



INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: NOVEMBER 2018 DOSSIER

The contours of the overall elections strategy of the BJP, previews in all the states going to the polls in this semi-final for the 2019 *Lok Sabha* elections, the dissolution of the Assembly in Jammu & Kashmir, a terror attack in Amritsar/Punjab and reflections by India's leading historian are the major highlights in the domestic part of the Dossier this month. The dossier also focuses on India's "non official" participation in Russia-led talks with Taliban and Modi's participation in the tri summits in Singapore. In the Dossier's South Asia part, Maldives witnesses the peaceful handing over of power to the new incumbent while the inauguration of the Kartarpur Corridor appears to be the thaw in Indo-Pakistan relations.

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Part I India - Domestic developments

- The election strategy of the BJP
- How will the people of Rajasthan decide?
- A tight race in Madhya Pradesh?
- Trends and scenarios in Chhattisgarh
- Telangana gears up for assembly elections
- Mizoram: End of the last Congress Bastion?
- J & K: Dissolution of the Assembly
- Terror attack in Amritsar
- Sikh-Pogroms 1984: A late healing?
- Ramachandra Guha on contemporary issues

Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments

- Talks in Moscow with Taliban
- Modi to Singapore summits

Part III South Asia

- Solih heads the Maldivian state
- Kartarpur corridor between India and Pakistan

Part I India - Domestic developments

Dr. Klaus Julian Voll examines the contours of the overall elections strategy of the BJP alongwith the previews of all the states going to the polls in order to give an insight on the upcoming general elections. He comments on the dissolution of the Assembly in Jammu & Kashmir, the terror attack in Amritsar/Punjab and writes the reflections by India's leading historian. Dr. Joyce Lobo writes a brief on the Kartarpur corridor between India and Pakistan.

The election strategy of the BJP

Indications are, that the BJP will make the building of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya in honour of the Hindu god Ram a major issue in the 2019 *Lok Sabha* election, setting the tone in the campaign. Besides this, the leadership qualities of Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be highlighted vis-à-vis an allegedly faceless opposition. Recently, the RSS indicated the launching of a movement, comparable to the 1992 Ayodhya campaign.

The opposition will especially highlight the alleged subversion of institutions by the BJP and the alleged corruption in the *Rafale-Deal*. Rahul Gandhi: "*Modi would not survive an enquiry into this case.*" Gandhi challenged the PM to have a TV debate with him on the *Rafale*-issue.

But it might be questionable, how far these issues are really affecting and interesting the voters.

The Shiv Sena, an NDA ally, puts pressure on the BJP. Its leader Uddhav Thackeray will march with 25 000 cadres to Ayodhya. RSS-Chief Mohan Bhagwat demands either an ordinance or a law by the government for the building of a Ram temple.

The *Supreme Court* gives no immediate priority to the wishes of the *Hindutva* camp, to treat the Ayodhya dispute with the highest priority, resuming the deliberations in January 2019. Voices in the RSS and BJP called this "*an insult to Hindus*". Union Minister Uma Bharti opined: "*Patience is running out.*"

The BJP has the following options in this regard: 1. Creating a majority sentiment. 2. An ordinance or a law for the construction of a Ram temple. 3. Introduction of a *Private Member Bill* in the *Upper House* (Rajya Sabha) by its M. P. Dr. Rakesh Sinha. 4. Launching of a people's movement for the construction of a Ram temple like in 1992. 5. Building of a grand statue of the Hindu god Ram in Ayodhya.

The erstwhile and new BJP-ally Janata Dal United (JDU) distances itself vis-à-vis the Ram Temple movement and will not support this, since the party sees this as unconstitutional.

According to Shekhar Gupta, chief editor of the on-line daily *The Print*, the BJP attempts to launch a kind of '*Revivalism-movement*', which is directed against eight hundred years of Muslim invasions.

Instruments for this are the announcement by the CM of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, to build a Ram statue in Ayodhya, which should stand within the planned temple complex, in order to underline the identity of Ayodhya and a multitude of name changes of cities, like Allahabad into Prayagraj, Faizabad into Ayodhya etc.

Conclusion

The Indian political system is entering into a critical and potentially dangerous phase. In case that the BJP makes the temple issue the leading topic in the election battle, then, at least in the Hindi heartland – where the election is mainly decided - , it could escalate into a very emotional and potentially violent situation, which might perhaps allow the BJP in 2019 to turn it into a preferred presidential campaign.

A lot will depend upon how the opposition will react towards this BJP strategy and if the going together of the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party will be effectively realized. The election analyst Yogendra Yadav anticipates in this case for the BJP the loss of up to a hundred seats in the Hindi heartland.

In his opinion, the opposition has to offer alternative contents and narratives, as well as to make transparent the discrepancies between the promises of Modi in 2014 and reality, highlighting the lack of employment, rural distress etc., in order to bring the BJP argumentatively into the defensive, thereby permitting the electorate to vote on the basis of facts.

A forthcoming opportunity will be on the 29/30th of November 2018, when farmer organizations under the leadership of the *All India Kisan Sabha* will try to encircle (*'gherao'*) both Houses of the Indian Parliament in New Delhi.

How will the people of Rajasthan decide?

Sachin Pilot*, (see short CV below), is the son of the former Union Minister Rajesh Pilot, who died in a car accident. He is an argumentatively refreshing and a systematically working politician.

In a so-called *Town Hall*-debate of *New Delhi Television* (NDTV), he opined, that Vasundhara Raje, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, had forfeited her big mandate from 2013. Raje's polemic challenge, "*I don't know against whom I am fighting*", - she referred to the fact, that the Congress has not nominated a chief ministerial face – countered Pilot, himself considered as a potential CM, by saying, "*we are working collectively.*" He mentioned the big political and administrative experience of the two times CM of Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot, who is currently Congress-General Secretary in Delhi and also a contender.

Pilot criticized the big discrepancy between the promises of the BJP in Rajasthan and the performance of the state government. He referred to the agrarian crisis, the "*job-less growth*" and demanded labour-intensive production in mining and the textile industry.

Existing vacancies in state institutions should be filled, in order to reduce the lack of employment. The so-called '*Inspector Raj*' should be abolished, in order to create more jobs in consultation with employers. "*It is necessary to create more working places in the private sector and occupy them with young and qualified people.*"

NDTV-Moderator Srinivasen Jain observed, "*that the Congress is trying to bypass the BJP in religious matters*", a strategy, which is called as "*soft Hindutva.*" Pilot tried to avoid a direct answer and said, "*that India is by nature a very religious country, but that religion is a private matter.*"

Pilot criticized, '*that currently lawlessness is permitted, which leads to lynch murders.*'

Pilot considers it as necessary, to improve speedily the situation of 30 to 40% of children in Rajasthan, who are either mal- or under-nourished.

Sachin Pilot, who connected quite well with the young people and students in this debate, warned of the phenomenon of “*steadily growing Fake News*’.”

The BJP and Vasundhara Raje are in view of the positive poll surveys in favour of the Congress – also its successes in by-polls to the state Assembly and to the *Lok Sabha* in Rajasthan should not be forgotten – in the defensive.

They reacted with 44 new candidates for the forthcoming election, a step successfully taken by the BJP in various states. 40 MLA’s and four ministers, amongst them two so-called ‘*Hindutva hard-liners*’, have been dropped, besides there is not a single candidate from the Muslim community.

With the ‘*Bharat Vahini Party*’, discontent Hindutva-forces formed a splinter group outside the BJP in Rajasthan. Some BJP politicians, amongst them BJP-MLA Manvendra Singh from the *Lok Sabha* Barmer with the size of Belgium, which his father, the former Foreign-, Finance- and Defence Minister Jaswant Singh, several times represented, crossed over to the Congress. Manvendra Singh is now the Congress candidate against the sitting CM.

The BJP government puts development (*Vikas*) into the centre of its campaign. But the question remains, if Vasundhara Raje can turn around the trend in the last minute with the help of Narendra Modi, who is especially popular in Rajasthan

During her *Rajasthan Gaurav* (‘Pride’) *Yatra* Raje visited 150 out of 200 constituencies. She announced the distribution of about ten million smartphones, right in time before the ‘*Model Code of Conduct*’ came into force.

Irrespective of the favourable opinion polls for the Congress, Sachin Pilot is very cautious and opines, “*that the Congress has the victory not yet in its bag.*” Yet, in view of the very negative balance sheet of the Rajasthan government, he even plays down the Modi factor, so his firm opinion.

Annex:

***Sachin Pilot - A profile**

Sachin Pilot is the son of Late Rajesh Pilot, an influential Congressman in India. Pilot 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. Presently he is serving as President, Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee.

A tight race in Madhya Pradesh?

Madhya Pradesh (M. P.), with a population of about 75 Million nearly as much as Germany, has an area about the size of Sweden.

M. P. is one of the states, where the BJP is well entrenched. It is a classical BJP-state, even more than Gujarat. Under the leadership of the rather popular CM Prithviraj Singh Chouhan, the BJP aspires for a fourth consecutive term.

But the party leadership takes the so-called '*anti-incumbency*'-factor quite seriously and does not re-nominate 53 of its MLA's this time. It is said, that CM Chouhan has to fear less the Congress but rivalry and resistance within the BJP ranks.

The Congress was in the past split into warring factions with bastions in various regions, NDTV-moderator Rajdeep Sardesai: "*The Congress itself was its own worst enemy.*" Jyotiraditya Scindia, Lok Sabha M. P. and descendant of a powerful dynasty - the Duchy of Gwalior, a weapon supplier to the British during the second world war – claims, that this time the leadership with Party President Kamal Nath, the former CM Digvijay Singh – "*I have no longer differences with him*" – and himself "*is working as a cohesive unit and therefore will form the government.*" Rajdeep Sardesai doubted, if this is also valid for the party workers at the '*grass-roots*'. Scindia argued, that this time only about 10% rebel candidates from the Congress ranks have filed nominations." *Instead, the BJP crumbles like a house of cards.*"

Scindia, who functions as a star-campaigner for the Congress – he covered 9000 kilometres by car during the last four to five months in the state, opined, "*that Chouhan is not anymore a popular Chief Minister. Instead, the BJP is launching 'fake news'.*"

Massive anger amongst farmers, uneasiness amongst the business community about demonetization as well how the *Goods and Services Tax* (GST) is carried out and a certain fatigue amongst voters created a certain wish for '*change*' ("*badlaav*"), which yet the Congress could not fully utilize to its advantage during the campaign.

The BJP leads the campaign under the motto "*Shivraj versus Maharaj*", e. g. the so-called '*common man*' – Chouhan is socially an OBC - against the '*feudal Royalty*' Adligen', referring to Scindia. Scindia, allegedly less accessible, countered: "*I am proud of my lineage. My grandmother founded the BJP in Madhya Pradesh, one of my aunts is CM of Rajasthan and another is a cabinet minister in Madhya Pradesh.*" Scindia referred also to the fact that he functioned on the behest of the Congress during the last four years as so-called '*Chief Whip*' of his party in the Lok Sabha.

With Rahul Gandhi's relatively new line of a so-called '*soft Hindutva*' the Congress tries to bypass the BJP from the right side under the motto, "*we are the better Hindus*".

Enough proof can be found in its party program (compare in the annexure the most important points of Congress and BJP as well as their major accusations against each other). Scindia: "*The export of cow meat has risen by two and a half under the NDA.*"

Congress spokesperson Priyanka Chaturvedi, referred to the dominant topic of unemployment. And also to the lack of security for women with about five thousand rapes per year.

Interestingly the Congress did not highlight the so-called “Viyapam”-scandal, where tremendous bribes and murders were involved in the context of placements in dental colleges.

There is discontent amongst farmers in Madhya Pradesh, like in other states, because of delayed payments.

According to Kamal Nath “the Congress offered to the BSP during friendly negotiations 25 to 30. The negotiations failed, because the BSP demanded constituencies, which we could not concede.” Scindia assumes, “that it will come to an exclusive battle between the BJP and the Congress, in which other parties, like the BSP, will play no role.”

Scindia: “have no own ambitions for a certain post and will respect the decisions of the party.” -

The BJP won during the last 28 years 65% of all seats, whereas the Congress only 35%. In 2013 BJP gained 45% of the votes, the Congress 36%, the BSP 6% and Others 13%. An alliance between the Congress and the BSP in 2013 would have led to 41 more seats for both parties together.

In the ‘Poll of Polls’, e. g. the sum of all opinion polls, the BJP is about 1 to 1 ½ % ahead of the Congress and would come to an estimated 116 seats, the Congress to 109 and the BSP to 6. For an own majority the Congress would require a ‘Swing’ of more than 5% in its favour.

In Local Council elections the Congress gained up to 5% in Madhya Pradesh, whereas the BJP gained even up to 13% in by-elections, but was also in some defeated.

Currently it can be doubted, that the Congress will be in a position to storm the BJP-bastion in Madhya Pradesh. Without a victory, the Congress would need to refurbish its entire party organization in this important state of the Hindi heartland, most probably under the leadership of Scindia. It would also mark the end of the generation of Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh

Annex:

CONGRESS AND BJP MANIFESTOS in Madhya Pradesh:

The **BJP Manifesto** is called “*Drishti Patra*” (vision document), including a separate document for women, released on November 17, 2018 and promises:

- For the youth: Providing 10 lakh jobs and self employment opportunities per year for the youth of the state; promised to make a provision for free education for the poor
- Creation of five million jobs in five years
- For farmers and agriculture:
 - Proportionate bonus to small farmers
 - A special bonus for small farmers who usually do not sell their output in mandis or agricultural markets, that is proportionate to the size of their holding and the quantum of their produce. For instance, a farmer with two acres of land and producing 30 quintals wheat would get a bonus of Rs 7,950 at the rate of Rs 265 per quintal, even if he doesn’t sell the wheat at mandis
 - Investing Rs 50,000 crore in the agriculture sector and expanding the area under irrigation to eight million hectares in the next five years

- Infrastructure: promised an expenditure of Rs 2 lakh crore on smart and mini smart cities and urban infrastructure in the state
- Availability of all government facilities and information through e-governance, wildlife police stations in areas known for poaching, libraries and gyms in all new police stations, creation of a forensic science directorate, identification of illegal mining through satellite-based tracking systems, and expanding the base of the Deendayal Antyodaya Kitchen scheme to all the districts to offer meals at Rs 5 per head.
- On the religious front and that of cows:
 - Underlined several facilities on the Narmada Parikrama Marg
 - Development of several places in the Buddhist circuit
 - An increased honorarium to priests and mahants
 - The creation of a religious places management authority to address the problems related to temples
 - Cow sanctuaries in every division of the state and 50 Gokul villages to be developed for conservation and promotion of indigenous cow breeds
- In its women's manifesto, titled, "Nari Shakti Sankalp Patra", the party promised to install sanitary napkin vending machines in schools and gift two-wheelers to every girl student scoring at least 75% in the school leaving examination.
- There is also a promise of measures to ensure welfare of farmers, women, backward classes and traders, besides the youth.
- Other key promises:
 - Free education to the children of poor families from primary level to PhD
 - Introduction of a 'female access to justice' scheme for the security of women in the state
 - Identification of hot spots related to crimes against women
 - Employment to at least one person from every family
 - Establishment of an intellectual property cell in every government college
 - Creation of an integrated job portal
 - Annual budget of Rs 1,000 crore for creating self-employment opportunities for the young
 - Global skills parks in Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Gwalior

BJP defended demonetisation as an ethical and not political move that has led to increased tax return filings and increase in the revenue of the States and the Centre. Modi Amit Shah and other star campaigners have criticised the Congress rule by calling or pointing it as 'the family'. Modi has defended "demonetisation" as a good move wherein the recovered money was invested to carry on public works and funding welfare schemes.

Congress released its manifesto, called '*Vachan Patra*' (document of promises):

- It offers sops to every section of the society, including government employees, homemakers, the common people, women and journalists, but the focus is largely on farmers and young people
- On religion and cows:
 - It promised an 'adhyatmik vibhag' (spiritual department), as well as plans to promote the Sanskrit language

- Developing the 'Ram path', a mythical route taken by Lord Ram during his 14-year exile
- Commercial production of 'gaumutra' (cow urine) and 'kanda' (cowdung cakes)
- On agriculture and farmers:
 - It promised to write off farm loans of up to Rs 2 lakh
 - It promised a minimum support price (MSP) for crops in accordance with the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations
 - Social security pension of Rs 1,000 per month to farmers who attain the age of 60 and whose land holding is below 2.5 acres
 - A rebate in the registration fee of land documents
 - Financial help of Rs 51,000 for the marriage of daughters of small cultivators
 - 50-per cent subsidy on loans for agriculture equipment
 - Halving the power bill rates for them
 - A bonus on the MSP of some crops
 - A subsidy of Rs 5 per litre on milk procurement etc
- Youth and employment:
 - It promised a rebate in diesel and petrol prices
 - Professionals like tourist guides and lawyers would be provided an "encouragement fee" of Rs 4,000 per month for five years for settling down in their respective professions
 - It promised a "salary grant" of Rs 10,000 per job to the industries offering employment to the youth of the state
 - It promised the constitution of a Yuva Aayog (Commission for the Youth) to look into the problems of young men and women.
- A rebate in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and subsidised loans for setting up industries with an investment of at least Rs 100 crore
- Those covered under the existing social security pension scheme would get Rs 1,000 per month, instead of Rs 300 given as of now
- A subsidy of Rs 100 on gas cylinders to poor families and free education to girls up to the post-graduation level
- It promised regularisation of daily wagers, 30 per cent government contracts to tribals, setting up of a Senior Citizen Board, a law to protect journalists and lawyers, honorarium to journalists above 60 years of age, tele-medicine facility in rural areas and four new medical colleges.

Congress blames the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan government on collapse of governance and its failure to work for agriculturists (2017 large scale protests by farmers for a better Minimum Support Price for their produce and other demands). Unlike the BJP, the Congress president Rahul Gandhi has promised loan waivers in every rally. Congress has promised re-investigation into the Mandsaur police firing incident, in which six farmers were killed in June, 2017

Congress criticised BJP's demonetisation as the "biggest scam" of India.

Congress leader Kamal Nath has called the BJP manifesto as "a bundle of lies". "It covers all promises the BJP had made during 2003, 2008 and 2013 assembly elections.

Trends and scenarios in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh is traditionally known for tight races between the BJP and the Congress. In 2013, the BJP got 41%, the Congress 40% and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) 4% of the votes. If Congress and BSP would have then gone together, they would have formed the government.

This time, Chhattisgarh witnesses a triangular fight with the newly formed Janta Congress (CJC) in alliance with BSP and the Communist Party of India (CPI). The CJC is led by the former Congress CM Ajit Jogi, who is a seasoned politician. The CPI gained in 2013 in 13 constituencies with own candidates 5.15%.

In the South of Chhattisgarh, the *Samajwadi Party* (SP), here not in alliance with the BSP like in Uttar Pradesh, is in alliance with the *Gondwana Party* a local player.

In Chhattisgarh, 94% of the population comprise of Hindus, 2% each are Muslims and Christians 77% of the population are living in rural areas. The state has a fairly high amount of so called 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST's or 'Adivasis', e. g. 'original inhabitants), 52% of them are 'Gonds', once with an own kingdom.

In the South of Chhattisgarh, 59% ST's are living there and in the North 47%. The state has 22% of so-called 'Scheduled Castes', (SC's, also called *Dalits* or "oppressed"), which explains the regional influence of the BSP.

BJP-Chief Minister Dr. Raman Singh, currently India's longest serving CM, aspires for a fourth mandate. There are no visible feelings against him. He dominates the huge boardings, whereas Narendra Modi appears at the edge or is not shown at all.

With the Congress it is exactly the opposite. Rahul Gandhi, also occasionally Sonia Gandhi, are shown, local Congress politicians don't play any role.

In the campaign, the parties try to outdo their opponents with so-called "freebies" like in Tamil Nadu. The BJP offers cheap rice for one Rupee a kilo and 5.4 million mobile phones, the Congress promises 50% less costs for electricity, whereas the CJC offers one thousand Rupees for young unemployed on a monthly basis and a health insurance of up to 700 000 Rupees annually.

In Chhattisgarh, a state rich in resources like coal, iron ore and bauxite, live also many poor people, but not as bad as in many parts of Uttar Pradesh, according to Prannoy Roy, NDTV owner. There is a lack of new investments.

The electorate in Chhattisgarh considers the election to the Assembly as more important than to the *Lok Sabha*. The voting percentage is 14% higher, a trend which can also be observed in other states. Whosoever wins the current elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, fares best in the following *Lok Sabha* elections.

Normally the BJP performs better with a lower turnout. With a voter turnout of about 74%, this could potentially be favorable for the Congress, which got between 2013 till 2018 the upper hand in local elections.

The first phase in this election in the Maoist infected Bastar district saw about a hundred thousand security forces in action, in order to guarantee a free and fair election.

A disadvantage for the Congress is the lack of a candidate for the office of the Chief Minister. There are all in all four contenders.

Ajit Jogi is full of confidence, that his regional party can challenge the two national parties. *“The CM tried to destroy me politically.”* The ex-Congressman prides himself of good personal relations to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi. Does the CJC possess sufficient financial resources? Should his party in view of the agrarian crisis win ten or more seats, then he could be a real contender in the ensuing power game.

Regarding the question of a possible coalition either with the BJP or the Congress, he only gave evasive answers. Mayawati described, using the vocabulary of her mentor and BSP-founder Kanshi Ram, BJP and Congress as *“snakes”*.

Chhattisgarh is free of polarization, even though the statement of Modi, that the Congress would be supporting the *‘urban Naxalites’*, created some turmoil for a short while.

There is no open anger by the voters, at best a certain tiredness and partly the desire for *‘change’*. In the sum of all poll surveys, the BJP has a narrow edge.

Annex:

Chhattisgarh Manifestos: Congress and BJP

The **Congress** released its manifesto *“Jan Ghoshna Patra”* (People’s manifesto document) on November 09, 2018 and made the following promises:

- Farm loan waivers within 10 days of the party attaining power
- Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops as per the Swaminathan Commission recommendations. MSP for paddy will be fixed at Rs 2,500 per quintal and maize at Rs 1,700 per quintal
- Increase in the minimum support price (MSP) on 70-85 forest crops, and fixing Rs 4,000 per bag for ‘tendu patta’ workers
- Provision of pension for farmers aged above 60 years has also been planned
- Fixing a “respectable income” for daily wage labourers, increase in income bands of Class 3 and 4 employees and distribution of 7th Pay Commission surplus in three phases
- An increase in the pension being given to police families who have lost a kin in Naxal attacks
- Halving electricity bills for domestic consumers,
- Provisioning of houses and land to urban and rural families respectively
- Every family will be given 35 kgs of rice every month at Rs 1 only
- Tackling employment under the party’s *“Ghar Ghar Rozgaar, Har Ghar Rozgaar”* scheme, the manifesto underlines apprenticeship programmes and employment opportunities for the youth
- A promise of a monthly stipend to 10 lakh unemployed youths under the party’s *‘Rajiv Mitr Yojana’*.

- Setting up of special women's police stations, women help cells in police stations and strict enforcement of laws related to women along with special conveyance for women for late night commuting.
- It proposes introduction of a "universal health care" scheme, in which free and quality services for the needy are provided.
- It proposes converting six medical colleges into multi-speciality hospitals, along with bringing 1,000 specialists on board in the first year
- Air ambulances will be provisioned for areas like Bastar, Surguja and Gariaband's Supebeda
- Special attention on improving the quality of education through emphasis on quality of teachers
- Establishment of sports hostels and scholarships for economically weak sports persons
- A ban on liquor sales, adding that Gram Sabhas in Scheduled areas like Surguja and Bastar will be vested with the power to decide on such a ban in these places
- A policy will be drafted to take deal with Naxalism, serious steps will be taken for talks, while each Naxal-affected panchayat will be given a package of Rs 1 crore for community development works
- Special laws will be enacted to ensure protection to journalists, lawyers and doctors
- In forest areas like Lemru and Korba, elephant and wildlife sanctuaries will be set up and steps would be taken to reduce human-elephant conflict

Congress has called the manifesto of the BJP as repetitive and has nothing new to offer.

The **BJP** released the manifesto on the last day of the campaigning for the first phase of the Chhattisgarh polls:

- It promised to make Chhattisgarh a "Naxal-free" state
- A pension to small and marginal farmers—will give Rs 1,000 per month as pension to small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers aged above 60 years, as well as two lakh new pump connections to cultivators in the next five years
- Provision of a one-and-a-half times hike in the minimum support price (MSP) for minor forest produce and promised, that the state government will purchase pulses and lentils at the MSP along with developing Chhattisgarh as an organic farming state
- It promised interest free loans to the tune of Rs 2 lakh to women, for setting up their business and of Rs 5 lakh to self-help groups (SHGs)
- It provisioned a new university to promote Hindi and Chhattisgarhi languages and a medical allowance of Rs 1,000 per month to pensioners
- Promotion of the state as popular tourist destination and establish a film city
- It promised a milk revolution and cow sanctuaries in all divisions of the state
- It promised to set up multi-specialty hospitals and take the state towards prosperity.

Amit Shah has targeted Congress as *"a party, that feels Naxalism is a medium of revolution, and therefore cannot do any good for Chhattisgarh."* Secondly, the party members have criticised Congress for offering sops to farmers in its manifesto. BJP questions as to why the Congress from

2004 to 2014 - when it was ruling at the Centre - did not think about implementing the Swaminathan Committee.

Telangana gears up for assembly elections

Telangana became India's 29th state in June 2014. It got its first assembly in 2014 and its first CM K. Chandrashekar Rao from the *Telangana Rashtra Samiti* (TRS). TRS won 63 (34.3%) of the 119 Assembly seats and emerged as the party with the largest vote share. This was largely for the role it played in campaigning for a separate State from the state of Andhra Pradesh. TRS also won 11 (34.9%) of the 17 Lok Sabha seats.

The other political parties had then won 50% of the assembly votes while not gaining significant number of seats.

The state heads to elections on December 07 this year. Apart from TRS, other important political parties are the *Indian National Congress* (INC); *Telugu Desam Party* (TDP); *All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen*(AIMIM) and the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP).

BJP has released the manifesto on Nov 29, 2018 with the following promises:

- for farmers: loan waiver up to Rs 2 lakh, free borewell or pump sets
- for students: free laptops to graduates, free bicycles to girls studying from 7 to 10, scooty on subsidy to girls studying graduation and above
- \$ for youth: stipend to unemployed youth, no exam fee for competitive exams and no costs of interviews for government jobs
- new autos to auto drivers and other schemes
- Rs 5000 a month rent to 2 BHK eligible persons till they get house
- fill government vacancies by 3 months
- Rs 10 lakh financial assistance to Telangana martyrs
- Rs 5 pension to people who were jailed during the Telangana move
- Distribution of one lakh cows during festivals etc.

BJP has pledged to fulfil all these promises and criticised, that the Rao government has failed in its promises made in 2014. BJP has also made controversial promises like preparing a legislation to prevent "forcible religious conversions" made by offering money and other inducements or sending Rohingyas back to Bangladesh.

The Congress has formed an alliance with TDP in a direct contest with the TRS. The Congress and TDP respective vote share of 25.2 and 14.7 per cent crosses the vote share of TRS. Moreover, the alliance called "*Prajakutami*" (People's Alliance) includes the *Telangana Jana Samithi* (TJS) and the *Communist Party of India* (CPI). This alliance blames the Rao government for "*misrule, highhandedness and authoritarianism*".

However the irony of the fact is, that 12 assembly members from the TDP have joined TRS, while the remaining one has joined the Congress. TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu left the BJP led alliance, the *National Democratic Alliance* (NDA), at the centre as the latter failed to grant *Special Category*

Status to Andhra Pradesh. His party rules Andhra Pradesh, which has an anti-BJP mood. Therefore he has been on the lead to form alliances for Congress within Telangana.

Congress's 'People's Manifesto' promises to:

- filling up of one lakh government jobs in the first year,
- RS 5 lakh for construction of homes
- farm loan waivers of up to Rs 2 lakhs

TRS may attempt an alliance with BJP after the elections as speculations are rife in the media. However experts point out that the Muslims comprise nearly 13% of the population, affecting the outcome in 48 of 119 assembly seats. TRS is still popular amongst the people. The BJP has not stopped from attacking the TRS government, even if it intends to form an alliance post results. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the star campaigner of BJP, termed the Rao government as "family rule".

The opposition terms the TRS as a "*defectionist party*" and is campaigning on issues such as rural distress and unemployment. Rao intends to campaign by highlighting the populist schemes and projects, that he has implanted during his tenure.

TRS had announced its "partial manifesto" in October in which it promises:

- unemployed people will get a monthly allowance of Rs 3,016 per month
- loan waivers of Rs 1 lakh for farmers
- An increase in Rythu Bandhu scheme amounts from Rs 8,000 per acre to Rs 10,000 per acre every year

TRS has pointed that the funds granted by the centre have not been sufficient. Rao pointed out, that their situation was not like what the state of Maharashtra enjoyed of having the same party ruling at the centre. Possibilities are that TRS will win the elections, given the defections that have taken place in the opposition parties. The CNX-Times Now Poll has predicted that it might win 70 seats.

Mizoram: End of the last Congress Bastion?

Mizoram as a society is very much influenced by Christianity and the church, which plays an important role for the election campaign and the questioning of the candidates.

This small state counts about a million inhabitants, with a slight majority of women voters. The election in Mizoram took place together with Madhya Pradesh on the 28th of November 2018.

It might be difficult for the Congress (2013: 44.6%), to defend its last bastion in India's Northeast, especially also since the party looks back to ten years of rule.

Yet, the 79 years old Chief Minister Laltanhawla is confident and hopes to win 32 to 34 seats in a house of 40, although his Home Minister, the *Speaker* and one more MLA left the Congress. Allegedly, Laltanhawla does not see any '*anti-incumbency*'-factor and concedes to the main opposition, the *Mizo National Front* (MNF, 2013: 28.7%) at best 5 seats.

His opponent Zornthanga, 74 years old, a former secessionist and leader of the MNF, opines, that the Congress could win this time at best ten seats, instead expecting 25 to 30 seats for the MNF. He maintains, that the Congress is crumbling, in Delhi and especially in the Northeast. *“The lack of development in Mizoram and especially the abolition of alcohol prohibition have led to a big ‘anti-incumbency’-factor.”*

Although the MNF is part of the NDA 2-government in Delhi and also of the *North East Democratic Alliance* (NEDA), Zornthanga opines, that the BJP will perform badly in this election. *“She can consider herself lucky, if she wins one or two seats in constituencies, dominated by the Reang (Brus). In Mizoram, nobody will tolerate the BJP, which is anti-Christian. Nevertheless, the Congress is our long-term opponent.”*

The BJP, with a vote-share of 0.4% in Mizoram in 2013, uses intensively the social media and presents itself *“as a party of equal opportunities, which does not discriminate on the basis of religion.”* The BJP refers to the examples of Goa and Meghalaya, targeting especially the *‘non-tribal’* population, the Buddhist Chakmas and the animistic Brus.

The MNF cannot be seen in an open alliance before the elections with the BJP, since there could be a backlash against it. But an alliance after the election is thinkable, perhaps for the purpose of achieving a majority.

Further smaller players are the *National People’s Party* (NPP), led by Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, which gives its debut in Mizoram. His late father, P. A. Sangma former CM of Meghalaya, a Congress Union Minister and *Speaker* of the *Lok Sabha*, founded the NPP.

The *Zoram Exodus Movement*, founded by retired priests, government officials and journalists, announced an alliance with the Zoram National Party (ZNP), in 2013 with a vote-share of 17%, but not a single seat, under the banner of the *‘Zoram People’s movement*.

Mizoram is a shining example in India, considering the political dynasties, plutocratic tendencies, corruption and criminality within the political class elsewhere are concerned, that all the political parties there subscribed to a code of conduct by the church-influenced *Mizoram People’s Forum* (MPF), in order to enable free and fair elections.

The ban of violence, achievable aims in party programmes, peaceful campaigns, a ban of party financed festivities, a thorough check on election expenditures, no misuse of social media for the purpose of advantages in the election and the monitoring of house-to-house campaigns by the MPF are some of the highlights.

Unemployment at a large scale forces many young people to leave the state in search of work, as well in India and abroad. How far this will influence the voting of especially young people, the election result on the 11th of December will tell. The turn-out this time was 80%.

Annex:

The **Congress manifesto** promises:

- provide free laptops to students who have cleared Class tenth and above
- promise of providing allocation in the annual budget for excursions and study tours, especially for college and university students, besides “serious efforts” for the implementation of the recommendations of the Mizoram Education Reforms Commission
- encouraging community participation in the conservation of flora, fauna and water resources and allocations for this purpose in the budget
- encouraging community participation in the course of implementation and maintenance of various developmental works
- promised housing for the poor in rural areas and residential quarters for employees of police and education departments
- set up more rehabilitation centres for drug addicts and alcoholics across the state.
- pledges to continue with the two flagship programmes for farmers and youths, when Congress was in power—that is New Land Use Policy (NLUP) for the farmers and New Economic Development Policy (NEDP) for unemployed youths

The NLUP was launched in January 2011 to end the wasteful practice of shifting or 'jhum' cultivation - process of clearing land by burning its natural vegetation before growing crops. A beneficiary of the NLUP gets around Rs 100,000. The party promises, that the grant would be raised. It said, the NEDP would also be continued with special thrust on entrepreneurship development for the youths.

The Mizo National Front (MNF) has accused Congress for lifting the ban on consumption on alcohol. BJP accuses Congress of spoiling cultures, traditions of Mizos. Also, Amit Shah accused the incumbent government, led by the Congress party, on misuse of funds sanctioned by the Centre for development projects, lack of development in the state. BJP is wooing the minority Brus and Chakmas and is expected to do well in five seats where these communities are a decisive factor. BJP sought votes for bringing development by focussing on education, public health and road communication.

Congress accuses BJP of being an anti-Christian party and trying to enter Christian-dominated Mizoram *“through the backdoor, by using the Mizo National Front (MNF) as they had done in other north eastern states”*. It accuses the BJP of doing “horse trading” right after the elections, if it fails to get a majority through its alliance members.

The **Mizo National Front (MNF)** released its manifesto in the first week of November 2018 with the following promises:

- to introduce a village level citizens register
- to take steps against the illegal migrants
- drawing up a scheme of rehabilitation and resettlement for the ‘martyrs’ and their families
- To place a total ban on liquor after the Congress government replaced the Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act (MLTP), 1995
- to bring a better road infrastructure

- to come up with the solution to some of the most intractable and long-pending problems of the state by propagating its Socio-Economic Development Policy (SEDP)

The **BJP manifesto** promises:

- rice at Rs 1 per kg
- A home to every homeless family
- traffic-congestion-free Aizawl in three years
- Pothole-free all-weather roads in the next six months.
- Including Mizo, the official language of the state, in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution
- To establish two medical colleges, three engineering colleges and as many nursing training institutes
- To create 50,000 jobs in the next five years
- Construction of a trans-boundary highway, linking Myanmar and Bangladesh border via Aizawl
- To promote trade, tourism and industries, establishment of multi-speciality hospitals in every district as part of the Ayushman Bharat scheme
- The establishment of football stadiums in every district, setting up of eco-parks and picnic spots to promote tourism

J & K: Dissolution of the Assembly

In the late evening of the 21st of November 2018, the Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, Satya Pal Malik, dissolved the Assembly, preceded by hectic parleys between the *Home Secretary* of the central government and the *Chief Secretary* of J & K in Delhi.

A day before, Sajad Lone, *Peoples Conference* (PC), with two seats together with the BJP, 26 and allegedly 18 dissidents of the *Peoples Democratic Party* (PDP) – as claimed by the rebel PDP-MLA Imran Ansari – asked to prove his numbers for a new government under the label of a “*third front*.” Muzaffar Beg, PDP M. P. from the *Lok Sabha*, joined this new formation.

In a surprising counter move, PDP, 29 seats, National Conference, 15, Congress, 12 and CPI, 1, declared, to form also a new government, after agreeing on Altaf Bukhari, a very articulate former Finance Minister, as candidate for the office of Chief Minister.

This formation, nominally with 57 seats– for a majority 45 seats are required - , vowed to preserve and protect the “*identity*” of J & K.

The Governor dissolved, most probably under pressure from the central government, suddenly the Assembly, later stating, that his fax machine did not function. He argued, that he feared so-called “*horse trading*”, e. g. the crossing of MLA’s between parties. The BJP accused Pakistan, to have initiated the PDP, NC, Congress and CPI-initiative. Such a government would have endangered the recent successes of the army and the other security forces.

The veteran Saifuddin Soz, a former Union Minister of the National Conference and later the Congress, described the step taken by the Governor as *“undemocratic, because a coalition under Altaf Bukhari would have built a popular and stable government.”*

An alternative coalition government would have not suited the BJP at this juncture with regard to its overall election strategy for 2019 and therefore had to be avoided. It is questionable, if this decision for new elections will improve the situation in the fragile crisis state of J & K.

The situation in Jammu & Kashmir

In an interview with NDTV on the 23rd of November 2018, Omar Abdullah, the former CM of Jammu & Kashmir, stated, that his National Conference (NC), together with the Congress, would have supported a minority government led by the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) from outside. *“The PDP is politically no untouchable.”*

Abdullah criticized the decision by Governor Satya Pal Malik, to dissolve the Assembly at this juncture and referred to parallels in Goa and Karnataka, where Governors decided differently. *“The BJP and Sajad Lone of the People’s Conference practiced the business of ‘horse trading’. It is not up to the Governor to decide, what an ‘unholy alliance’ is, Why should J & K be lifted on such a high standard. Since five months, we demanded the dissolution of the Assembly.”*

Omar Abdullah emphasized, that the envisaged government would not have unilaterally represented one region, but would have been representative for the regions Jammu, the Kashmir-Valley and Ladakh. *“Such an alliance would have preserved the identity of J & K and the articles 370 and 35.”*

In the public debates it has become clear, that the BJP favors the abolition of these articles and the full integration of J & K into the Indian Union.

According to Abdullah, NC and PDP are vehemently fighting for the same political space.

“Coalition governments have been detrimental for J & K, therefore we do not call to cast votes for a coalition government. I am not unhappy at all about the recent developments. The NC will not appeal in court the decision of the Governor, but we will support it, if the PDP dies should do it. ”

Omar Abdullah, in the course of the years a very mature and seasoned politician, envisages difficulties for the BJP to explain to its cadres, especially in Jammu, why it seemed to be ready, to support Sajad Lone and his People’s Conference in a coalition.

Omar Abdullah, a former Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA 1-government, rejected decisively the insinuation by Ram Madhav, BJP-General Secretary and especially in charge for J & K, *that the initiative for the government formation of PDP, NC and Congress was the result of influence and pressure from Pakistan.”* Together with other NC-representatives he referred to the altogether five thousand cadres, who lost their lives in their fight against militants, who often were supported by Pakistan and infiltrated from there.

Quite contrary to Omar Abdullah, Sajad Lone, who stayed during the recent events in London maintained, *“I had the legally required numbers, in order to form a government. This is only the beginning, during the next months, there will be a steady joining of people. There is now space for a ‘Third Front’ in the Kashmir Valley, although there are still problems in Central and South Kashmir. Till date, nobody had the courage, to stand up to dominant families and political dynasties.”*

With regard to the statements by separatists, that the recent developments “murdered democracy in Kashmir,” Lone remarked, “who actually cares about them, if there is a participation of 85% in local elections. The understanding in Delhi is superficial, the times are changing.” Lone did not exclude an alliance between the PC and the BJP in the forthcoming elections.

Congress-spokesperson Salman Soz, earlier working with the World Bank and son of Saifuddin Soz, stated, “that the BJP had desperately tried to form a government in J & K. 72 hours before the dissolution of the Assembly, the Governor had declared, that no dissolution will take place.” Soz insinuated that “the ‘burning of the house’ by the BJP is against the national interest.”

The BJP alleges, that in the past it was only a battle between two families in J & K elections. Insofar, the till now failed attempt to build a so-called ‘third front’ with the help of the ‘collaborator’ Sajad Lone, makes from its perspective sense, to break up the established system, especially also given the growing ‘alienation’ in Ladakh, according to Dr. Phunchok Stobdan, who hails from there. But the BJP might not succeed in the near future, to set up shop in the Kashmir Valley.

Omar Abdullah: “The situation in J & K and at the national level is nowadays, compared with 2014, today not so comfortable.” He advocates therefore simultaneous elections to the Assembly and the Lok Sabha in 2019.

Omar Abdullah announced, that there would be no alliances in the forthcoming elections in J & K. But at the national level, there would be a strategic coming together between parties in various states.

The journalist Rahul Jalali, who is well-versed with J & K, opined, that the Governor should have waited with his decision. “The people in Kashmir don’t trust their politicians anymore. Soon we will have new faces as an alternative to the existing parties.”

Terror attack in Amritsar

On Sunday, the 18th of November 2018 two masked terrorists attacked with a hand-granate – used by the Pakistani army - a religious gathering in the house of the Nirankari-sect. Three people died and between 15 to 20 got injured.

Red alert has been pronounced for Delhi, Punjab and Haryana. The *National Security Advisor* (NSA), Ajit Doval, inspected the situation and a team of the *National Investigation Agency* (NIA) reached Amritsar.

Speculations reached from Khalistani- and Kashmiri- as well as Al Qaeda- and Jaish-e-Mohammad-terrorists, possibly supported by the Pakistan secret service ISI (*Interstate Intelligence*).

Pro-Khalistan groups in Canada and England became recently more active, as also warned by Indian security agencies.

This attack was threatened to become politicized. The Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur from the opposition party *Akali Dal* in Punjab accused the Congress-CM Amarinder Singh, to have weakened the security situation by alleged pro-Khalistani gestures. Ashwini Kumar, a former Congress Union Minister, appealed, not to use this attack for party politics.

Concerned observers asked the question, if this attack could be the beginning of the return of terrorism between 1978 till the beginnings of the 1990's, which devastated a whole generation of Punjabis.

It took some time, till the two terrorists got arrested. Before, some "*hardliners*" had been taken into preventive detention. The police claims to have busted 17 modules by the ISI.

Before the attack, the army chief Rawat warned, that militant groups could try to revive the armed insurgency in Punjab. Dr. Ajay Sahni, a leading terrorism analyst from the *South Asia Terrorist Portal*, described the statement of Rawat "*as misplaced.*" Sahni spoke about the attempts by the remaining Khalistani secessionist leadership, who lives in Pakistan, to revitalize the 1970's till the 1990's. He underlined the vulnerability of the state in Punjab, caused besides other factors by a political polarization – the Akalis speak only for Sikhs – and fragmentations. "*If the Akalis are not in power, there is an ideological continuum between the Akali Dal and the Khalistanis visible and a fundamentalist mobilization by the Akali Dal.*"

The Akali Dal spokesperson Manjinder Singh Sirsa contradicted this opinion decisively and opined, that Sikhs in Canada, England and Germany etc. supported these developments aided by the ISI. "*The divisive politics spreads this via social media.*"

Arvinder Singh Lovely from the Congress opined, "*that the overall polarization in India is helping Pakistan.*" C. Pal Singh, a former *Inspector General* of Police in Punjab, alleged an informal support of certain sections of the population in Punjab.

"*All political parties are playing with fire*", so NDTV-moderator Srinivasen Jain.

Sikh-Pogroms 1984: A late healing?

After 34 long years, the '*High Court*' of Delhi sentenced an accused to death and another one to life-long imprisonment in the context of the terrible massacres of members of the Sikh community after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984.

Captain Amarinder Singh, Congress Chief Minister of Punjab: "*I welcome this judgement.*" Harvinder Singh Phoolka, Lawyer and opposition leader of the *Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP) in the Punjab Assembly, who tirelessly pursued the interest of the victims for prosecution, referred to this first sentence 34 years after this "*huge genocide.*"

K. T. S. Tulsi, himself a Sikh and a nominated upper house member of the Congress, emphasized "*that the judiciary was not active in regard to these issues till 1994. The battle is not yet over*"

In the nearby future, the cases of the allegedly involved Congress politicians Sajjan Kumar, Jagdish Tytler and Kamal Nath, *Lok Sabha* M.P. and President of the Congress in Madhya Pradesh, will be treated in court. A '*special Investigation Team*' (SIT) of the *Supreme Court* will monitor the proceedings.

N. Ram, a former editor-in-chief, *The Hindu*, opined, "*there was a cover up of the genocide at the highest political level.*" Yet, N. Ram also referred to parallels to the genocide against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 under the regime of the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi gibt. "*The criminal justice system is in a bad shape and provides immunity to the very powerful.*"

Manjit Singh, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), mentioned the alienation of Sikhs and described the judgement *“as a big step forward. In our assessment about five thousand people lost their lives alone in Delhi and not, like officially state, three thousand.”*

Between 1984 till 1994 the police, which actively supported the rioters, exercised pressure on family members of the victims, not to register *“First Information Reports”* (FIR's).

Although ex-PM Dr. Manmohan Singh said in view of these event in 1984, *“I bow my head in shame”*, also Rahul Gandhi found words of regret, the coming trials might bring the Congress into difficulties in explaining its role, especially so close to the 2019 general elections.

Ramachandra Guha on contemporary issues

The leading Indian historian Ramachandra Guha said in the new NDTV-Series *“Off the Cuff”* (18. 11. 2018), *“that India has disbandened (sic) Mahatma Gandhi. He belongs to the world. We see the rise of sectarian violence, of violence between Hindus and Muslims. The religious minorities did never feel so vulnerable since 1950, also with regard to the attempts to create a ‘Hindu India’. Therefore, we see as a reaction amongst Muslims a rise of fundamentalism. Religion becomes the smallest common denominator.”*

Guha praised Mahatma Gandhi, *“who made followers into leaders. Amongst upper caste people, he did the most to improve the situation of the suppressed classes and castes.”*

Referring to the controversy on Sardar Patel, who has been appropriated by the RSS and the BJP – Modi inaugurated in his honor recently the biggest monument worldwide in Gujarat – Guha said: *“Sardar Patel venerated Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru, who stayed yet for too long in office, was next to Mahatma Gandhi the least parochial politician in India, who also pleaded for gender equality, quite contrary to Sardar Patel.*

After the first generation of freedom fighters, the political class permitted India to crumble and to ‘degenerate’, like it is expressed in a lack of civility in public discourses by leaders of political parties. The political class lacks innovations.

The tragedy of Narendra Modi manifests itself in the fact, that in 2014 he received so much good will and benefit of doubt. Modi emphasized in 2014 hope, in 2019 fear. Personally I felt betrayed by Arvind Kejriwal with his original ideals and the reality of governance. ”

Guha stated, *“that the national freedom movement was directed against the grains of Indian society. The social hierarchies got broken and in numerous spheres of social life we find so much energy and innovation.”*

Ramachandra Guha, who is as well critical of Modi as also of the Gandhis – he agreed, that Rahul Gandhi lead the Congress to the ‘right’– *“if Nehru would be still alive, he would disown politically his family”*, stated laconically: *“that only federalism, the diversity of the country and the Indian South can save India.”*

Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments

Dr. Joyce writes on the non official participation of India in talks with the Taliban without sacrificing its official position on Afghanistan. Also she examines the tri summits—EAS, ASEAN-India and RCEP in Singapore.

Talks in Moscow with Taliban

Russia held talks with the representatives of Taliban, called at an inter-governmental multilateral meeting on Afghanistan on November 09, 2018 in Moscow. In this format, countries such as the USA, Pakistan, Iran, China, the five Central Asian Republics and India were invited. Indian participation, albeit at a “*non-official level*”, seemed imminent, given the fact, that it is the only country to have been left out so far, when it came to the really looking at resolving the Afghan problem. However, India has been clear that it would not officially participate in a format that did not have the direct participation of the Afghan government.

So far, India refused any talks with Taliban, given their nexus with Pakistan and the fact that it did not represent the Afghan nation. India maintains the position that peace efforts should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled and with the participation of the government of Afghanistan. Kabul was represented by some members of the *National Unity Government's* (NUG) *Afghan High Peace Council* and not by any government official. Hence India chose a likewise delegation.

From the Indian side, about two former foreign ministry officials participated, i.e., former Indian ambassador to Afghanistan Amar Sinha and head of the government-funded *Indian Council of World Affairs* think tank T. C. A. Raghavan.

Russia attempted talks with Taliban in September, which was rejected by the Afghan government as “*unnecessary*” as the Taliban had “*disrespected internationally-sanctioned principles and rejected the message of peace and direct negotiations.*”

While the Taliban, headquartered at Doha, has refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the NUG, it wants the complete withdrawal of foreign forces from the Afghan soil for any meaningful talk with Kabul. It rather seeks direct talks with the USA for bringing a closure in the region. However, the USA participated as an observer and plans to hold talks with Taliban in the coming days.

Russia has its vested interests of maintaining peace and stability, while re-carving a role for itself on the global stage. The countries that were invited for the talks have a stake in retaining their respective trade, connectivity, infrastructure and development interests.

To achieve unity amongst the various ethnic groups within Afghanistan is a challenge that cannot be avoided. This peace and unity amongst the ethnic groups will decide the fate of Afghanistan as a nation. This requires countering the external divisive forces machinated by Pakistan.

Taliban has a notorious record of denying basic rights to women in particular and establishing an Islamic caliphate in a ruthless manner. Though there is a change in terms of their positions currently, Taliban is not trusted.

About half of the Afghan territory is today under the control of the Taliban with strife intensifying within the ethnic groups. The stakeholders in the region, like India, do not want this to spiral into a Middle East like situation. Rather, India seeks to protect its economic interests, friendly ties with popularly elected leaders, counter terrorism, and continue with its developmental role in the region.

Much depends on how these peace talks are coordinated with the USA efforts under its special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, in negotiating an end to the 17 years of war.

Modi to Singapore summits

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the *16th ASEAN-India Summit*, *13th East Asia Summit (EAS)*, and the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit* in Singapore (November 14-15, 2018). Singapore under the premiership of Lee Hsein Loong hosted these summits.

16th India-ASEAN summit

The *Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)* was founded in 1967. It has ten members—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, the Laos PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The post Cold War opened doors for India to join this South -East Asian entity as a dialogue partner. This opened a whole lot of opportunities for India to explore investments and markets for its goods. This also led India to make structural changes to its economy, while altering the compass of its foreign policy. In early 1990s, former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao formulated the '*Look East Policy*' with the ASEAN as its key pillar. The sectoral dialogue established with ASEAN in 1992 moved upwards— full dialogue partnership in 1995, summit partnership in 2002 and strategic partnership in 2012. At the 14th Summit in 2014, Modi re-named the policy towards South-East Asia as '*Act East Policy*', with a focus on commerce, connectivity and culture.

Observing this partnership of 25 years and the strategic partnership of 5 years, India and ASEAN commemorated the occasions with a wide range of activities, both in India and through its Missions in ASEAN Member States. This culminated in a Commemorative Summit on the theme "*Shared Values, Common Destiny*" in New Delhi (January 2018), with a focus on three pillars— political security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation.

The ASEAN has a 650 million population and a GDP crossing \$2.8 trillion, approximately like India. India has been actively involved in Asean-led fora such as the EAS, the *Asean Defence Ministers Meeting Plus*, and *Asean Regional Forum*. India and ASEAN have 30 dialogue mechanisms and it includes a Summit and 7 Ministerial meetings in Foreign Affairs, Defence, Commerce, Agriculture, Environment, Renewable Energy and Telecommunications.

India and ASEAN trade amounted to \$70 billion in 2016-17, which is small compared to China ASEAN (US\$ 346 bn), Japan (US\$ 239 bn), the EU (US\$ 228 bn), and the USA (US\$ 212 bn) in a rank order. However there has been a steady increase as the trade between India and ASEAN stands at US\$ 81.33 billion in 2017-18. This constitutes 10.58% of India's total trade. Exports to ASEAN countries constitute 11.28% of India's total exports.

Singapore is the major investor amongst the ASEAN countries with a cumulative total of about US\$ 30 billion (98%). A cumulative FDI outflow from India to ASEAN countries, from April 2007 to March 2015, as per data maintained by the Ministry of Finance, was about US\$ 38.67 billion.

Areas that the ASEAN countries keenly look towards India are physical and digital connectivity. Strengthening land, air and sea linkages enable contacts, business, investment and tourism. These countries particularly Singapore seeks Indian markets for collaborations in E-commerce and FinTech.

The entire economic relations is conducted on the basis of *ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement* (AIFTA) of 2009 that has seen a tremendous growth from US\$2.9 billion in 1993 to over US\$70 billion in 2016-17.

Presently, the ASEAN countries look towards the RCEP for better economic integration.

RCEP Summit

Since the USA has rolled back the *Trans-Pacific Partnership*, with 12 members, the other economic partnership available in the region is the China-led RCEP. Modi participated in the summit, to review the progress made in the negotiations as part of finalising the RCEP as a free trade agreement amongst 16 countries – ten ASEAN Member States, India, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea.

So far 24 rounds of negotiations have taken place since 2012. If the RCEP takes shape, then it will include 45% of the world's population, 40% of world trade and 34% of global GDP, amounting to USD 21.3 trillion.

Modi made five interventions in this summit— praised the progress of negotiations (so far five out of 16 chapters from the RCEP are concluded), to better the progress of in services negotiations, early conclusion of negotiations and lastly RCEP modern, comprehensive, balanced and mutually beneficial

13th East Asia Summit

The EAS is a premier leaders-led forum in the Indo-Pacific Region, comprising of the ten ASEAN member states and its eight dialogue partners India, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Russia.

The leaders reviewed the political, security and economic developments in the Indo-Pacific region. Particularly, they discussed the international developmental issues such as ICT, Smart Cities,

Maritime Cooperation, Education, Finance, Food Security, Environment and Energy at both the Retreat and Plenary Sessions.

Meeting with Singapore Premier and Mike Pence

Both Modi and Prime Minister of Singapore Lee reviewed the bilateral relations. This included discussions on second and third review of CICA pertaining to connectivity, on RCEP negotiations, etc. Modi met with the Vice President of USA Pence on the sidelines. Both discussed on enhancement of trade and addressing of trade deficit that seemed to have shown decline by the USA. Also India is keen to increase oil and gas imports from the USA which was valued at US\$ 4 bn in 2017. The visit by President Donald Trump to India is still on the cards with no dates confirmed.

Part III South Asia

Dr. Joyce writes on the peaceful transition of power in Maldives after the political uncertainty that gripped the island nation. A brief writing explains whether Pakistan believes in building peace through efforts like the Kartarpur Corridor.

Solih heads the Maldivian state

The 30 years (1978-2008) of dictatorship in the Maldives under Maumoon Abdul Gayoom showed signs of revival under President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. Yameen won the protracted elections in Maldives in 2013. His entire rule has been controversial.

Maldives witnessed the real democracy, when the *Maldivian Democratic Party* (MDP), led by Mohammed Nasheed, won the multi-party elections. However, under Yameen imprisonment of his dissenters, arrests of the Chief Justice, judges, imposing of emergency etc took place

The September 23 Presidential elections led to the victory of the opposition leader from the MDP, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. The fear amongst the Maldivian populace was that despite a clear victory for Solih, President Yameen would not step down from power.

However, on November 17, 2018 Solih was formally sworn in as the President of the country. In attendance was Prime Minister Modi. Solih expressed, that the Maldives would fortify ties with India. Relations between the Maldives and India have spiralled down, as Yameen moved closer to China.

After a span of 7 years, Modi became the first Indian PM to visit the Maldives. As a special gesture, Solih held a bilateral meeting with Modi, in order to revive the ties of friendship and cooperation. They agreed on the need for peace and security in the Indian Ocean, combating terrorism, etc..

The 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.

It will be interesting to observe, how constructive the relations between both countries will evolve and how far the Chinese influence can be contained and neutralised, irrespective of its growing influence in India's immediate neighbourhood and in the Indian Ocean.

Kartarpur corridor between India and Pakistan

The Kartarpur Corridor is the proposed border corridor between the neighbouring countries of India and Pakistan. This connects the Sikh shrines of *Dera Baba Nanak Sahib* (located in Punjab, India) and *Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur* (in Punjab, Pakistan). The Corridor was proposed by India to Pakistan around 20 years ago.

The groundbreaking ceremony took place under the initiative of the present government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The foundation stone for the four-lane "human corridor" was laid on

November 26 this year. The work is to be completed by November 23, 2019, so as to coincide with the 550th birth anniversary of Sikh founder Guru Nanak. This will enable the Indian Sikh pilgrims to visit the final resting place of Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539).

The symbolic ground- breaking ceremony in Pakistan took place on November 28, to lay the 4 kms of the corridor, while India lays 2 kms. This yearly pilgrimage, that the Indian Sikhs undertake, involves a journey of 200 kms which will be reduced to 6 kms. This will also facilitate visa-free movement of pilgrims for Indians.

The reactions to this ground laying ceremony were manifold. Some experts have termed this move as religious diplomacy. The BJP party and its leaders within the government termed this as building peace efforts between two neighbouring states. Other opposition party member read this as a gimmick for the general elections in 2019 to garner Sikh votes.

The Congress Chief Minister of Punjab refused to attend the ceremony in Pakistan as a reaction for the terror related activities, that have wrecked havoc on the military and in Punjab, while External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj refused on grounds of inability to attend.

Vice President Venkaiah Naidu hailed this, *“That is the history we have to create together, a history that will make our two countries and the entire world a more peaceful place for our children and grandchildren to live and grow together.”*

Political parties like the Congress and the *Shiromani Akali Dal* (SAD) in Punjab tried to claim credit with much jostling.

Prime Minister Imran Khan claimed that India was playing the obstructionist in completing the corridor.

India instead sent two ministers, Hardeep Singh Puri and Harsimrat Kaur Badal, to the event in Pakistan. Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's commented that this presence of Indian ministers at the event was Imran Khan's ability to bowl a "googly" to ensure Indian government's presence. He said, *“Imran delivered a googly and India sent two ministers to Pakistan.”* This kind of talk has been described in India as Pakistan government playing to its domestic audience.

This move by India and Pakistan has been considered as a thaw in the cold relations between both counties since 2008. However, the presence of pro-Khalistani leader Gopal Singh Chawla at this event betrays the seriousness of Imran Khan in building peace roads with India.
