



INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: MARCH 2019 DOSSIER

The March Dossier deals with conversations on Indian democracy, the debate concerning India-Pakistan relations, political developments in Goa, the role of female Indian politicians in the upcoming Assembly elections, critical statements by a former Indian Vice-President on journalism and nationalism, the political journey of young politician Alka Lamba, and finally a glimpse at Odisha state ahead of Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

The dossier covers foreign visits by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to the Maldives and her address at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the first by any Indian leader.

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE
D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES



**FEPS
STUDIES**
MARCH
2019

Dr Klaus Julian Voll
FEPS Advisor on Asia

With Dr. Joyce Lobo

Part I India - Domestic developments

- Election prognoses in India
- What next between India and Pakistan?
- Goa: The demise of Manohar Parrikar
- Pramod Sawant: New CM in Goa
- Role of Female Politicians in India
- Ex-VP Hamid Ansari: A critical voice
- Battleground Delhi: Alka Lamba between Congress and AAP
- Ahead of the Assembly elections in Odisha

Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments

- External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj at OIC

Part III South Asia

- Sushma Swaraj in Maldives

Part I India - Domestic developments

This March Dossier 2019 will be the last issue after so many years for the FEPS-Website. It will be followed by a few papers on the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, its results and assessments.

The following articles deal with 'Conversations on Indian Democracy', the debate on the India-Pakistan relations and its perspectives; the political developments in Goa after the demise of the popular BJP-Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar, the role of female politicians in Assemblies in India, the critical statements of former Vice-President Hamid Ansari about "Journalism in times of Strident Nationalism", the political journey of the young ex-Congress and outgoing AAP-politician Alka Lamba and finally Odisha, ahead of simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

Election prognoses in India

The *Center for Policy Research* (CPR) and the *Center for the Studies of Developing Societies* (CSDS), "both the most fiercely independent think tanks in India", so CPR-President Yamini Aiyar, invited with regard to the forthcoming *Lok Sabha* elections to a first round of 'Conversations on Indian Democracy' at the 5th of March 2019 in the *India International Centre* (IIC), which had been well attended.

Quite prominent poll researchers, amongst them Yashwant Deshmukh from *C-Voters* and CSDS-Director Dr. Sanjay Kumar from *Lokniti*, also the economist and journalist Dr. Surjit Bhalla, Member of the *Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister*, and Rajdeep Sardesai, *Consulting Editor* of the TV station *India Today*, participated in the discussion.

Election research in India looks quite a long way back. The moderator, Rahul Verma from CPR, himself a researcher in this field, referred to the numerous methodological and methodical difficulties.

"Poll research in India is quite a costly affair." Deshmukh expects for national surveys about 12 800 interviews. If state-specific surveys are added then this could increase to 30 000. "Only for the Northeast there is no interest."

Pradeep Bhandari, relatively new in this field, concentrates on focused group discussions ('*chaupal*') in a month-long period, in order to find out the real mood at the ground.

Deshmukh underlined, "there is a lack of sufficient samples of interviews with women, as well for telephonic and face to face ones."

According to findings, the number of so-called "floating voters", who are undecided till the end, reduced during the last years from about 40% to 22 / 23%.

Bhalla: "People are lying. The trick is, that the conversion of percentage point into seats does succeed."

Sardesai mentioned, that Deshmukh goes so far to publish a weekly "Trecker". "Political parties are also paying commissions to poll research institutes. Amit Shah pays huge amounts to 'pollsters' and one can ask, from where is this money coming."

Bhandari opined, "that the Lok Sabha elections 2019 will be a patriotic election", referring to the air Indian air attack on Balakot in Pakistan, which could very well go in favor of the BJP und NDA.

Sourab Trivedi mentioned the great influence of Narendra Modi to the outcome of elections. "Even if the BJP and he himself will not win, he convinces his audience, that he is winning."

At the end Rajdeep Sardesai stated, "that nobody really knows, how the elections will really turn out."

Election research has acquired a new quality in India, irrespective of occasionally completely wrong prognoses, as Sanjay Kumar self-critically acknowledged. They are an important instrument that influences the opinion building process and give insights into important social and political changes.

What next between India and Pakistan?

After the terror attack in Pulwama and the Indian air attack in Balakot, Pakistan entered also the Indian airspace. The *Centre for Policy Research* (CPR) and the *Society for Policy Studies* (SPS) posed the question, how the relations between India will now further develop.

The former *Foreign Secretary* Shyam Saran, Sharat Sabharwal, from 2009 till 2013 Indian *High Commissioner* in Islamabad, the JNU-Professor Happymon Jacob, Yamini Aiyar, CPR-President and *Commodore* Uday Bhaskar, SPS-Director, pursued this question in a well attended discussion, especially with many young people, in the *India International Centre*.

Shyam Saran said, *"we have not found right answers to these challenges. This attack, like all the others, has not affected our great power status and minimally our economy. Pakistan paid a substantial price through radicalization and negative consequences for its economy. Bangladesh has outstripped Pakistan in many indicators. The Pakistani profile is undermined and Pakistan is isolated. But patterns of behavior have not changed."*

Saran observed, in view of the recent terror attack, *"a lot of anger and sorrows in India with a series of reactions. The air attack marks a new threshold. A hidden mediation through diplomatic measures with external dimensions has taken place. It is not desirable, to link these topics with the Kashmir issue."*

Happymon Jacob was of the opinion *"that the Pulwama-attack forces us to reflect. There is a political failure in J & K."*

Pakistan can use the situation there for its purposes. The intensity of attacks during robust dialogues is minimal, also in a calm political situation. The civilian-military relations are a decisive factor, like the example between Pervez Musharraf and Manmohan Singh demonstrated. We must conduct dialogues, which lead to moderation and politically pacify Kashmir, as well as take into consideration the power structures in Pakistan. Terrorism does not help the Pakistani strategy."

Jacob is of the opinion, if Indian representatives can sit with Taliban representatives at one table in Moscow, it should also be possible, to talk to secessionists like the *Hurriyat* and to militants. *"We have to tweak our language. Pakistan is far from being diplomatically isolated."*

Jacob said, *"we did not achieve much in Balakot. It was more symbolical, like also the 'surgical strikes' led to more violence. More youngsters are joining the militants. The military approach does not lead anywhere. A multi-pronged strategy has to be politically supported. There is a need to engage with the Pakistani army through political-military channels behind the scenes, in order to achieve confidence building measures. The 'hyphenation' between India and Pakistan is negative for India. China is the elephant in the room. We should not think tactically."*

Sharat Sabharwal posed the question, if Pakistan will continue with terror. As causes he sees the role of the army, its worldview and interest *"to keep up the Indian 'bogeyman', although the Afghans don't recognize the Durand line. The army is not concerned about the costs. She puts its priorities with all its privileges ahead of those of the country. But one also should not isolate Pakistan. The annulation of the MNF and the stopping of Indus water, which will keep anyway flowing, will affect*

individual Pakistani exporters, but it is harming the Indian consumers. This has a tactical but no strategic effect.

Military measures, nothing short of an all-out war, stop militancy. Economically, Pakistan by itself is not an existential threat to India. The options for India are in the tactical domain and the effects are of a temporary nature because Pakistan will respond. There is no 'silver bullet'.

Pakistan acts only symbolically against terrorists and withdraws them temporarily. Yet, terrorists are important for Pakistan in Kashmir. We should have realistic expectations. The Indian image got bogged down in its back-yard. The relations have to be managed."

Shyam Saran doubted, that in view of the opposed narratives *"a reconciliation process is currently possible."*

C. Uday Bhaskar mentioned *"that Pulwama has been overtaken by Balakot with its implications of the use of the air force. We have crossed the line of not using air power to deal with insurgents."*

But Bhaskar questioned, if this will be successful in the long run, citing the example of the US in Afghanistan, besides moral and ethical dimensions. *"The deeply entrenched Pakistani eco-system nurtures young Kashmiris."*

Bhaskar reflected on the domestic impact and he observed a kind of *"triumphalism, which has set free certain factors. India should be an equitable power regionally and internationally. The social media are creating an own make-belief system."*

Shyam Saran said, that India should try, to make terrorism less and less possible, also through better intelligence gathering, like he self-critically observed.

Yamini Aiyar, CPR-President and daughter of the former Congress-Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, emphasized the deeply rooted social changes in India with an *"immanent 'masochism', which requires reflection."*

Jacob emphasized, that it is time *"to engage with the Pakistani army. Reach out to those, who hold the real power in their hands. We have it to do with a 'complex eco-system' in Pakistan and have to pose the question, if we speak to the right people."*

In this context, Shyam Saran, reminded, how difficult it was even during the relatively calm times between Pervez Musharraf and Manmohan Singh, to implement such thoughts in even undisputed areas.

Sabharwal underlined, that it makes no sense *"to try to transform Pakistan into a civilisational state. Deal with Pakistan as it really is, manage the relations and engage with all stakeholders. The world view of the Pakistani army has to change."*

Saran recommended bringing questions of India's security from the TV-studios back to Parliament, like it was earlier the case in a Parliamentary Standing Committee.

During the discussion, a former employee of the Home Ministry spoke about *"the failure of the secret services and that the impact of Balakot was minimal. Violence nurtures violence"*, he alleged. Saran on the other hand, one should not forget how many attempts have actually been foiled.

Saran ruled not out *"an uncontrolled escalation. We have to look ahead. Are there no options and priorities between doing nothing and to go to war?"*

Till the formation of a new government in India in late May or early June, one can only hope, that no new attacks or an escalation will take place. Thereafter, it is high time, that a constructive dialogue between India and Pakistan at several levels will take place, given the dangerous confrontation between India and Pakistan which has recently taken place.

Goa: The demise of Manohar Parrikar

The 63 years old Manohar Parrikar, Chief Minister of Goa, died in office as a result of cancer on the 17th of March 2019. Educated in an *Indian Institute of Technology* (IIT) and a RSS-cadre, Parrikar brought the BJP to power in Goa, also with compromises in educational matters vis-à-vis the Catholic church.

The four-time CM, interrupted by a relatively short stint as defence minister, was the dominating personality within the BJP, who held together the fragile coalition government with the Goa Forward Party, the MGP, an independent MLA and the lonely MLA from the NCP.

The Congress, also after two MLA's switched over to the BJP, is with 14 MLA's the strongest faction in a Parliament of 40, claimed after the election and lastly on the 16th of March in vain, to be given the opportunity by the Governor, to form a government. The BJP has only 12 MLA's.

Perspectives

Who will be the successor of Parrikar as Chief Minister? The Union Minister Shripad Naik, the Goa *Speaker* Pramod Sawant, health minister Vishwajit Rane and BJP-President Vinay Tendulkar are in the race, besides Laxmikant Parsekar, a former BJP-rebel.

Besides, there are rumours that the former Congress-CM Digambar Kamat could return to the BJP, where he served earlier as Vice-President.

Goa votes for its two *Lok Sabha* seats on the 23rd of April, besides simultaneous by-polls in three constituencies to its *Vidhan Sabha*. The latter could decisively change the power structures. Till then, besides the swearing in of a new CM, nothing much will change.

In these difficult times for Goa, the balancing capabilities of the rather popular Manohar Parrikar will be certainly missed.

Pramod Sawant: New CM in Goa

In the presence of BJP-President Amit Shah and Nitin Gadkari, the 45 years old Pramod Sawant has been selected as the new Chief Minister of Goa.

Besides Sawant, two deputy CM's will take oath, in order to keep the fragile coalition government of the BJP with the *Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party* and the *Goa Forward Party* together. Sudin Dhavalikar, MGP, who nurtured own ambitions as CM, and Vijai Sardesai, GFP, will occupy these positions in a reduced Parliament with currently 36 MLA's.

Pramod Sawant, a close confidante of Manohar Parrikar, was since 2017 the *Speaker* of the Parliament of Goa and represents Sanquelim constituency in the North..

His wife Sulakshana Sawant heads currently the *BJP Mahila Morcha*, the women's wing of the BJP in Goa.

By profession, Sawant is an Ayurvedic doctor. He spent his career in the RSS, which has certainly influenced his selection after several rounds of talks.

With this decision, the demand of the Congress, to get a call as the single largest party by the Governor Mridula Sinha to form a government, has been blocked.

Conclusion: Goa, currently with a population of about 1.6 million inhabitants, comparable to cities like Patna or Bhopal, will continue to be in an unstable political situation.

The numerically reduced BJP had to concede quite some concessions to its coalition partners, in order not to lose Goa on the eve of the *Lok Sabha* elections, which would have affected its momentum at the beginning of the election campaign.

The death of Manoj Parrikar has left a real big vacuum in Goa.

***Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister of Goa**

Pramod Sawant, aged 45, has been a dedicated *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) worker and a loyal follower of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) ideology. These norms are required qualifications to reach top positions, for instance to become the Chief Minister of Goa. Since his youth days, Sawant, has served the BJP through its youth wing the *Akila Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad*. An Ayurvedic practitioner by profession, Sawant rose to becoming the Speaker of Goa before he was sworn as CM. He holds a Bachelor degree in *Ayurveda, Medicine and Surgery*, and also a Masters degree in *Social Work*.

Sawant is a two-time *Member of Legislative Assembly* from Sankhalim in North Goa (in 2012 and 2017) and the speaker of the Goa Assembly. He defeated the Congress in Sankhalim which was the grand old party's stronghold. In 2011, he rose to prominence while raising a protest against Digambar Kamat-led Congress government over alleged irregularities in the mining sector.

Sawant recently won the floor test while appeasing the two alliance parties, the *Goa Forward Party* and the *Maharashtra Gomantak Party* with two deputy CM posts.

Role of Female Politicians in India

The French Assistant Professor Gilles Verniers, who teaches at the private *Ashoka University* in Panipat in Haryana, spoke about "*The underrepresentation of Women in India's elected Assemblies*" in the *Centre des Sciences Humaines* (CSH) in Delhi on the 4th of March 2019.

Verniers referred to the fact, that India with 11.4% women – 7.4% are candidates - in the *Lok Sabha* occupies worldwide rank 149, Pakistan 90, Bangladesh 70 and Sri Lanka 173.

Nevertheless, there are powerful female politicians as role models in India, who are not only coming from political dynasties or families. The percentage of women in village and urban councils is 54%.

In all Assemblies (*Vidan Sabha*) at the state level, 8.8 % of the Parliamentarians are women and 8.1% have been candidates. The increase is only incremental. Interestingly, the agrarian state of Haryana is topping with 14%, in Nagaland there is not a single woman.

A larger number of states in the Hindi belt perform with regard to female Parliamentarians better than in the rest of the country. Karnataka has six women in a Parliament of 225, two of forty are in Goa. Interestingly, the economically weaker states are those with a higher percentage of women in the Assemblies. From nearly 700 MLA-seats (*Member of Legislative Assembly*), 69 are occupied by women.

These tendencies of a lower women participation are perhaps also influenced by the participation of women in the public sphere, which is, irrespective of exceptions, generally low in India. The participation of women in the Indian labor market is lower than in Saudi Arabia.

Major hurdles for the entry of women into politics are the political parties. Interestingly, women are more prominent in the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu.

There are some myths about women in politics:

- Women are weaker
- They possess less experience
- Women from the elites perform better
- Women cannot be effective
- They are silent representatives for male relatives.

Some of these factors influence the low degree of the nomination of women, since political parties are risk averse.

There are specific hurdles for women to enter politics. There is one scrutiny induced by the party, one by the voters and one by the candidates. Tickets from parties can function as equalizers. On the other side, voters can contribute to the marginalization of women. There are more female candidates in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan.

Two thirds of the female *Lok Sabha* members belong to political families, amongst men it is one quarter. The political dynasties with their aspirations are already starting at the local level.

Women, for instance in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, perform better. Female MLA's are better educated and with more grass-roots experience. Female candidates tend to be more elitist. Although the female candidates in the North East are better educated, they don't get elected.

With regard to participation in voting, women are ahead of men in 17 states of the Indian Union.

As a rule, women own far less economic capital than men. Verniers mentioned a specific case in Telangana, where a woman candidate, in order to have at least a fighting chance to be elected, has to raise 100 crore (1 crore is about 125 000 Euro) for her candidature and campaign, which shows the plutocratic character of Indian elections. Local business interests, like construction companies, collect often money for candidates, expecting '*a give and take*' after the verdict. These collected funds go then often to local opinion multipliers. The TRS distributed veritable tractors to such persons, who often co-opt local elites. Because of the electoral system, stronger parties try to divide the electorate.

Irrespective of these measures, politicians last as a rule normally only one legislative period, e. g. one can observe a high turn-over. Only 32 of 230 MLA's in Madhya Pradesh got re-elected.

This work of the research team, led by Gilles Verniers, show "*that India is an electoral democracy, but one can observe a lack of 'democratic Governance', in which high entry costs are connected with a high probability of an early exit.*"

In the increasingly costlier elections it will be interesting to observe, how the economic capital is allying with the political one and how much leverage will be remaining with the voters for their decisions, also in order to bring more women into Parliaments.

In my opinion it would be desirable, that scientists from other European countries make themselves familiar with this research programme, led by Gilles Verniers, so that its conclusions could become

part of an increasingly elaborated narrative about the Indian political system with all its branches at the lower and state levels in India. It would be worthwhile, to invest into such an effort, in order to expand the European knowledge about contemporary India.

Ex-VP Hamid Ansari: A critical voice

Hamid Ansari was India's Vice-President and thereby also the Chairman of the *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House). He is considered as an unorthodox and independent voice of dissent.

Ansari spoke on the occasion of a journalistic prize award by the *Media Foundation* * on the topic '*Journalism in Times of Strident Nationalism*' in front of a full Auditorium on the 9th of March in the India International Centre.

Dr. Harish Khare, former media advisor to PM Dr. Manmohan Singh, opined, "*that the media fraternity - also a divided lot - is confused to speak out against authority.*"

Khare remembered the well-known journalist B. G. Verghese and how important it is, "*to manage the diversities.*" He reminded about the freedom of media, "*who should be impartial and unprejudiced and not dictated by vested interests.*" He spoke out against "*a totalitarian state with its dictates, obeying without questions and where the press supports authority. We have to practice tolerance for others. There is an institutional decay.*"

Hamid Ansari referred to the fact, that India ranks on place No. 138 out of 180 in the *World Press Freedom Index* 2018 and according to *Freedom House* as "*partially free*" on rank No. 43. out of 100.

He reminded the numerous "*paid 'fake news'*. *The editorial freedom has gone down.*"

"*'Strident Nationalism' wants power and represents ideological poison, which transgresses individual rights quite contrary to defensive patriotism.*"

Ansari remembered Rabindranath Tagore, who called nationalism a "*great danger. Nehru opposed to bring religion into nationalism.*"

Ansari: "*Hindutva, a cultural revitalization movement, homogenizes diversity through social violence and dominance. V. D. Savarkar embraced all departments of activities. M. S. Golwalkar wanted a unified government and spoke out against federalism. The Hindutva-forces want to transform a liberal democracy into one which is ethnically dominated. According to this, the state is owned by a numerical majority ethnic core-group, which considers groups not belonging to the core as a threat. Many of these conditions prevail in India today, like the Citizenship Amendment Bill. This is a departure of the rule of law.*"

Ansari spoke about violence against journalists by a militant public and "*that the local security forces are complicit. There is a crisis of credibility and an atmosphere of intimidation. If You challenge the government, You are risking loosing Your job.*"

Ansari mentioned, that the "*Editors Guild*" took notice of these developments and has appealed, "*that the media-owners are not cowed down by political pressure. Propaganda for a leader or a party are a danger for the Indian democracy. Crudity is the new form of refinement. The 'Official Secrets Act' is archaic and irrelevant for today's times. Liberal nationalism is good.*"

Ansari appealed to confront excessive power and to speak truth in front of power.

Although he did not draw parallels to Germany during the Hitler-regime, one can assume indirectly from his statements, that he envisages possible tendencies, which might narrow down the freedom of opinions.

* P. S.

The citation for the *Chameli Devi Award* for Priyanka Dubey was read out by the well-known journalist Bharat Bhushan, who earlier emphasized, *“that journalism in India is going down-hill. Yet, this award has been given to some of the most outstanding journalists in the past.”*

Dubey produced for the bilingual BBC Hindi-Service and the *Indian Express* reports about the alleged killings of cows and the following lynching of people by mobs, alleged so-called ‘fake-encounters’ in Uttar Pradesh, the collapse of the health-system in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, the consequences of the agrarian crisis and about human trafficking etc.

The meeting was attended by important members of Indian society, former ministers and MP’s, India’s leading historian Ramachandra Guha, but only a few foreigners, not to speak of Europeans.

Battleground Delhi: Alka Lamba between Congress and AAP

It seems, that the negotiations about an alliance between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party have failed, although there might be a last minute effort .between Rahul Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal. After that meeting, there had been sharp differences within AAP, which had nominated before six of its candidates for the *Lok Sabha* election in Delhi.

The Congress wants as a formula three candidates for each party and for the remaining seat a so-called *“neutral candidate.”* This is not at all acceptable for AAP, which swept the 2015 Assembly elections.

Alka Lamba, AAP-MLA and ready to come back to the Congress: *“At best AAP will concede two seats to the Congress, if not talks will fail”*

In this case, Lamba envisages to get a last-minute nomination, since *“Rahul Gandhi ruled out, that the Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal, a former Congress-Minister and a former LS-MP from Chandni Chowk, will be nominated, also not the former Congress President from Delhi, Jaiprakash Aggarwal.”*

According to Lamba, she is a *“better face to spoil the chances of AAP in this constituency. As a younger politician I could also contribute as one of the Congress faces in the Assembly election in 2020, provided there will be organizational changes in the Congress.”*

Lamba conceded, that the recent C-Voter poll gave the BJP all the seven seats in Delhi. Lamba: *“The BJP replaces about 60% of their MP’s all over the country, this holds also true for Delhi, for instance for the MP Meenakshi Lekhi. The BJP, by the highest party level, even offered me to be the candidate for Central Delhi. They are capable to anything.”*

Lamba gives the Congress about. 125 seats in the *Lok Sabha* election and believes even after the air attack in Balakot, that the NDA will not win an own majority, *“because Modi gambled away his 2014 mandate. Yet, Arvind Kejriwal could support a Nitin Gadkari led NDA-government.”*

Party financing in practice

The Congress, weak in financial resource, will in case of Lamba's nomination, certainly ask the question, how she can finance her election campaign. The costs can go up to 1.2 million Euro, in order to finance so-called 'party workers', expenses for posters and social media etc. Some speculate, that costs country-wide could go up to 6 million Euro.

Lamba herself has no own finances and would require support from lobbyists and sympathizers. A group of builders would be certainly ready, to provide her up to 300 000 Euro as a quid pro quo. She is confident that she can collect sufficient funds.

Perspectives

The case of Alka Lamba is therefore of a certain interest, since it gives insights into the political landscape of Delhi and the behavior of its leadership. Besides it shows the organizational weakness of the Congress, a 'party of notables' without a reasonable strength and a 80 years old President Sheila Dikshi, who served as a three times Chief Minister.

The Congress is split into factions, which limits the capacity for Rahul Gandhi to take clear decisions. The BJP is tactically and organizationally superior and ready, not to renominate a certain amount of sitting MPs, in order to reduce the 'anti-incumbency'-factor.

Ahead of the Assembly elections in Odisha

It is remarkable, that the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) could keep power more or less not seriously challenged for nearly 20 years in Odisha. The party is named after Biju Patnaik, the father of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

But undoubtedly, it is also due to the strategic and tactical acumen of the 72 years old Naveen Patnaik, who governs since 2000. He left in 2009 the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led BJP/NDA-government and disassociated himself from the BJP-coalition partner in Odisha, because of communal attacks in 2007 in Kandhamal against Christians. He forged afterwards an alliance with left parties.

The former legendary freedom fighter Biju Patnaik enjoys till date a great reputation with the population and contributes with its nostalgia to the repeated re-election of his son.

2014: Looking back

In the 2014 *Lok Sabha* election, the BJD won 17 of the 20 seats with a vote-share of 44.7%. Then, the BJP could with 21.88% only win one seat.

In the simultaneously held Assembly election, the BJD won 117 of 147 seats with 43.35% . The Congress won 16 and the BJP 10 seats.

2014 Odisha Assembly Results

Party	Seats won	Vote share (%)
BJD	117	43.35
INC	16	25.71
BJP	10	17.99

CPM	01	0.37
SKD	01	0.40
IND	02	5.04
Total	147	--

Source: Election Commission of India

Naveen Patnaik is perceived as a fairly clean politician with a good reputation in the population.

This clear dominance of the BJD did not always exist. In former times, the Congress and the Janata Dal, led by Bijnu Patnaik and more towards the *“socialist camp”* oriented, changed power, with a slight advantage for the Congress.

The decline of the faction-ridden Congress in Odisha and an originally weak BJP also contributed, that the BJD could remain so long in power.

Some BJD characteristics

As a regional party, the BJD prides itself to keep an equi-distance vis-à-vis the BJP and the Congress. Within the BJD, which has a few very good Parliamentarians, like Pinakshi Misra, there are differences.

Patnaik suspended on the 24th of January 2018 Baijayant "Jay" Panda, MP and BJD spokesperson, an industrialist with mines and real estate, because of alleged *“anti-party activities”*, also because of a critical article after substantial losses of the BJD in local elections in 2017, in which the BJP became the second strongest force.

Four months later, Panda left the BJD and described the allegations as *“false, baseless and as part of a conspiracy.”*

The 55 years old Baijayant "Jay" Panda, who joined in March 2019 the BJP, could, together with the Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, become a serious opponent for Naveen Patnaik, particularly, since the BJP sees itself on the rise in Odisha. The BJP nominated Panda as one of its national Vice-Presidents. He will play certainly a prominent role in the forthcoming campaigns.

Panda, who studied at Michigan University, pursued many public causes, like malnutrition, migrant labour and smoking and writes a monthly column in national dailies on questions of Indian politics.

Central campaign topics

A law gives inhabitants of Slums in urban areas land and property rights. In 2018, qualitatively good ('pucca') apartments have been built in the country-side, there are better conditions for farmers, the construction of rural roads and a sharp decline of infant mortality. Also, the state lingua franca Odia has now acquired the status of a classical language.

In contrast to Patnaik, the BJD-MLA's are confronted with an *“anti-incumbency”*-factor in this election, because of unemployment and price rise especially in western Odisha with its higher share of 'Adivasis' and so-called *“backward people”*.

The southern and western regions are prone to the so-called 'Naxalism' or 'left-wing extremism'. The BJP performed quite well there in local elections in 2017 and is rather strong in the coastal areas.

Therefore, Patnaik decided to engage himself particularly in southern and western Odisha, in order to correct the image of neglect. He has taken measures, in order to reduce Naxalism in the state, improving police infrastructure, recruitment of weaponised security personnel, specialised trainings as well as a progressive policy towards surrender and rehabilitation of former left extremists. 8 out of 13 districts are affected by *Naxalism*.

The interests of 'Adivasis', 22% of the population, will certainly play a role in the campaign, especially with regard to land rights (*Forest Rights Act, 2006*), because Odisha has only an approval rate of 71%, whereas the national average is 81%. Especially the government has to answer, why the legal rights of the so-called "Scheduled Tribes" (ST's) have not been adequately fulfilled.

It is alleged, that the Patnaik-government is decisively steered by bureaucrats, which allegedly protects partly corruption and criminal activities. Some of the MLA's are former bureaucrats. Corruption and 'Scams' are a major issue. The opposition names high costs of all this, allegedly to the tune of 249 thousand crores.

In 2014, the BJP could add 5.3% of votes, primarily from the Congress and especially in the coastal belt and in western Odisha.

The faction-ridden Congress enters in no alliance in 2019, but informal seat-adjustments for the *Lok Sabha* and *Assembly* elections with the Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India Marxis (CPI/M) and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM).

The BJD gives seven seats, e. g. a third of the *Lok Sabha* seats to women. According to the tradition of political families, BJD male politicians demanded tickets for their wives. Other parties will also nominate more women candidates. In 2014, three women MP's entered the *Lok Sabha* and 12 the Vidhan Sabha.

Perspectives

The BJD hopes, to get good support from female voters. This makes the BJD, besides the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal with 40.5% female candidates, quite unique amongst political parties.

A poll survey, conducted end of October 2018, predicted for the BJD 80, the Congress 33 and the BJP 18 as well as others 2 seats, which can at best be seen as an indicator about the trend at that time.

The central question is, if the BJD can succeed for a fifth time to win an own mandate with an absolute majority.

All parties experience before elections the classical syndrome of 'Aya Ram, Gaya Ram' ('Ram has come, Ram has gone'), a phenomenon, that candidates, who have not been nominated, join another party, be it the BJD, BJP or the Congress.

The BJD enters into both the elections as favourite, but it cannot be excluded and even assumed, that the BJP, possibly also the Congress, will perform this time better in Odisha, might be even challenging the hegemony of the Biju Janta Dal.

Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments

Sushma Swaraj became the first Indian leader to address the OIC which has been critical of India's Kashmir policy.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj at OIC

The *External Affairs Minister* Sushma Swaraj attended the 46th session of *Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation* (OIC), held on March 01, 2019), which was scheduled right after the Pulwama attack in Kashmir.

In her [speech](#), she recounted the better ties that India shared with the UAE and Saudi Arabia; in South Asia with Afghanistan, Maldives and Bangladesh, while counting out Pakistan and to the east with Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia.

While speaking of sweeping changes in the world and the *"gravity of the global economy moving to Asia"*, Swaraj pointed out that *"Tensions, turbulence, disputes, violence, dislocation, displacement"* were also high. She reiterated, that the countries should clearly convey *"states, which provide shelter and funding to the terrorists, to dismantle the infrastructure of the terrorist camps and stop providing funding and shelter to the terror organisations, based in that country"*. She suggested rather terrorism could be countered only through military, intelligence and diplomatic means. This battle should also be fought through values and through the real message of religions.

Second, Swaraj made an offer to the OIC countries for partnerships with India in markets, resources, opportunities and skills.

Third, Swaraj offered India's cooperation in building peace and religious harmony, advocacy of moderation over extremism, inspiring youth towards service to humanity,

However the OIC, which comprises of 57 countries, criticised India's policy towards Kashmir in a resolution. It criticised, that the Indian government has used indiscriminate force against Kashmiris since July 2016 along with an increased number of illegal detentions and disappearances.

India has been invited as guest of honour, for the first time to the OIC at the foreign minister level. India has enhanced relations with the UAE and other Gulf countries before. The Gulf is home to 8 million Indians, who send in the highest remittances. India is home to 185 million Muslims, whose identity is made more pronounced by the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), to which Swaraj belongs to. This meeting did not see the attendance of the Foreign Minister Shah Mahood Qureshi, instead Pakistan sent a junior level official.

Part III South Asia

In keeping with the renewed efforts by Maldives for enhanced cooperation foreign minister Sushma Swaraj visited the island nation.

Sushma Swaraj in Maldives

India and Maldives have renewed their relations, after the September 2018 elections saw the victory of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih from the *Maldivian Democratic Party* (MDP). This election ousted the authoritarian Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Maldives in November and in December 2018, Solih did his first maiden trip to India. Solih termed the policy of Maldives towards India as '*India First*'.

Maldives, like other South Asian states, comprises of political parties, that either favour India or China. India has emerged as a leader to some South Asian states. In terms of the littoral states, India acts as the net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. However, China seems to counter India's leading role through its ability to fund infrastructural projects in many of the South Asian states. Yameen's *Progressive Party of Maldives* (PPM) tilted in favour of China, whereas MDP has been a traditional supporter of India.

The External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Maldives in March (17-18, 2019). Swaraj and her counterpart Abdulla Shahid conducted talks while keeping in mind the framework, that Solih and Modi lay in December 2018. This framework includes the fact that Maldives would remain sensitive towards India's security and strategic concerns. This also includes assistance of India in the socio-economic development of Maldives.

India has so far not only been involved in infrastructural development, renovations, development of human resources, including capacity building programmes, and provision of training and scholarship opportunities, but also through financial assistance in the form of budgetary support, currency swap, and concessional lines of credit.

During Swaraj's visit, the following Agreements were signed;

- Agreement on the Exemption from Visa Requirement for Holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports;
- Memorandum of Understanding regarding an Indian Grant Assistance for the Implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects through Local Bodies;
- Memorandum of Understanding on Collaboration in the Field of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

In order to boost business between the two nations, it is agreed that a *Maldives-India Business Forum* be held in 2019. Both countries have better cooperation in countering terrorism, piracy, organized crime, narcotic drugs and human trafficking. Also, given that Maldives is an archipelago nation, it is likely to become a victim of rising sea waters, due to the rise in global temperatures. Both nations have agreed on the need to strengthen the global response to climate change through multilateral forums, including the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement.
