



INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: DECEMBER 2018- JANUARY 2019 DOSSIER

The first part examines the assembly elections that have thrown surprises both at the Congress and the BJP in five Indian states. This part also elucidates the vision that a former legislator has for Mangaluru, a coastal town in Karnataka. There is a short memoriam written on George Fernandes, one of the Indian Socialist leaders. A short portrait of Priyanka Gandhi, the newly inducted General Secretary of East UP is attempted alongwith her chances of changing the fortunes of Congress Party.

The other two parts dealing with India's foreign relations and South Asian politics cover visits to India by Norwegian PM, South African President, Maldivian President and Bhutan PM. There is an analysis on the recently held elections to the Bangladesh Parliament, dubbed as 'battle of Begums'.

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Part I India - Domestic developments

- State elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Mizoram
- Vision for Mangaluru—Mr. John Richard Lobo
- Priyanka Gandhi—the new frontier of Congress party
- George Fernandes in Memoriam

Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments

- Prime Minister of Norway in India
- President Ramaphosa at 70th Indian Republic Day

Part III South Asia

- Maldivian President's maiden trip to India
- Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh
- Prime Minister Lotay Tshering in India

Part I India - Domestic developments

Dr. Klaus briefly analyses the five assembly elections in India which have acted as run-up to the 2019 General Elections trends; Congress has emerged as a winner, BJP as loser and two other regional parties dominating the other two states. He writes a memorial on George Fernandes, one of the great Socialist leaders of India, and on his meeting with one of the former legislators from Mangaluru, a place considered to be the hotbed of communal politics. Dr. Joyce Lobo writes on the chances of Priyanka Gandhi as she makes her forays in one of the toughest electoral places that Congress faces.

State elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Mizoram

Two months are a very long period in Indian politics. The important elections in the West and central Indian states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh brought insofar a big surprise, as the Congress could dethrone the BJP and install its own governments, after a long period of defeats since 2014, although it managed to scrape through in Karnataka in 2018.

Since these results have been declared, India is already in the beginning of its election campaign, although the elections are only due in May 2019. The opposition parties will try to challenge the hegemony of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) and the most important step in this direction is the declared pre-poll alliance between the *Samajwadi Party* (SP) and the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) in India's mega-state Uttar Pradesh with about 220 million inhabitants. This could shatter the chances of the BJP to return to power with an own absolute majority, since from this state alone it could win 73 seats in 2014.

No doubt, the agrarian distress, substantial unemployment and unfulfilled expectations particularly amongst young people have affected the performance and image of the BJP, although Prime Minister Modi's image remains largely intact. The latest legislation holds out a 10% reservation for persons/families with less than 8 lakhs annual income and less than 5 acres of land.

In the largest democracy in the world, these state elections, as a kind of semi-final to the *Lok Sabha* elections in May 2019, took place in November and December 2018 in the above mentioned states. They marked a true test about the prevalent mood and trends in the country.

Congress victories in the Hindi heartland

No one really expected this outcome, besides the *Exit Poll of India Today/Axis My India*. Many expected a Congress victory in Rajasthan, but the fairly good popularity of the BJP-Chief Ministers Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh and of Dr. Raaman Singh in Chhattisgarh catapulted the BJP in these states into the role of a favourite.

For Rahul Gandhi and the Congress, these elections have been a question of political survival so shortly before the 2019 general elections.

The clear victory in Chhattisgarh with a two-third majority for the Congress, the de facto yet relatively narrow majority in Rajasthan as well the role as the strongest parliamentary party just

below the half-way mark in Madhya Pradesh mark the return of the Congress in the Hindi-heartland with 5 to 8% 'swings' away from the BJP in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

These results, declared on the 11th of December 2018, exactly a year after assuming the office of President of India's oldest political party, mark the ascent of Rahul Gandhi as a serious player in the battle for power in 2019.

Madhya Pradesh

In Madhya Pradesh, for a period of four years, the Congress did not appear much on the scene. Eight months before the elections, the 72 years old former Union Minister Kamal Nath and a nine times MP from Madhya Pradesh was nominated as the President of the notoriously fragmented (Digvijay Singh, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Kamal Nath) Congress, with the various factions fighting with each other.

Irrespective of the unfavourable conditions, the Congress could launch this surprising coup. The star campaigner was the young and energetic Scindia, MP in the *Lok Sabha*. Digvijay Singh, twice a former CM, did a lot of organizational work.

Madhya Pradesh Assembly Election Results: 2013 & 2018

Party	2018		2013	
	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)
INC	114	40.9	58	36.38
BJP	109	41.0	165	44.88
BSP	02	5.0	04	6.29
Others	05 [#]	7.1	03 [*]	5.38
Total	230		230	

Note: *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP); *Indian National Congress* (INC); *Bahujan Samaj Party*(BSP); and *Independent* (IND) *

*includes *Samjawadi Party* (01 seat) and 4 Independents

The BJP lost only about 3% and the BSP 2% of the votes, whereas the Congress could gain about 5% of votes. Parts of the young voters deserted the BJP, but especially the poorest of the poor.

Although Madhya Pradesh has the highest growth rate in agriculture in India, which does not necessarily imply, that this benefits the small farmers, when the prices paid for their products are low. As a result, the BJP lost about 47 seats in rural areas, whereas the Congress could add there 41 seats to its tally, but in 26 constituencies with less than 500 votes.

The former BJP-cabinet minister Yashodara Raje, sister of the outgoing CM of Rajasthan Vasundhara Raje, opined, “that the nomination of quite a number of candidates was not positive. I have not been consulted.”

The BSP and *Samajwadi Party*, along with four independent *Members of the Legislative Assembly* (MLA’s) support the Congress and Kamal Nath, who thereby could prove his majority.

*****Profile**

Kamal Nath—Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh

Kamal Nath sets to become the 18th Chief Minister of the central Indian state of *Madhya Pradesh* (MP). He is known as a master strategist and a Gandhi loyalist. He was elected by the Congress Party as the president of the *Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee* in May 2018 and led the party to victory in the recently held MP assembly election.

Aged 72, Nath was born on November 18, 1946 at Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh. He completed his schooling from the prestigious The Doon School and has two degrees in law and commerce.

Nath has the record of being the longest serving member of the Lok Sabha from Chhindwara parliamentary constituency for about nine times. He is credited to bring several welfare initiatives within Chhindwara.

Nath had been appointed as union minister in different Congress-led governments like Commerce and Industry Minister, Road Transport and Highways, Urban Development and Parliamentary Affairs. As India's Commerce minister, he championed the cause of developing countries and farmers at WTO ministerial meetings. He has also held organisational posts including being in-charge of Gujarat and Haryana in his nearly four decades of political career.

Nath has not only stood by the Congress party in its difficult times, but also proved his political acumen by ousting MP's three times chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Rajasthan

In the end, the Congress won with slightly less than 2% of the votes ahead of the BJP. With 99 seats it narrowly missed an own absolute majority, but it has sufficient coalition partners.

Rajasthan Assembly Election Results: 2013 & 2018

Party	2018		2013	
	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)
INC	99	39.3	21	33.07
BJP	73	38.8	163	45.17
BSP	06	4.0	03	

Others	08 [^]	4.6	09 [*]	8.63
IND	13	9.5	07	8.21
Total	199 [#]		200	

Note: ^{*}Status known for 199 out of 200

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); Indian National Congress (INC); and Independent (IND)

[^] Others in 2018 include: *Communist Party of India (Marxist) (2), Bharatiya Tribal Party (2), Rashtriya Lok Dal (1), and Rashtriya Loktantrik Party(3)*

^{*}Others in 2013 include: *Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) with 3 seats, National People's Party with 4 seats and National Unionist Zamindara Party with 2 seats*

The young and energetic Sachin Pilot, who has as President of the Congress in Rajasthan revitalized his party during the last five years in the state, got after a slightly longer power struggle rewarded and nominated as Deputy Chief Minister, whereas the former two times CM Ashok Gehlot is occupying this position for a third time.

*****Profiles**

Ashok Gehlot—CM of Rajasthan

Ashok Gehlot, aged 67, was born on May 03, 1951 at Jodhpur, Rajasthan. He has completed his graduation in Science and Law, and Masters in Economics. In 1971, while serving in the refugee camps during the liberation war of Bangladesh Gehlot was recognised by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi for his organisational skills.

Gehlot rose within the Congress party in organisational roles while being appointed as the President of *Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee* in 1985, 1994 and 1997. Also he joined the union government as Deputy Minister, Department of Tourism (1982) and Sports (1984) and as Union Minister of Textiles (1991). Gehlot has been a Member of Parliament from Jodhpur five times (1980-84, 1984-89, 1991-96, 1996-98) & 1998-99) and also represented Sardarpura in the Rajasthan state assembly five times (1999-2003, 2003-08, 2008-13, 2013-18 & won in Dec 2018).

Gehlot has served Rajasthan twice as its Chief Minister (1998-2003 and 2008-13). Till his appointment as the Chief Minister for the third time this year, he was appointed as the General Secretary of the *All India Congress Committee*. In a very difficult situation, the Congress party president Rahul Gandhi made Gehlot as the CM while Sachin Pilot as the deputy CM. Gehlot has been recognised by the party for his political acumen and organisational skills.

Sachin Pilot- deputy CM of Rajasthan

Sachin Pilot is the son of Late Rajesh Pilot, an influential Congressman in India. Pilot, aged 41, was born on September 7, 1977. He did his BA in English Literature from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. Briefly he worked at the Delhi Bureau of the BBC, and subsequently went on to work for the General Motors Corporation. Pilot completed his MBA Degree at the Wharton Business School (University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A), where he specialized in multinational management and finance.

At 26 years of age, he became the youngest parliamentarian when he got elected to the 14th Lok

Sabha from the Dausa Parliamentary Constituency of Rajasthan in the year 2004. He was again elected in 2009, wherein he became the Minister of State (MoS) in the Ministry of Communication & Information Technology and in 2012 he became Minister of State (Independent charge) of Ministry of Corporate Affairs. During this time, he was the youngest minister in the cabinet.

Pilot led the Congress party, as the President of Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee since 2014, to victory in the recently held assembly elections. He is recognised for his dynamic leadership in building the party at the grass roots level in Rajasthan that stood decimated after the 2014 General Elections.

Chhattisgarh

The Congress returned after 15 years back to power, although its entire leadership had been wiped out some years ago by a Maoist terror attack.

The good work at the ‘grass-roots’-level by the party as well as generous election promises, to grant loan-waivers and higher ‘Minimum Support Prices’ (MSP’s) for the farmers, paid off.

Chhattisgarh Assembly Election Results: 2013 & 2018

Party	2018		2013	
	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)
INC	68	43.0	39	40.29
BJP	15	33.0	49	41.04
JCC(J)	05	7.6	01	5.33
BSP	02	3.9	01*	4.27
Total	90		90	

Note: *Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); Indian National Congress (INC); Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP); and Janta Congress Chhattisgarh (J) (JCC-J)*

The Congress, till now not ‘mandalised’, that means with a leadership from so-called ‘Other Backward Castes’ (OBC’s), installed a CM from this social background.

*****Profile**

Bhupesh Baghel—CM of Chhattisgarh

Bhupesh Baghel, aged 57, was born on August 23, 1961. He is an OBC member of the Kurmi community. He is a member of the *Congress legislature party (CLP)* and has led the Chhattisgarh Congress unit as its President since 2014. He has been a strong critic of the BJP party in the state.

Before the new state of Chhattisgarh was created, Bhagel won the seat to the Madhya Pradesh assembly (1993 and in 1998). He has served in the government ministries in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in ministries like Public Grievance, Transport, etc. He became the Deputy Leader of Opposition in Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly from 2003 to 2008.

Baghel is known as an aggressive politician especially while dealing with the opposition. He is credited for reviving the state unit of Congress within the state. He is also known his social works and reforms within Chhattisgarh. Presently he is sworn as the third Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh.

Telangana

The *Telangana Rashtriya Samitihi* (TRS) won in this preponed state election an own two-third majority, emphasizing an own 'sub-nationalism'.

The alliance between Congress and *Telugu Desam Party* failed miserably, also since Chandababu Naidu was perceived as an outsider, who thereby weakened the Congress, who had been originally responsible for the creation of Telangana.

The *Lok Sabha* M. P. Owaisi with his AIMIM in its fortress Hyderabad supported the claim of CM K. Chandrashekar Rao and the TRS to form a so-called "*federal Front*" without BJP and Congress.

Very regrettable was the elimination of about 2.2 million of voters from the electoral lists by the Election Commission.

Jagmohan Reddy, leader of the YSR Congress wants to use the defeat of TDP and Congress in the next state election in Andhra Pradesh, in order to oust Chandhrababu Naidu from power.

Telangana Assembly Election Results: 2014 & 2018

Party	2018		2014	
	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)
TRS	88	46.9	63	34.3*
INC+	21	31.9	21	25.2
BJP	01	7.0	05	7.1
Others	09^	6.8	15#	20.0
TDP	INC+	--	15	14.7
Total	119		119	

Note: *Telangana Rashtra Samiti* (TRS); *Indian National Congress* (INC); *Telugu Desam Party* (TDP); *All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen* (AIMIM); *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP); and *Independent* (IND).

^Others in 2018 include: AIMIM with 7 seats, All India Forward Bloc (1) and IND (1)

#Others in 2014 comprise of *Bahujan Samaj Party*(BSP) 2 seats; *Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress Party* (YSRCP) 03 seats; *Communist Party of India*(CPI) and *Communist Party of India-Marxist* (CPI-M) with one seat each.

INC+ includes the alliance the Telugu Desam Party with 2 seats (3.5%)

*Data taken from IndiaVotes.com cited by The Economic Times, June 30, 2018

***Profile

K Chandrashekar Rao—CM of Telangana

Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao, aged 64, was born on February 17, 1954 at Chintalamadaka village in Medak District. He completed his M.A. degree in Telugu Literature from Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Rao started his career with the youth Congress party, but joined *Telugu Desam Party* (TDP) in 1983. He won for four consecutive terms in the *Andhra Pradesh* (AP) assembly elections (1985-2003). During this time he became the Cabinet minister of Drought & Relief and later Transport. In 2000-01, he was elected as the deputy speaker till he resigned from the post and the TDP to form the *Telangana Rashtra Samithi* (TRS) Party. This he created with an aim to create a separate state of Telangana from AP.

The TRS under Rao leadership became part of the *United Progressive Alliance* (UPA) coalition government for sake of Telangana statehood. He was elected to the Lok Sabha from Karimnagar in 2004 and from Mahbubnagar in 2009. Rao became the Cabinet minister of Labour and Employment (2004-06).

In 2006 Rao quit the alliance and led the agitation to form Telangana. In 2009, he won the bye-election from the Mahbubnagar Lok Sabha constituency. In the simultaneous assembly and general elections in 2014, he won the Medak parliamentary seat along with the Gajwel assembly seat of Medak District of Telangana.

Rao became the first chief minister of the 29th state of the country, Telangana, on 2 June 2014. He also won the recently held assembly elections in Telangana by securing a majority with increased number of seats. Since 2001 he has remained the TRS supremo and the strongman of Telangana.

Mizoram

After ten years in power, the Congress lost its last bastion in the Northeast. The *Mizo National Front* (MNF), part of the NDA and NEDA, returned after ten years to power.

Mizoram Assembly Election Results: 2013 & 2018

Party	2018	2013

	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)
MNF	26	37.6	05	28.65
INC	05	30.2	34	44.63
BJP	01	8.0	Nil	
MPC	Nil	--	01	6.15
IND	08	22.9		
Total	40		40	

Note: *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP); *Indian National Congress* (INC); *Mizo National Front* (MNF), *Mizoram People's Conference* (MPC), and *Independent* (IND)

***Profile

Zoramthanga— Chief Minister of Mizoram

Zoramthanga, the President of the *Mizo National Front* (MNF) broke the long record of *Indian National Congress* (INC) rule, especially since 2008, in Mizoram and also shattered the dreams of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) of ruling the entire north-east.

Zoramthanga, aged 74, was born on July 13, 1944 in Samthang village, Mizoram. He graduated from the D.M. College in Manipur. In 1966, he joined the underground *Mizo Freedom Movement* to create an independent state for the Mizos and became the secretary for the Run Bung Area. He was part of the insurgency operations and has also served his prison time for such activities. Most importantly he worked for the relocation of Assam Rifles out from the city of Aizwal, present capital of Mizoram.

When the *Mizo Freedom Movement*, later renamed as MNF, formed the government in 1987, Zoramthanga became the Minister of Finance and Education. In 1990, he became the President of MNF. In 1998 assembly elections he led his party to victory and became the Chief Minister for two consecutive terms (1998-2003 and 2003-2008). With defections from significant leaders within the Congress party and the anti-incumbency factor that had set in the state, the MNF under Zoramthanga's leadership were able to win a majority in the state assembly elections held on November 28, 2018. With this Zoramthanga became the Chief Minister for a third time.

Perspectives

With these elections, Rahul Gandhi could finally shed his loser image. In future, the BJP cannot simply degrade him as a political lightweight and ridicule him.

A substantial part of first-time voters withdrew from the BJP, also rural voters, especially *Dalits* and *Adivasis*.

The legend of the invincibility of Amit Shah and Narendra Modi got destroyed in these elections, although the good organization of BJP and RSS withstood a strong change in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. But it seems that Modi alone cannot single-handedly turn around a state election. Given the agrarian crisis, the suffering of many farmers and the massive unemployment, the question arises, if the BJP can really play successfully its final trump-card of building a Ram-temple in Ayodhya.

Although the BJP controls quite some sections of the media and is far ahead with its party finances, there will be perhaps more donations for the Congress in future, in order to enable a more level-playing field.

Therefore, the BJP will have to alter its narrative with regard to the forthcoming *Lok Sabha* elections and begin a serious introspection. Dr. Swapan Dasguta, journalist and a nominated BJP *Rajya Sabha* member, speaks of “*a serious setback for the BJP.*” Dr. Sanjaya Baru, a former media advisor to PM Dr. Manmohan Singh, opined, “*that the results put a big question mark for Modi and Shah.*”

The far more self-confident Rahul Gandhi said at his press-conference after these elections, “*that India finds itself in a crisis and Narendra Modi is paralysed. We need a vision for India.*”

In the coming months, one can expect a tremendous fight between the BJP and the Congress. The well-known journalist Ajoy Bose expects “*a veritable political guerilla war in the election campaign all over India.*”

Vision for Mangaluru—Mr. John Richard Lobo

Former KAS officer and former MLA of Karnataka Assembly from Mangaluru South

John Richard Lobo, famously known as JR Lobo points out that Hindutva factor and how Congress responds will decide the fate of 2019 General Elections. Janata Dal(S) and Congress combine can fetch 25 seats in the 2019 elections.

Lobo says that the Congress is weak in the Coastal Karnataka due to the Hindutva politics. This is where the Congress needs to build its influence amongst the majority community i.e., the Hindus. In the coast, the combination of Muslim and Christian voters is not significant enough to bring desired electoral gains for the Congress.

Congress needs to counter its negative image that is created and projected by the BJP as anti-Hindu. Hence the party needs to tailor make policies for the moderate Hindus who may not be strictly speaking BJP or Congress. Lobo agrees that his own defeat in the Karnataka assembly elections held in May 2018 was due to the Hindutva factor. The infrastructural developmental works carried during his term was not appreciated by the people rather the hate politics of BJP and some irresponsible statements triumphed. In short, economic development is not a political issue in India during elections.

Lobo gave solutions to how Indian mindset should be challenged for its narrow mindset. Useless issues such as caste, religion seem to dominate the political discourse. Second, reservations have actually created a divide in the society. Third religion should be private affair with no public display. Social issues should be countered and rather there should be concentration on economic issue. Most importantly, there should be state funding of elections as election spending decides the kind of political leaders. Government should focus only on areas such as law and order, education, universal health, irrigation, electricity generation, basic infrastructure and communication.

Lobo has a definite plan for the Mangalore city in terms of river side projects (approx Rs. 1000 crore), connecting ports (approx Rs. 3000 crore), attracting Lakshadweep Island trade to Mangaluru, and lastly developing tourism. He pointed to some of the problems associated with completion of

infrastructural projects within the state. Lobo says persuasion alongwith state and central financial assistance is a must for timely completion of such projects.

Lobo says there is a need to turn to soft-Hindus. Congress decisions so far have benefitted the Hindu community more than any other religious community. However, fingers are pointed to other minority communities as the sole beneficiaries. Bad publicity of the BJP-RSS combine has projected Muslims and Hindus in a very bad light.

Christians become soft targets for Hindus in order to send an indirect message to the Muslim community. This is done in creating a fear psychosis within the Muslims.

On return of Narendra Modi to power post 2019 elections, Lobo cautioned that the former may bring drastic changes to the constitution. Rather he believes that the secular parties have curtailed the spread of Hindutva. Advantage of BJP has been that it is a cadre based and not mass based party like the Congress. His advice to the Congress party is to build a strong cadre, train, build professionalism, and have presence in the social media. Problem within the party is the non-accountability and non – recognition of party workers who actually work.

Priyanka Gandhi—the new frontier of Congress party

The Congress party in India has tasted victory in three of the northern Indian states in December 2018. On January 13 this year, it took a bold decision to fight both the BJP and the *Samjwadi Party(SP)-Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)* alliance in *Uttar Pradesh (UP)*. To this, Rahul Gandhi, the President of Congress, introduced his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as a “440-volt jolt” to the party’s organisation in UP. She was appointed on January 23rd as the General Secretary for eastern UP.

Eastern UP poses the face of Hindutva with ancient cities like Varnasi, Ayodhya (the birth place of Lord Ram), Gorakhpur (the bastion of *Hindu Mahasabha Party* and from where the current Chief Minister hails), the places where the Gandhi family has always contested from—Rae Bareilly district and the assembly segments of Amethi, Allahabad—the place where Nehru grew up and contested successfully, etc. These several reasons show that Priyanka has been given the toughest part of UP to manage.

BJP has dismissed her as a gimmick, evil sister (*Surpanakh*) of Rahul Gandhi (called as *Ravana*, the evil king). Congress feels, that it was high time she was pulled into the organisation formally, due to her charismatic personality. She is considered as a game changer or an answer to their prayers.

Priyanka, aged 47, was born on January 12, 1972 to a family of renowned political leaders of India. She is the great granddaughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India; the granddaughter of India’s first woman PM Indira Gandhi who was considered as Iron Lady or *Durga Ma*; daughter of former PM Rajiv Gandhi and former President of the Congress Party Sonia Gandhi; and lastly, sister of the current President of Congress, Rahul Gandhi. She is a Psychology graduate and has done Masters in Buddhist Studies. She has formally converted to Buddhism.

So far Priyanka has shown utmost loyalty to her brother without eclipsing his leadership. She is considered as a mirror image of Indira Gandhi. Her entry into Eastern UP will turn fortunes in favour of Congress in an uphill task.

In the 2014 General Elections, Congress won a vote share of 7.53%, while BJP won 42.63%, BSP won 19.77% and SP won 22.35%. Congress has won a UP assembly vote share in single digits since 2002. It has won less than 20% vote share since the 1999 General Elections, wherein the 2014 was its worst result. Adding to this, experts point out, that the BSP-SP combine is rock solid, so that Congress may find it difficult to shake Modi's failed promises, but may shake the Hindu fence sitters. The Dalits and OBCs have shown strong inclinations towards BSP and SP. These parties together can get a vote share between 40-45%. Priyanka and the Congress party need to convince the Hindu moderates, the Dalits, OBCs and the Muslims (here without provoking Hindus), that they have a definite roadmap for the people in UP.

The timing of Priyanka entering into politics seems not to be a rushed decision after all. Her mother Sonia holds the Lok Sabha Rae Bareilly seat (in Eastern UP) and is a member of the *Congress Working Committee*. Given her health problems, Priyanka might step into the seat of her mother's constituency, when the time for nomination comes. Till Jan., 23, Priyanka was not part of the Congress organisation. Being a woman, she may bring a certain kind of leadership that may empower the women in UP, where the sex ratios are in favour of men and boy children, where literacy rates are low for women, etc.

Again, Priyanka is not new to politics, having managed the elections of her mother since 2004. Since then she has been involved in campaigning, resolving issues between ticket seekers, meeting people, etc.

Priyanka also has a tendency to draw large crowds. It does not stop at that. She speaks to the public directly in chaste Hindi. She is honest with the crowd, simple in words, witty and short in her speeches. Her witty remarks can match those of current PM Narendra Modi. Also in her speeches, she has the habit of educating her audiences like Nehru.

Priyanka has not been launched on a safe pad or constituency, she is launched on a difficult state, which makes or breaks the fortunes of any national party. Moreover, she is on the rockiest part of UP, the eastern side. Therefore, any talk by BJP on dynastic politics may sound weak, when she is given such a difficult task. She might not be able to pull many votes in eastern UP, but she can bring a few percentages of vote shares to the Congress is what one can safely bet. Indian voters are no more like those of yesteryears, who voted for the symbol of the party. Priyanka faces the followers of hard core Hindutva, the upper caste, male dominated areas, who have favoured for two decades the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Again, she has to prepare for the BSP-SP challenge.

Certainly the results of the 2019 elections will tell what would be the status of Congress, of Rahul Gandhi and what changes Priyanka's entry into politics brought. If she can turn the tide in favour of her party in some significant terms, then Narendra Modi- Amit Shah have found their match in Rahul- Priyanka for the coming years.

George Fernandes in Memoriam

George Fernandes belonged to the extraordinary politicians of his time. The Trade Unionist organized 1974 the biggest railway-strike in India's history and fought during the 'emergency', declared by Indira Gandhi, in the underground.

Fernandes, a determined political adversary of the Congress, served during the Janata-government of Moraji Desai as Industry minister and expelled Coca Cola. Railway Minister under V. P. Singh and nearly six years defence minister under NDA-governments, led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, have been further steps in the illustrious career of this Indian Socialist, who, educated by Jesuits, was very much influenced by the thinking of the social reformer Ram Manohar Lohia.

Fernandes showed big sympathies for the German Social Democracy, mainly influenced by his decades of friendship and discussions with Hans-Eberhard Dingels, 31 years *International Secretary* of the SPD. Fernandes admired Willy Brandt and travelled to his funeral in Berlin.

After many years of a strong Alzheimer disease, Fernandes died 89 years old. India loses one of his outstanding politicians from the old socialist movement, who, although he made the BJP politically acceptable, did not concede ground on decisive issues, so that Hindu nationalism could not transcend during his time certain barriers, so that India could preserve its secular character.

Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments

Dr. Joyce Lobo writes on the visit of the Norwegian PM Erna Solberg and the congruity that both India and Norway share. She also briefly comments on the visit of South African President to India as the Chief Guest for the 70th Republic Day.

Prime Minister of Norway in India

Prime Minister Erna Solberg was on a state visit to India (January 7-9, 2019) accompanied by the government and a business delegation representing about 100 companies. Indo-Norwegian relations are considered as multi-faceted where the larger focus is on economical and technical cooperation. Unlike other developed economies, India and Norwegian relations are based on 'sustainability' instead of liberal use of phrases like 'strategic partnership' or 'strategic relations'. Sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth is one such area that is of interest to both the countries.

So far Solberg and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have met formally during the G-20 Summit, bilateral visit in Norway and in New Delhi. The focus of the relations during these times for Norway has been meeting the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). Solberg, as an example, inaugurated Norway's new Green Embassy in India. As part of the SDGs, both India and Norway have collaborations on mother and child health through "Norway-India Partnership Initiative."

Solberg, apart from bilateral talks, addressed the Raisina Dialogue and the Business Summit.

Solberg's address at the 4th Raisina Dialogue

Solberg delivered the inaugural address of 4th Edition of the Raisina Dialogue on January 08. The annual geopolitical and geostrategic conference was themed as "*A World Reorder: New Geometries; Fluid Partnerships; Uncertain Outcomes*". She focussed here primarily on the oceans linking jobs, energy, food, and economic growth. Ocean resources need to be extracted and used sustainably given that by 2050, the world population reaches 10 billion. Therefore she said that time was the need of the hour though each country was free to hold national interest first as long as they respected the global order. There was a need to build a sustainable blue economy. The rationale of her address was that the oceans were part of the common goods or global commons. Hence they were necessary for all nations having coastlines. Solberg's government relies on sustainable value creation and employment based ocean industries as Norway's ocean strategy.

Solberg emphasised next on the Arctic and the manner in which the climate has brought unpredictable problems for the local communities and the nations of the regions. She also emphasised on globalisation and global trade with their benefits while pointing that it has not benefitted all. Solberg reiterated as to what India believed in – rules based international order with open seas.

India-Norway Business Summit

In India, the Norwegian companies, numbering more than 100 have invested in ship-building, petroleum related services, hydropower, clean energy and IT services. While the addressing the *India-Norway Business Summit*, Solberg said, "The aim of the new strategy is to strengthen Norway's

bilateral relations and economic ties with India. Private sector engagement, research and technical cooperation are key components of the strategy.”

Norwegian expertise in maritime operations, have been in demand in India. Norway gains much from its maritime exports (70%). The Norwegian shipping industry depends on building vessels in Indian ship yards. These companies have shown interest in ship-building, ports and port-led development under the ‘Sagarmala Program.’ Indian companies have invested and are involved in areas such as IT offshore activities, shipping, hi-tech products etc.

In order to give boost to trade, both sides have signed the *Terms of Reference for the establishment of the Dialogue on Trade and Investment*. This aims for participation of Norwegian companies in the flagship programmes of India. Given the Norwegian sway over maritime trade based on sustainable methods, both countries have signed the *MoU on India-Norway Ocean Dialogue*. Under this the *Joint Task Force on Blue Economy* is established. During this visit, business organisations have signed 15 MoUs in finance, ICT, health-care, energy and aquaculture etc.

India is also trying to conclude the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) with Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. This will help reduce trade barriers between these five nations.

Relations between India and Norway began with the ‘*in principle*’ agreement to establish bilateral relations in Feb., 1947. Relations have continued at ministerial level since then. However in 2014, former President Pranab Mukherjee paid the first visit to Norway. Since then relations at the high level have continued adding new dimensions. There is much promise in ties between India and Norway as relations are built on the basis of nations surviving the global oddities resulting from climate change.

President Ramaphosa at 70th Indian Republic Day

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa becomes the second Chief Guest from his country on India’s Republic Day, i.e., on January 26, 2019. The South African hero, Nelson Mandela was the Chief Guest in 1995. Both nations share national movements based on the principles of non-violence, civil disobedience, boycotts and strikes, giving to the world great leaders like the Mahatma in India and Madiba in South Africa. Moreover, the Indian Diaspora of 1.5 million *Persons of Indian Origin* (PIOs) acts as a link between the two nations.

Ramaphosa made his first visit to India after assuming the office in February 2018. Both nations established the strategic partnership through the *Red Fort Declaration* in 1997. High level visits have followed since. The current visit attempted to meet twin aims—celebrating the constitutional inauguration and to give new direction to the existing strategic partnership. Hence a *Year Strategic Programme of Cooperation (2019-2021)* was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ramaphosa talks. This consists of every field—defence & security, political relations, economic and trade, investment cooperation, Blue Economy, tourism, science & technology etc.

Defence cooperation

South Africa, having a flourishing defence industry, is interested in defence cooperation with India in terms of joint production. The blacklisted defence firm (since 2005 to Sept., 2018) Denel, a state manufacturer, is now allowed to look into joint ventures with Indian firms under the *Make in India* programme. Denel is looking for supply of anti-material and assault rifles to the Indian military. Other private defence manufacturers are also engaged in business with India. The defence cooperation also encompasses manufacturing, research and development, training and joint exercises.

Both nations have common interests in securing the sea lanes for trade and continued prosperity of the entire *Indian Ocean Region* (IOR). Both nations give importance to maritime security in the IOR. Therefore the navies have interactions in maritime operations and training. Both nations participated in the *Multinational India-Africa Field Training Exercise* (IAFTX) in March 2019 in India.

Economic cooperation

Ramaphosa was accompanied by a business delegation of 50 members. His country seeks to attract investments and has set a target of \$100 billion over the next three years or more. Nearly 150 Indian companies are present in South Africa, investing around US\$ 9-10 billion and created around 20 thousand jobs locally. Trade between India and South Africa has also increased to \$10.7 billion in 2017-18, with an increase of about 13% over the previous year.

India is part of capacity building in South Africa. Both nations share same global concerns. They work in cooperation in global forums like the BRICS, G20, Commonwealth, IPSA, IORA etc. India is keen, that South Africa joins the *International Solar Alliance*.

However there is confusion amongst the Indian leadership, bureaucracy and policy circles, when it comes to commenting relations with individual African nations. Most of the time, African nations are lumped together to prove, that India has better relations with the continent, than on highlighting the strengths of individual nations. Talking about Africa as one entity will not reflect well on the bilateral relations, that Indian shares with individual African nations.

Part III: South Asia

Dr. Joyce Lobo looks into the reset that has taken place between India and Maldives, the victory of Sheikh Hasina for a fourth time in Bangladesh, and the debut trip of Bhutan PM to India who wants to wean his country's policy from New Delhi.

Maldivian President's maiden trip to India

The first trip that President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih took right after the September 23 elections this year was to India (December 17, 2018). This should come as no surprise.

Modi was the only invitee as head of government to the November 17, 2018 swearing in of President Solih who emerged as the winner from the *Maldivian Democratic Party* (MDP). This visit from India comes after 7 years. Solih recognised Maldives foreign policy as '*India First*' which is to be in sync with India's '*Neighbours First*'. A change in Maldivian regime saw the reversal of policy towards India which was hitherto, albeit for five years, tilted towards China under the authoritarian Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. History is replete with examples of authoritarian regimes being comfortable in building foreign relations with likewise regimes. Unless democracy takes strong roots in Maldives, the pendulum may shift from democratic parties like MDP and autocratic parties such as Yameen's *Progressive Party of Maldives* (PPM). Therefore India needs to strengthen the democratic nations and those groups that aspire to rule through democratic means.

Solih was accompanied by a huge delegation comprising of cabinet ministers for Foreign Affairs, Finance, National Planning and Infrastructure, Transport and Civil Aviation, Economic, along with senior government officials and business persons. Both nations have considered their relationship as special.

Maldivian economy is confined to tourism and fishing, public finance requires reforming, there is stagnating growth, unemployment, and combating corruption, cronyism, and drug problem are near-term challenges facing the government. It seeks from India to meet the aspirations like housing and infrastructure development, water and sewerage systemised.

Maldives grew closer to China in the last five years where the latter invested in the former's projects, ports and tourism sector. Also both signed the *Free Trade Agreement* (FTA) in Dec., 2017. The MDP party Chief Mohamed Nasheed has made it clear that the country intends to back out of the hastily signed FTA. The Parliament was not taken into confidence on the 1000 page document. Yameen ensured that India was alienated and restrictions were placed on business travels by Indians. During Solih's visit, India and Maldives signed the *Agreement on the Facilitation of Visa Arrangements* for ease of travel for business, education, medical reasons etc.

Agreements were also signed in the areas of cultural cooperation and agriculture. A separate joint declaration was signed on cooperation in the field of *Information & Communications Technology and Electronics*. Both countries have decided to create institutional linkages and establish a clear framework in health, legal assistance, investment, human resource development and tourism. Solih has recognised Indian cooperation in of housing and infrastructure, water and sewerage systems in the outlying islands, healthcare, education and tourism. Infrastructure is also aimed at building connectivity between both countries.

Given the needs of Maldives, India has extended its financial assistance (upto US\$ 1.4 billion) for Maldives socio-economic development through budgetary support, currency swap and concessional lines of credit. Part of this might be utilised for servicing the debt that Male owes to Beijing. It is believed that Male's debt amounts to quarter of its GDP.

India continues its capacity building efforts in Maldives in areas judicial, policing and law-enforcement, audit and financial management, local governance, community development, IT, e-governance, sports, media, youth and women empowerment, leadership, innovation & entrepreneurship, art & culture.

Both countries have similar interests in terms of combating terrorism, drugs and organised crime. Both have shared goals in the Indian Ocean Region. Maldives has become the new entrant of the *Indian Ocean Rim Association*. Most importantly given the sensitivities of this island nation, both countries have strong interest in combating climate change.

While Maldives cannot entirely ignore China, the fact remains that India is restored back to its earlier position of being a favoured nation.

Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh

Incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina swept the elections to the 11th *Jatiya Sangsad or National Parliament* of Bangladesh. The elections were held on December 30, 2018. This becomes the third consecutive term for Hasina. She won the elections due to few factors.

Socio-economic development under Hasina

Hasina and her *Awami League* (AL) have to their credit the improved economy for the last decade. The per capita income has tripled during Hasina's rule since 2009. Bangladesh's GDP has witnessed a 7.28% growth, according to the *Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics* (BBS) for 2017-18.

The economic growth is largely due to the US\$ 28 billion garment or readymade garment sector. This alone provides for 4.5 million jobs. Most of this business is targeted towards China. The garment industries have improved the plight of women. Their participation in labour has increased while bringing maternal and child benefits. This has also added to the life expectancy of women.

Compared to its neighbours like India or Pakistan, Dhaka has made significant improvements in its social indicators, be it the child mortality rate, gender equality, or life expectancy. The government also has aimed to reduce child marriages. People living below the poverty line have reduced from 19% to 9%.

To top all this, Hasina's government has taken more than one million Rohingya refugees that fled persecution in Myanmar. The socio-economic development factor combined with humanitarianism towards Rohingyas has proven the political leadership of Hasina.

Incarceration of rivals

The other factor was the imprisonment of her arch rival from the *Bangladesh National party* (BNP), Khaleda Zia. The election fray was described as '*battle of the two Begums*' or between the left-secular *Awami League* (AL) and conservative *Bangladesh National Party* (BNP).

The run up to the polls has witnessed violence between these two factions. The BNP is supported by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Jel), which was banned from contesting this election. The BNP had refused to participate in the 2014 election. It had to contest, in order not to lose its registration with the Election Commission this term. However, BNP was left leaderless and rudderless, due to the dynastic functioning of the BNP. Khaleda Zia is serving a 10 years sentence for corruption. The Constitution does not permit her to contest. Many of her party members, including those from the Jel, are imprisoned. Her son Tarique Rahman has been sentenced to life imprisonment in October 2018 for a plot to assassinate Hasina. He lives in exile in London.

Human rights concerns

Hasina, while being credited for excellent economic growth, has been accused for perpetrating human rights abuses.

The Hasina government is charged by the rights activists for numerous violations. Cases have been noted on "forced disappearances", deaths in the hands of law enforcement agencies, secret detentions, etc. The year 2018 witnessed about 450 persons killed by the police as part of tackling the drug problem. To control unrest, government had restricted internet services. The escalation of clashes between the AL and the BNP-Jel, included deaths had become common due to the December 2018 polls and the incarceration of opposition political leaders and party workers. In order to tackle the rights abuse, the opposition parties joined forces to bring down Hasina's government. These parties came under the leadership of the octogenarian Dr. Kamal Hossain, a freedom fighter, close associate of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and a former AL member. The *Gono Forum*, *Nagorik Okiya*, BNP, Jel, etc formed the alliance— the *Jatiya Oikya Front* (National Unity Front).

AL had formed the *Grand Alliance* with the *Jatiya Party*, *Workers Party of Bangladesh*, *Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-Inu*, *Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh*, *Tarikat Federation*, *Jatiya Party (Manju)*, *Bangladesh Natoinalist Front* etc.

AL and its alliance won 293 seats, while the BNP led alliance won only 7 seats. Naturally the opposition dubbed the elections as rigged.

Hasina has continued to be the popular choice of the people, despite intimidation, a gag on media, restrictions of the internet, violence etc. The results show, that people have voted in favour of economic growth and development and have overlooked the lack of the protection of human rights.

Prime Minister Lotay Tshering in India

Bhutan Prime Minister Lotay Tshering was on his debut visit to India after winning the third parliamentary elections in November 2018. His visit in December 27-29, 2018 marks the golden jubilee year of the diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan.

Despite the misgivings that Lotay would move away from better relations with India, he has made the first visit to New Delhi. This election saw that relations with India were not one of the campaign issues. However Lotay's election campaigns promises indirectly translated to moving away from India in terms of influence, debt and economic diversification.

Lotay has spelled his "*Narrowing the Gap*" vision for Bhutan. There is growing income gap wherein the lower and middle-income groups are not prospering. In this manner, the Lotay government intends to fulfil the promises made in its *Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa* (DNT) party manifesto in the areas of health, economy, education, agriculture, jobs and livelihood, communications, housing, water, housing, women and children, public services, culture, and transport.

Lotay's avowal of diversification of the Bhutanese economy, reduction of external debt and attract FDI from other foreign countries seems to distance India. However, these goals are formulated for sake of national interest. India needs to build better relations with its neighbour without suspicion, overbearance and reprisals. A weaker neighbour may result in unwanted migrants that India handles at the borders of Bangladesh particularly. The move away from India's influence is also to do with certain events like the forced exiling of the Lhotshapasas from Bhutan in 1990, the subsidy cut for Bhutan in 2013 and the Doklam standoff of 2017. This led the Bhutanese administration to seek bilateral relations with other nations.

Nevertheless, Bhutan continues to depend on India for financing its development. In Bhutan's *12th Five year plan* (for the period 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2023) India will provide assistance of INR 4500 crore and a transitional *Trade Support Facility* of INR 400 Crore over a period of five years to strengthen bilateral trade and economic linkages.

Most of the trade with Bhutan has been hydroelectricity. However, presently space science has become the new dimension of cooperation. At present a Ground-Station is being built by the *Indian Space Research Organisation* (ISRO). This will enable Bhutan to gain weather information, reach tele-medicine and disaster relief in the far flung areas of the country.

Lotay's visit is like an assurance to India that all is well between both the neighbours.
