India.

Naidu's open critique of the BJP

Chandrababu Naidu, chief minister of Andhra Pradesh and President of the *Telugu Desam Party* (TDP), said in an interview with Rajdeep Sardesai (*India Today*, 4. 4. 2018), that Prime Minister Narendra Modi ignored his presence in Parliament.

He argued, that his sole agenda would be the implementation of the partition law of the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh. „*The NDA-government has completely failed in this regard. The false propaganda of the BJP in this regard has to be condemned. Under Vajpayee the NDA was a coalition with a great respect for its allies, NDA 2 does not bother about the other parties. I have not received any answers by the Prime Minister's Office. The division of the state happened in an unscientific and irrational manner.*“

Naidu emphasized, that he joined the NDA in the interest of Andhra Pradesh, also because of the aspired '*special category-status*' by his party. „*Instead, the BJP supports the YSR Congress, whose MP's are entertained in the PMO.*“

During his recent stay in Delhi, Naidu spoke to quite a number of opposition politicians. Naidu, who stressed his role as the longest serving CM, praised coalition governments, „*because they deliver results.*“

He underlined, according to him, the average growth rate of 10.5% during the last four years in

Andhra Pradesh . „*The BJP was never a real political force in Andhra Pradesh and will in future perform even worse.*“

With regard to the chances of an alternative front to BJP and Congress, Naidu opined: „*A third front could be an option for the future.*“ He indicated, although hesitantly, that he could support a „*federal front.*“

It will be interesting to observe, if it will really come to closer ties between the YSR Congress under Jagan Mohan Reddy and the BJP, as well as how the TDP will come out of its political isolation in AP. The Congress is definitely not an option for the TDP, because such a step would be politically suicidal.

Yogi Adityanath's 'Encounter Raj'.

During the first twelve months of the government of Yogi Adityanath in Uttar Pradesh there have been 12 000 so-called „*encounters*“ between the police and criminals. Result: 40 persons dead and 247 injured.

The UP-government argues, that these are not at all so-called '*fake encounters*', practised in quite a number of Indian states, even earlier in Delhi.

Akhilesh Yadav, President of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and a former CM, alleges, that the situation in UP is worsening. According to reports, family members of killed persons, if they complain about the killings for instance at the *National Human Rights Commission* (NHRC), are arrested by the police and even tortured. In one case, the police alleged, that a whole family and even a seventy years old man were allegedly involved in a so-called '*gang-rape*'. The UP-CM denies the alleged '*fake cases*' .

The former police chief of Uttar Pradesh, Vikram Singh, calls such reports „*absolutely shocking*“ and Anand Patel, *Assistant Editor, India Today*, speaks of „*clear intimidations by the police.*“

According to the BJP-spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia, till recently with the SP, 2 744 criminals have been arrested in one year. „*After these arrests, criminals are fleeing or surrender voluntarily.*“

Yet Maja Daruwala, director of the *Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative*, speaks of a recognisable pattern of the actions of the police. The experienced UP-journalist Sharat Pradhan maintains, „*that 80% of the arrested are petty criminals. There are awards declared for the arrests of criminals, four days after they are released from prison, they are shot by „trigger happy cops!*“

Parts of the population, amongst them especially traders threatened by extortions and murders, applaud these actions against organized crime and its „*bullet for bullet policy.*“

Daruwala opined, „*the public acclamation should not be a yardstick but the observance of law. There is no justification for these killings and the question arises, if these cases are pursued.*“ The journalist Sharat Pradhan is of the opinion, „*that the lumpen elements of the BJP have now a free run. Most of the 'encounters' take place in the night and are 'fake'.*“

There is certainly a more exact need to know more about these incidents, arrests and killings. But the referred documentation material presented by the TV station *India Today* (5. 4. 2018) should at least raise more poignant questions about law and order in India's most populous state.

Politics of rapes

India is in large parts a brutal and lawless society. The gruesome gang rape and murder of the 8 years old girl Asifa, which belonged to an ethnic group of Muslim nomads in Kathua in Jammu, and the alleged rape of a minor by the BJP-MLA Kuldeep Sengar in Unnao in Uttar Pradesh dominated the headlines for many days. People in large parts of the country protested in the streets, posing the question, if the government policy '*Beti Bachao*' is finally only an empty slogan.

The BJP-leadership kept quiet in both cases for quite some time. Even some of its political representatives, as two BJP ministers in Jammu & Kashmir, supported protesting lawyers, who wanted to communalize the gang-rape, in order to avoid a prosecution of the culprits.

In an act of damage control, PM Narendra Modi finally condemned these brutal rapes and the two J&K-ministers had to resign after pressure from Delhi. For quite some time, the BJP underestimated the national anger about these incidents.

The political leadership in Uttar Pradesh permitted its MLA Kuldeep Sengar, a notorious party hopper, ten months to roam around free. The police refused a *First Information Report* (FIR), till the father of the minor raped girl, succumbed to heavy injuries, afflicted by the brother of the MLA, and died in police custody. The raped young woman tried to commit suicide in front of the CM's residence.

Finally, the *High Court* in Allahabad ordered the arrest and interrogation of the MLA Sengar, after he gave many statements with derogatory remarks about the family of the victim on TV. Also higher police officers have been suspended.

BJP female ministers Sushma Swaraj, Smriti Irani, Nirmala Sithraman and Maneka Gandhi, expressed themselves in 2012/13 in the so-called „*Nirbhaya*“ case in no uncertain terms in favour of the raped, who died later. Since 2013 – the „*Nirbhaya*“ case led over weeks to massive country-wide demonstrations, rapes rose by 50%. Maneka Gandhi, minister for women and child welfare, demanded now the death sentence for the rape of children below 12 years.

The conviction rate of rapes is 22%. These crimes are rising. Since 2015, alone rapes of children increased by 82%. Besides, there are many abductions of children.

The experienced political scientist Neera Chandoke opined, that the roots of all these evils are deeper. „*There is a complete breakdown of institutions and procedures.*“

Many see numerous politicians and the political class, „*which lives to a large degree from politics*“, responsible for these tendencies. Its members are protected from prosecution by a multifold network.

In Uttar Pradesh, CM Yogi Adityanath closed many proceedings shortly before the final stage, also riot cases in Muzaffarnagar from 2013 and a rape case against a former BJP-union minister. All this in a country, where many criminals charged with murders and rapes, are sitting in Parliaments. Increasingly, the political class itself becomes the problem.

Death sentence for rapes of children

„*India is the rape capital of the world. It is no country for women and children.*“

Such and similar statements made headlines in a deeply shattered society after the recent rape and murder of an 8 years old girl in Kathua in Jammu and a minor in Unnao in Uttar Pradesh.

According to Vrinda Grover, lawyer at the *Supreme Court* (SC) and a human rights activist, „*the rule of*

law is breaking down. The people don't respect any longer the rule of law, which manifests itself in public lynching of people.“

As a reaction, the Modi government, through an executive order, introduced the death sentence for the raping of girls below 12 years and increased the minimum sentence from 10 to 20 years for the rape of girls below 16 years. It amended the already stringent *Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences* (POCSO) Act, which was introduced after the 'Nurbhaya' case in 2012/13.

Will these measures be deterrents? *Hindutva* apologists do think so. But the opinions with regard to this question are divided.

The number of rapes in the extremely frustrated Indian society are increasing. This is a disturbing trend, particularly since many cases go unreported. Only 30% of rapes get registered. There are targeted rapes of women of the Dalit and Muslim communities. These rapes are not seldom celebrated in social media.

The human rights activist Harsh Mander, who retired from the *Indian Administrative Service* (IAS) after the massacres in Gujarat in 2002, states, „that 90% of the rapists are personally known to the victims. Public officers often destroy evidence to favour rapists.“

Mihira Sood, SC-lawyer, opines, „that the new law will be counter-productive, because the rapists will try to destroy primary evidence and kill the victim. The increase in sentences will not lead to higher convictions.“

Vrinda Grover speaks about „a political and legal populism of the Modi-government. There is no protection for the victims and witnesses. Since the 'Nirbhaya' case in 2012/13, there is an increase of rapes by 50%, although the registration of rapes constitutes a massive problem. The death sentence for these crimes will not be a deterrent, given the shoddy investigations and the lack of forensic laboratories. The speeding up of files does not happen. There is a low conviction rate.“

Sood and Grover emphasize, that there will be in future increased pressure from within the families and from the neighbourhood, in order to sweep rapes under the carpet, in order not to send the perpetrators to the gallows. This would lead to a decrease of registrations.

Besides the rapes of children and minors, there are also all over the country abductions of children. Congress-spokesperson Dr. Shama Mohammed refers in this context also to the numerous cases of pedophilia.

Dr. Sunil Mittal, a psychiatrist, demands, that in schools sexual education for children should take place. He reminded in this context, that the government swept under the carpet the topic of 'marital rapes', which happen quite frequently in India.

All these facts are alarming symptoms of an increasingly violent and in many ways perhaps „sick“ society with an unbalanced sexual economy, which is not capable to master the transition from a traditional to a modern society.

Part II India - Economic Developments

Karnataka—an economic profile of the state

Karnataka has been called as one of the fastest growing states in India. As the state of Karnataka heads to the assembly elections to be held on May 12 this year, a look into its economic performance matters a great deal to the incumbent party—the *Indian National Congress* (INC).

As per the February 2018 published *Economic Survey of Karnataka 2017-18*, the GSDP is estimated to be Rs. 12,68,881 crore and is anticipated to grow at 12.1% at current prices. At constant (2011-12) prices GSDP is Rs. 9,49,111 crore with an expected growth of 8.5%, whereas the GDP at the national level is 6.5% at constant (2011-12) prices. The share of Karnataka's GSDP in *All India GDP* is 7.6% during 2017-18. Sector-wise, services share is 66.63%, compared to agriculture (11.10%) and industry (22.27%), and have come to dominate the GSDP. Industry growth rate has dipped to 2.2%. Karnataka along with Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana and Tamil Nadu is one of the largest exporting states as per the *Economic Survey 201*

Karnataka is known for having the highest R&D centres numbering to about 401. About 75% of the *Fortune Global 500* companies outsource their IT services to firms in Bengaluru. It is also known as the fourth largest technology cluster in the world with 47 IT/ITeS *Special Economic Zones*, three software technology parks and dedicated IT investment regions. The state began as an IT hub since the 1980s. In 2017, the export of electronics and computer software from the state was about US\$ 62.66 billion.

The state ranks as the third destination for FDI (8%), after Mumbai and New Delhi as per the February 2018 *Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion* factsheet. It produces 60% of the machine tools of India, is the second highest producer of special purpose and heavy electrical machinery, contributes second highest to aerospace exports from India and accounts for 20% of the national garments production.

Karnataka's *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP) grew at an average of 7.68%, which is the third fastest among 20 states, included in a report published by *India Ratings and Research*. Karnataka is behind Gujarat (10%) and West Bengal (8.30%) in terms of state GDP growth rate. Fiscal deficit is restrained to 2.8% of the total state GDP. It has a low expenditure on education (15.3%). Expenditure on roads & bridges, power, and irrigation has been balanced to more than 6% in each. However it's *Human Development Index* average score is 0.52, much behind seven states — Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab.

Several initiatives have been taken earnestly in the state with sector-specific policies, that have been announced for electric vehicles, animation, aerospace policy, electronic system design & manufacturing, biotech etc. So far, it has been able to attract 170 start-ups under the *GoK-Nasscom Start-Up Warehouse NextGen* in association with the *National Association of Software and Services Companies* (NASSCOM). Under the *New Textile Policy 2013-18*, the government plans to invest US\$ 1,650 million in the textile sector. In September 2017, the state government passed the '*Karnataka Electric Vehicle and Energy Storage Policy 2017*'. Electric Vehicles manufacturing is expected to attract investments worth US\$ 4.82 billion, while creating more than 50,000 jobs. Also, a new *Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics* (AVGC) policy has been introduced for 2017-2022. The policy aims to encourage and support appropriate manpower development, infrastructure development and business development in this sector. Also, its government has approved the establishment of food parks in six districts, which are in advanced stages of implementation. Finally,

Karnataka also happens to be among the top five destinations for tourism in India.

Part III India - Foreign Policy Developments

Dr. Joyce Lobo analyses the triple visit by Modi to Europe. Through the Nordic Summit, India tries to

redefine its equations with Europe by forging relations other than its traditional partners. With UK, India has already begun its work on continuing ties before and after BREXIT. And in Wuhan, Modi and Xi realise the need for effective communications to avoid tensions.

Modi in Sweden and the Indo-Nordic Summit

Sweden

For Prime Minister Modi, this has been a month of several significant foreign trips—Sweden, UK, Germany and China. His first visit took him to Sweden (16-17 April 2018), where he had an audience with King Carl XVI Gustaf and bilateral talks with his counterpart PM Stefan Löfven (April 17). Meetings with the Swedish business leaders and the Indian community were the other events on his itinerary.

The focus of the talks in particular and the bilateral relations in general have remained trade, technology and investment. Sweden has shown keen interest in the *Make in India* initiative. Löfven participated in the *Make in India* Mumbai Summit in February 2016. A similar event was held in Sweden the next year in October. Over 170 Swedish companies have invested USD 1.4 billion (0.39% or 19th rank) since 2000 in India. Around 70 Indian companies have invested in Sweden. The bilateral trade stands at around USD 1.8 billion.

The bilateral talks yielded few significant results, with press statements issued by both the leaders. Both sides reiterated their commitment to the provisions of the *2016 Joint Statement*. There has been an agreement to strengthen defence and security ties - especially cyber-security - for which a security agreement will be formulated. The security dialogue takes place at the *National Security Advisors* level. Both sides signed the *Joint Declaration on Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future* and announced the adoption of the *Joint Action Plan*.

The innovation partnership would be built into the previous joint statement and the *2018 Joint Action Plan*. This will have areas of collaboration such as smart cities, transportation and eMobility, energy, clean technologies, new materials, space, circular and bio-based economy, and health and life sciences.

The *Joint Action Plan* includes areas like investment, start-ups, manufacturing etc., linked to renewable energy, urban transport, and waste-management. As part of the Plan, in terms of defence cooperation, both sides agreed to look into possibilities of finalization of a bilateral agreement on exchange and mutual protection of classified information, explore opportunities for investment in *Defence Production Corridors* in India, and encourage industry partners to develop supply chains for *small and medium sized enterprises* (SME) with major *Defence & Aerospace Original Equipment Manufacturers*. The *Indo-Swedish Joint Commission on Scientific and Economic Affairs*, *Foreign Office Consultations* and other relevant bilateral fora and *Joint Working Groups* are tasked to oversee the implementation of the Plan.

The last visit by any premier from India was by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988. Sweden and India share the same ethos in terms of global and regional peace with marked commitment to the UNO. Sweden has extended its support for India's accession to the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

India-Nordic Summit, April 17, 2018

Both India and Sweden (Modi and Löfven) co-hosted the *India-Nordic Summit – Shared Values Mutual Prosperity* in Stockholm. In participation were the remaining Nordic countries leaders—Denmark (Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Finland (Juha Sipilä), Iceland (Katrín Jakobsdóttir) and Norway (Erna Solberg). The focus of the discussions were global security, economic growth, innovation and climate change, with free trade as a catalyst for achieving inclusive growth and realising the *Sustainable Development Goals*. So innovation and digital transformation have been given a great deal of emphasis. The remaining part of the joint press statement that was issued, echoed the same position of Sweden in relation to India. Hence *Agenda 2030* for sustainable development and *Paris Agreement*, UN reforms and India's permanent membership to UNSC and the NSG found an echo in the statement.

India seeks to enhance ties with the *European Union* (EU). Sweden, Denmark and Finland are members of the EU, while Norway and Iceland are part of the *European Free Trade Association*. As India embarked on several flagship programs like *Clean Ganga*, *Swacch Bharat*, *Smart City*, *Skill India* etc., the strength of the Nordic states in areas of clean technology, environmental solutions, port modernization, cold chains, skill development, innovation, digital initiatives etc matters. India wants to cultivate better relations with the Nordic countries as a region, as it finds similar characteristics amongst them.

India becomes a point of attraction, given the huge population, the goods and services it can supply and as a source of investment for the Nordic region. India's trade with the region totalled to around US\$ 5.3 billion in 2016-17, with *Cumulative Foreign Direct Investment* (FDI) to India at US\$ 2.5 billion.

Bilateral on the sidelines

On the sidelines of the *India-Nordic Summit*, Modi met his counterparts, wherein the common denominator of talks was trade, investment and renewable energy. With Denmark, the Indian officials exchanged documents pertaining to animal husbandry, dairying and urban development. India and Finland have dedicated their relations to trade and investment, renewable energy, space, waste management, start-up and education. Iceland is keen on viewing India as an investment destination in the blue economy and geothermal energy, apart from other areas. With Norway, the focus was on trade and investment, shipping and port-development, blue economy, renewable energy, health, IT and green transport solutions.

Modi's visit to UK: bilateral talks and the CHOGM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UK is in terms of continuing the modern partnership with rich economic engagement. Trade and investment, commitment to the working of Commonwealth and the technology partnership were the key focuses of the bilateral talks (April 18, 2018) between Modi and Prime Minister Theresa May. A wide range of agreements in this regard were signed on cyber, rejuvenation of River Ganga, skill development, nuclear safety, technology cooperation, organised crime, animal husbandry, etc.

The bilateral trade stands at about US\$ 13 billion (2017), services trade at US\$ 7.2 billion. The UK has been the largest G20 investor in India over the last ten years, while India is the fourth largest investor

in the UK and the second largest job creator, having created 1, 10,000 jobs so far. UK is India's second largest international research and innovation partner. Again, UK FDI amounts to more the US\$25 billion over 2000 to 2017, which is about 6.88%.

Modi's visit focussed on two themes – Living Bridge and the tech partnership. As part of Living Bridge, Modi met persons in all spheres of activity and both countries vowed to continue this interaction with the varied groups of persons.

The *Joint Statement* devoted the initial aspects to the global understanding, that India and the UK share and also their understanding of the Commonwealth. As part of environment cooperation, both sides decided to tackle plastic pollution through the Commonwealth in particular.

Trade and investment were given priority, as UK makes the formal exit from the EU. May expressed UK's interest to have a *Free Trade Agreement (FTA)* or begin with its negotiations at least. Modi sought assurances, that the FTA would be balanced. He was assured, that till the end of 2020, Indian companies would enjoy the benefits of the pre-BREXIT period. Modi sought easier mobility for Indian professionals, also students like visa issues, work permits etc. May has initiated - even when she was the home secretary - tougher migration policies, that have drastically reduced the number of Indian students seeking education in UK, due to the condition, that they return home after the completion of their studies.

These consular issues were raised by India, including the issue of economic offenders. India tends to deal stringently with the economic offenders, who leave the country in order to escape punishment. Hence there is an endeavour in the Parliament to pass *the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill*, but in the meanwhile take up the issue with countries, where these fugitives have taken asylum or reside.

The *UK-India Joint Trade Review* having been concluded, both countries have decided to follow its recommendations to reduce barriers to trade, make it easier to do business in both countries and enable a stronger bilateral trade relationship after the UK exits the EU. Both countries announced a *Fast Track Mechanism*, to support Indian investments into the UK.

The *New Global Green Energy Fund*, with each country investing about 120 million pounds - the remaining to be raised on the *London Stock Exchange*, LSE - has been initiated. This fund will serve the Green projects as part of their climate action.

Second, importance was given to technology, innovation and R&D and Tech initiatives. Premier May participated in the November 2016 *Tech Summit* in Delhi, while a similar one is to be held in the later part of 2018 in the UK. There is a deep interest to up the technology collaborations in areas of *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*, digital economy, health technologies, cyber security, clean growth, smart urbanisation and future mobility. As part of the technology partnership, UK has initiated to establish the *UK-India Tech Hub* in India. Also an *India-UK Tech CEO Alliance* has been announced with an agreement signed between NASSCOM and TECH-UK. Pune has been so far identified as one of the hubs

The UK formally joined the *International Solar Alliance (ISA)* initiative by India, at an event held between ISA and the LSE. UK would collaborate with the ISA on solar financing, developing next generation solar technologies, etc.

On the question of Syria, both countries took a common stand of opposing “*use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anybody, under any circumstances and are committed to strengthening the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.*”

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

Modi participated in the UK hosted *Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting* on April 19-20. The Summit this year was structured around the theme “*Our Common Future*”, with 53 countries in attendance.

India believes in multilateralism or multilateral institutions, particularly the CHOGM, as it looks into the interests of the small states, small island nations, which are yet to be developed. Also many of these states are found in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean region.

Modi participated in the executive session of the CHOGM. The areas discussed included several spheres with an emphasis on humanistic principles. Modi highlighted some key issues such as sustainable development goals and climate action. India seeks from the organisation, that it focuses on the developing countries in terms of international advocacy and in assistance.

Germany

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also made a brief stopover at Berlin on the 21st of April and held talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel. This visit followed the visit to India by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in March this year. Both sides have committed to continue a high level exchange, to sustain strategic and economic ties. Germany is the largest trade partner of India with the EU. In 2016-17, the bilateral trade turnover was US\$ 18.76 billion, with India exporting goods worth US\$ 7.18 billion to Germany and importing German products worth US\$ 11.58 billion.

Modi-Xi talks at Wuhan Summit

In what seems to be a surprising move, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met his counterpart Xi Jinping at Wuhan for an informal summit (April 27-28, 2018). They held several rounds of meeting with no announcements or agreements to shed light on specifics.

The summit’s focus was in a way a restarting of the dialogue process in areas of bilateral and global aspects, while giving priority to the respective national interests. There was a reiteration of the closer development partnership, as agreed in previous summits. Second, the India-China boundary question was to be approached in the usual manner and with usual mechanisms that had been in place so far. The principle of peace and tranquillity was to guide, while preventing and managing situations in border areas. Third, India and China have addressed the trade deficit that the former has. In this case, both sides decided to explore agricultural and pharmaceutical exports to China. Contact between people, culture, sport, entertainment were other areas that were part of the discussions.

Much needs to be seen on how skirmishes at the border are avoided in future. Also, how China will act on terrorism by ensuring, that terrorists such as Masood Azhar are proscribed. In the meanwhile, India needs to ensure, that constant dialogue is maintained, despite adverse events. This is the only

way to diffuse tensions, given the fact, that Modi's latter two years in office have not gained momentum in good neighbourly relations. India has to shed its inhibitions of China by getting closer to its neighbours. The simple fact is, that India does not have the resources and means to giving assistance, especially financial, to its neighbours on a scale to match the Chinese. May be, it can explore joint collaborations in the neighbourhood along with China – this is intended in Afghanistan - that can hold true in bringing stability and prosperity to the South Asian region. This way, China's goal of not provoking the peripheral countries in its quest for development and India's goal of emerging as a leader in building connectivity for development can be envisaged and realised in the near future.

Part IV South Asia

Dr. Joyce Lobo observes that Premier Oli of Nepal makes a departure from his predecessors in dealing with India on its own merits.

Visit with a twist by Prime Minister Oli of Nepal

The visit by Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, simply called as KPS Oli was very much different from his 2016 one to India. He arrived for a three day visit after winning a majority consensus during the triple elections to the local, provincial and national legislative bodies, won over the Madhesis and made India his first destination after taking over Nepal. He was accompanied by not only a large delegation, but a varied one—members of the cabinet (foreign affairs, industry, transport), Parliamentarians representing all the political parties and businessmen.

Oli has been more pragmatic in his relations with his two neighbours while keeping national interest as the priority. However, there have been various analyses, misgivings, assumptions, which may have some truth. One of these is, that Nepal is moving away from India and tilting towards China in a zero sum way. Second, Nepal has joined the *One Belt One Road* (OBOR) initiative that seems to somehow move away from India's interests. Third the visit by Pakistan premier Shahid Abbasi to Kathmandu indicates the growing relations and possibly an emerging triangular relationship between Pakistan-Nepal-China.

The talks held on April 07 yielded a short joint statement of about 12 points and three short joint statements on connectivity and agriculture. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had favourably responded to the overtures made by Oli during the visit of burying the hatchet and resetting the relations.

For all the assumptions made, the relations between India and China have not developed a deep chasm since the 2015 blockade, although, this incident has remained a scar in the bilateral relations. However, Nepal imports two-thirds of merchandise trade, has one-third of trade in services, 46 per cent of foreign direct investments, 100 per cent of petroleum supplies, significant share of inward remittances on account of pensioners and workers from India. Open border, quasi-citizen rights for employment and property ownership on a reciprocal basis have added to the special relations that both countries share. However many of the projects have been either slow in completion or are pending to finish.

Oli naturally discussed the huge deficit, which Nepal has with India in terms of the merchandise trade. The discussions have largely revolved around relevant themes of transmission lines, pending projects, development assistance etc., while avoiding areas of friction. The *Ministry of External Affairs of India* during their media briefings confirmed that the talks between both the leaders did not relate to China. Nepal under Oli might be proceeding to build relations with neighbours on a merit basis.

For Oli the present visit holds importance in terms of economic development in Nepal. His priority for bringing economic transformation in the country through '*Samriddha Nepal Sukhi Nepali*' lends weight to better ties with neighbours. Modi's assurance to strengthen the partnership over the priorities of Nepal adds to some kind of confidence building that was lost for a while. This visit became a possibility as the External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Nepal prior to the formation of the government after the elections of Nov-Dec 2017.

Three special joint statements were issued right after the talks between Modi and Oli on April 07, 2018:

The joint statement on *New Connectivity through Inland Waterways* has been adopted for sake of movement of cargo. As per this both sides will work towards developing the inland waterways within

the framework of trade and transit arrangements, thus giving Nepal access to the sea. Both sides will formulate and follow requisite procedures and modalities for including inland waterways as an additional means of transport in the *Protocol to the Treaty of Transit between India and Nepal*.

The statement on *Expanding Rail Linkages* was adopted with a view to connect a border city of India (Raxaul) to Kathmandu for people to people contacts through an electrified line with the financial support from India. So far rail projects are in progress, while the new agreement will first include a survey work.

The statement on *New Partnership in Agriculture* seeks to promote cooperation in agricultural science and technology, agricultural production and agro-processing. In Nepal, 81% of those in the working age are engaged in agricultural activities while 66% are directly engaged in farming. Thus Nepal is still an agriculturally dependent country.

The other important aspect of Oli's visit was the discussion on the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* (SAARC). Abbasi's visit to Nepal has been to build ties with Kathmandu, while ensuring that the SAARC initiative is taken forward. The last SAARC summit took place in November 2014, which Modi had attended. However, India has not shown its keenness for the summits to continue, due to its opposition to cross border terrorism emanating.

The bilateral talks between Modi and Oli were considered as 'path breaking', 'new dawn' or 'thaw' in the relations. Some experts and news reports have tried to point out, that India is sidelined and China has become Kathmandu's best ally. However, it must be noted, that Oli brings a departure from the previous leaderships that considered ties with India as integral to their country's foreign policy. However Oli has projected relations with India and China as equilibrium. If subsequent leaderships in Kathmandu were to continue with this attitude, surely one can say that there is a definite drift from Nepal's early foreign policy of being pro-Indian.
