



# INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: SEPTEMBER 2018 DOSSIER

The September edition covers political and social developments in India. It deals with disparate topics related to Indian politics including the surge of the Dalits in the Indian political landscape, the Left that fails to renew as per the times, elections in Telangana and Karnataka, arrests of Maoists and violence in Jammu and Kashmir, the new Chief Justice of India, and a few prominent publications.

In terms of the foreign developments, the dossier looks into the surprising outcome of Maldivian elections, the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit, the growing relations between India and the USA and, finally, explores the chances of rapprochement between India and Pakistan.

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**FEPS  
STUDIES**  
SEPTEMBER  
2018

**Dr Klaus Julian Voll**  
FEPS Advisor on Asia

With Dr. Joyce Lobo

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## **Part I India - Domestic developments**

Dr. Klaus J. Voll covers the recent political and social developments of India that range from Jammu and Kashmir to the Maoists, the Left, Supreme Court, Karnataka elections etc.

### **Political and social developments**

The *Supreme Court* has prolonged twice the house arrest of social activists, who have been arrested by the urban police of Pune in the context of the alleged assassination of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and links with Maoists.

M. N. Singh, a former police commissioner of Mumbai, speaks of "*serious allegations, like collecting the raising of funds for terrorists and the acquisition of weapons.*"

It will be interesting to observe, how the *Supreme Court* will finally decide in this matter.

The upcoming urban and rural elections in the crisis state Jammu & Kashmir will be boycotted by the National Conference (NC) and now also the People's Democratic Party (PDP), till it is clear for them, that article 35, which concerns property rights J & K, will remain untouched.

In a historical decision, a *Supreme Court* bench of five judges, chaired by the *Chief Judge of India*, Dipak Misra, decriminalized article 377 of the *Indian Penal Code*, which put under prosecution homosexual relations since 1860/61. This is a big step for the 'LGBT (Q)-community' according to the motto, "*one India, equal in love.*" The SC estimates, that 7% of India are affected by this decision.

The government remained neutral with regard to this question and did not expose itself to a possible leadership role.

The Hindu cadre organization RSS accepted this decision, but does not support it. One of its leading cadres described homo-sexuality as "*unnatural*" and the BJP supporter Baba Ramdev, a Yoga Guru with a real mass-following, invited homosexuals, "*to heal*" them.

The RSS-spokesperson Desh Ratan Nigam observed that society is not yet ready for this decision and its underlying thinking. It would be still a long way to go till its acceptance.

The struggle against article 377 of the IPC, introduced by the British colonialists, quite contrary to the practices before, has been led since 2001. In the future, important topics will be property and marriage rights for the LGBT (Q)-community.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, the Congress launched a country-wide general strike (*Bandh*) against the rising petrol and Diesel prices with mixed results and not supported by all the opposition parties.

The former Congress Union-Minister Kapil Sibal does not assume that there will be a so-called *Mahabaghandan* (big alliance) of all opposition parties on a common platform for the *Lok Sabha* elections 2019.

According to relatively representative surveys ('*Election Stock Exchange*') in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, the BJP in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is ahead with a small margin, whereas the Congress is ahead in Rajasthan, if elections would take place today.

In Rajasthan, as a result of the revived party and the popularity of the former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and the dynamic Rajasthan Party President Sachin Pilot the Congress is ahead of the BJP-CM Vasundara Raje.

Commerce and Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu, also in charge for civil aviation, announced in a meeting with his Iranian counterpart, that India aspires during the coming five years to double its foreign trade with Iran. The question arises, if this is really realistic, since India will have to drastically cut the import of Iranian oil as a result of American pressure.

The BJP launched in a press conference by union minister Smriti Irani sharp attacks against Rahul and Sonia Gandhi with regard to a reassessment of taxes by the Income Tax Department, literally in the last minute, in the context of the *National Herald/Associated Journals* and *Young India*. The Congress-Rashtriya Sabha member Dr. Abishek Manu Singhvi, who represents the accused, is of the opinion, that it is not an enterprise, which seeks profits.

It can be already now anticipated, that the BJO will target in its election campaign the Gandhis more or less in obsessive manner.

Chandra Kumar Bose, a descendant of the legendary independence leader Subhash Chandra Bose and Vice-President of the BJP in West Bengal, alleged "*the illegal acquisition of funds*" by the Congress-leadership.

The question about the *National Herald/Associated Journals* and *Young India* will, together with the cases against Robert Vadra, son-in-law of Sonia Gandhi, as well as against P. Chidambaran and his son Karthik, form a central part of the attacks by the government against the Congress in 2019.

### **The situation of the Left in India**

The sum of left and communist parties in India has reduced from about 60 seats in Indian Parliament in 2014 to a currently historical low of less than ten.

What are the reasons in a country, which shows extreme differences in economics and society and would offer thereby ideal preconditions for a successful left presence and policy? According to the experienced journalist Arathi Jerath, "*there is sufficient space for left thinking, in order to be a force at the ballot-box.*"

In my opinion, there is an evident lack of genuine thinkers, who are not in a position, to formulate a truly contemporary analysis together with an applicable ideology of the existing real conditions. Exemplary for this stand the former CPI/M General Secretary Prakash Karat and his successor Sitaram Yechury, who never fought any election: "*The Left must under all circumstances become more contemporary. The time for the old Left is over. The old Left has moved to the right*", says former CPI/M member Presenjit Bose.

Besides, it lacks organizational capacity, not the least as a result of divisions between formations of the CPI/M, CPI, CPI (ML) and the CPI/Maoist, which operates in the underground.

*"The Left faces an existential crisis and has more or less collapsed"*, so Presenjit Bose. The CPI/M, '*the last bastion of political Brahmanism*', carries a lot of historical baggage, also with regard to its attitude towards "*armed struggle*".

Kavita Krishna, Member of the political bureau of the *Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist*, criticized also the political violence CPI/M-cadres in Kerala, from which the CPI/M does not really distances itself, sufficiently.

The CPI/M ignored more or less the various different Dalit movements, which adhere to the cult figure Dr. Ambedkar, and did not bring sufficient representatives of so-called disadvantaged castes and sections into positions of decision-making.

In my opinion, it cannot be expected, that the left parties will perform substantially better in the upcoming *Lok Sabha* elections in 2019. In Tripura, the CPI/M is visibly weakened after it was voted out, in West Bengal it is only a third force behind the Trinamool Congress and the ascending BJP, only in Kerala it is still a force to reckon with.

Ideologically run-down, besides its mobilization of small farmers and agricultural labourers in Maharashtra, like demonstrated in its march to Mumbai, its labour wing has lost strength, the Left is threatened to sink in the under-currents of attacks by the *Hindutva-Right* and get into oblivion. Only a miracle can lead to a true *Renaissance of the Left*.

### **Early Assembly Elections in Telangana**

What drives the state government of Telangana to postpone the next Assembly election, which is only due in June/July 2019, and dissolve the state Parliament, in which the *Telangana Rashtriya Samiti* (TRS) has a clear majority?

Will Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao, popularly known as KCR, try to avoid the often cited so-called “*anti-incumbency*”-factor? Allegedly he fears, amongst other reasons, the so-called Modi-effect.

The BJP, which was happy, that the TRS did not participate in the no-confidence vote against the NDA, envisages the TRS as a potential ally post 2019, called the move of the CM “*arrogant*”.

#### *Reasons and interests*

“*Anti-incumbency*” and the “*Modi effect*” are certainly genuine factors, whereas “*political fragility*” and “*foolish behaviour*”, allegedly by the Congress, seem to be unsubstantiated, if one considers the current dominance of the TRS in the Assembly.

#### *Seat distribution in the Assembly 2014*

<b>Party</b>	<b>Seats won</b>
TRS	90
INC	17
AIMIM	07
BJP	05
TDP	03
CPI/M	01
Anglo-Indian(nominated)	01

The 64-years Rao allegedly wants to build up his son K. T. Rama Rao as his successor in Telangana on the one side, and play himself a national role. He and his party play a key role with regard to a bigger opposition unity. KCR prefers a so-called “*Federal Front*” without BJP and Congress. The TRS, which is

sure of winning in both of the elections, wants to go it alone in the forthcoming elections, according to K. Kavita, Member of the *Lok Sabha* and daughter of KCR.

But it cannot be ruled out at all, that KCR, for a price, could support the BJP, in case it loses its own absolute majority, and a possible NDA 3 government.

#### *Date for the Assembly elections*

The *Election Commission of India* inspected the situation on the ground, as far as the preparedness for the elections in Telangana is concerned. They will be most probably held together with those in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram or shortly before or after.

#### *Political Strategies and possible alliances*

In view of the political strengths in Telangana, it can be assumed, that the TRS is in a position to win alone an absolute majority.

It seems, that the BJP won't be in a position to strengthen itself substantially. Will there be a small so-called '*Mahabaghdhan*', e.g. a "*grand alliance*" and informal alliance between the Congress, TDP, AIMIM and CPI/M on the basis of seat adjustments?

Rao explicitly ruled out a coming together with the BJP. On the other side, he called Rahul Gandhi a "*Buffoon*". Rao, earlier in the Congress and the *Telugu Desam Party* (TDP), is a shrewd politician. He tactically put the Congress before 2014 'on the mat'.

The elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram, most probably also in Telangana, towards the end of 2018 are a kind of semi-final, since they will provide a representative sample in Central, North and Northeast India for 2019.

The early dissolution of the Assembly also seems to be an attempt to meet the Congress, split in various warring factions with own candidates for the post of CM, unprepared. Currently, Party President Uttam Kumar Reddy seems to be the non-declared favourite, in case that the Congress could form a government.

The TRS seems to be well prepared for an early elections and offers to the electorate, tailored for the various "*communities*" and interest groups, respective gifts. The cabinet ministers released, right before the code of conduct will come into effect, the funds for big projects. The good monsoon – for the sowing season from March to June 2019 scarcity of drinking water and for irrigation are expected – certainly also influenced KCR's decision.

The so-called "*Rythu Bandu*"-programme, whereby 8.500 Rupees have been paid in two instalments to farmers, could lead to a political dividend for the TRS.

KCR wants also to more or less avoid elections to the state parliament and to the *Lok Sabha* at the same time, since he fears, that the projection of Rahul Gandhi as candidate for the office of Prime Minister could lead to a situation, that parts of the electorate could vote for the Congress, since the BJP in Telangana represents not a potent force.

In the meantime, the Congress, the *Telugu Desam Party* (TDP), together with the only in some areas influential Communists, want to form an alliance in Telangana against the governing *Telangana*

*Rashtriya Samiti* (TRS). They ask for the imposition of *President's Rule* in Telangana. The Congress wants to appeal in this matter also to the *Supreme Court*.

This surprising coming together between the TDP and the Congress could also have an impact on neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, where the Congress has been reduced to a pitiable position after the deadly helicopter accident of its erstwhile Chief Minister YSR Reddy and the breakaway of his son Jagan Reddy with his newly formed YSR Congress.

#### **Arrests of so-called '*urban Maoists*' illegal?**

The arrests of five prominent activists on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August across five states of the Indian Union under the *Unlawful Activities Prevention Act* (UAPA) threw the spotlight on '*Maoism*' in India, but also on police practices and the intervention of the *Supreme Court* the following day.

The police argued, that they have "*concrete and solid proofs. The accused tried to form an anti-fascist front.*"

The arrested, Sudha Baradwaj, Arun Fereira, Gautam Navlankha, Vernon Gonsalves and Varavaro Rao are lawyers, journalists and human rights activists, spent a night in police custody. Sudha Bhardwaj works since many years with the local population in Chhattisgarh, Varavaro Rao is a quite popular '*revolutionary poet*' in South India.

They are accused by the urban police of Pune in Maharashtra, to have stirred up violence at the memorial day for Dalits in Bhima Koregaon at the end of 2017, early 2018, although the rural police of Pune held the right-wing radical '*Sanatan Sanstha*' responsible for the violence there. Besides, they accuse the above arrested did plan an attack on the Prime Minister. The police classified the arrested publicly as so-called '*urban Maoists*', who allegedly work for the underground '*Communist Party of India (Maoist)*'.

The *Supreme Court* decided on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, that the arrested persons would be put under house arrest till the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, which was later extended. One of the judges stated, "*deviating opinions are a safety valve in a democracy.*" According to observers of these developments, this decision has been a setback for the government of Maharashtra. Yet, the RSS spokesperson Desh Ratan Nigam opined, "*The house has been converted into a prison.*"

Kavita Srivastava, national secretary of the *People's Union for Civil Liberties* (PUCL), referred to the fact, that the arrest orders have been issued only in '*Marathi*' und not in English. "*These are fabricated cases and an attempt to silence the activists.*"

The Congress and the entire opposition condemned the action of the Pune police. K. T. Tulsi, *Rajya Sabha* member of the Congress, said, that it does not constitute "*sedition*", if members of civil society support members of Maoists.

How far the police can go was demonstrated in the case of the son-in-law of the poet Varavaro Rao, who is a Professor and University VC. His house was stormed and his computer and research work taken away, only because he is related to Rao.

The Home Ministry highlights in its reports the decline of Maoist influence in various parts of the country. Do these arrests try to draw attention away from the performance of the Modi government and attempt to make this topic a central election issue in 2019? Is the opposition in danger, to run into a trap by the government?

### **Escalation of violence in Kashmir?**

Is there a change in terror politics in Kashmir? Within 48 hours, 11 family members of policemen have been kidnapped, but later released. Is this a sign of weakness of terrorists, who are allegedly getting pushed back in the Southern parts of Kashmir? According to military sources, the *Hizbul Mujahiddin* is allegedly on the run.

Is this the result of the “*hard approach*” under the regime of the Governor and thereby of the central government? Till now in 2018, already 70 terrorists have been killed, that is more than in whole of 2017.

On the other side, 32 policemen have been killed, twenty of them in their apartments and houses. Their safety is urgently required, particularly since housing projects for the police have been delayed for years.

One of the reasons for these kidnappings could be, that the son of the Hizbul-leader has been arrested because of illegal ‘*Hawala-trade*’ for alleged terror financing by the *National Investigation Agency* (NIA).

Interestingly, none of the ‘*mainstream parties*’, e. g. Congress, National Conference und People’s Democratic Party, condemned these kidnappings of family members of police personnel, except the BJP. The BJP-spokesperson Zafar Islam insinuated, that the Congress, the NC and the Hurriyat support the stone pelters. Ex-CM Mehbooba Mufti demanded from the security forces and the police, not to kill the terrorists if possible and not to attack their relatives.

Praveen Swami, *Consulting Editor* of the TV station CNN-IBN, asked, if this is the beginning of the end of terrorism in J & K and drew parallels to the Punjab, irrespective of the different socio-economic context. He conceded, “*that a substantial part of the population is supporting these activities.*” He sees in the kidnappings by terrorists an attempt, to exercise pressure on administration and politics. “*It is a dangerous new trend.*”

### **Urban polls in Karnataka**

A few months after the Assembly Elections, resulting in a conflict-ridden coalition government between the *Janata Dal (Secular)* and the Congress, both parties decided to go into these municipal elections alone and not, like planned for 2019, together.

The Congress won 982 seats, the BJP 929, the JD/S 375 and Others 376.

The Congress gained about. 37% (2013= 39%) of the votes, the BJP about. 35% - 2018 in the urban segments about 51% - whereas the JD/S slipped from 18 to 14%.

Normally, the voters support immediately after an Assembly Election the governing formation, which was not the case this time for the JD/S, contrary to the Congress.

The JD/S lost, compared to the municipal elections in 2013 about 100 seats, although being at that time in the opposition. Danish Ali, national general secretary of the JD/S, remarked, that his party always only occupied in such elections the third rank. According to him, the main aim had been, to keep the BJP out and to avoid, that as a result of an open alliance with the Congress a switching over of disgruntled candidates to the BJP could be avoided.

The JD/S, the biggest loser in these elections, only won in its bastion in Old Mysore, irrespective of waving of loans of altogether Rupies 40.000 crore.

It has to be seen, if the results of these elections will have any effect on the declared intention of JD/S and Congress, to enter into a pre-poll alliance in 2019. Besides the question of seat distribution, the cohesion of the coalition could be negatively affected. It seems that the JD/S needs the Congress more than it is the case the other way round.

### **Ranjan Gogoi is the new Chief Justice of India**

In keeping with the convention of the seniority principle, outgoing *Chief Justice of India* (CJI) Dipak Misra recommended Justice Ranjan Gogoi as the next CJI of the Supreme Court. There was much speculation that CJI Misra may not uphold the tradition, after Justice Gogoi had gone public along with four other judges in January 2018, raising concerns on the CJI's allocation of cases to benches in the *Supreme Court*. Justice Gogoi is set to become the 46th CJI on October 03, 2018.

Born on November 18, 1954, Justice Gogoi (aged 63) hails from Assam. He is set to become the first from his state and the entire north-east to reach the highest judicial office. He began his legal career by joining the Bar in 1978. He was appointed as the permanent judge of the *Guwahati High Court* in February 2001. He later became the Chief Justice of *Punjab and Haryana High Court* in February 2011 and was finally alleviated as a judge in the Supreme Court on April 23, 2012.

Gogoi has been heading the special bench that monitors the updating of the *National Register of Citizens*, to identify citizens and weed out illegally settled foreigners in Assam. The Benches led by Justice Gogoi have dealt largely with the issue of corruption in politics and public life. His Bench has been monitoring the progress made by the government in the appointment of the anti-corruption ombudsman *Lokpal*.

#### **Publications:**

- India-China Relations 1942-2000: A Documentary Study, Vols. I – V.

Edited by A. S. Bhasin, Geethika Publishers

15 000 Rs., 5 318 pages

According to Shivshankar Menon, a former *Foreign Secretary* and *National Security Advisor* (NSA), this is an important standard work to understand the relations between India and China. (Review in *India Today*, August 6, 2018, pages 14/15)

- Walter K. Andersen/Shridhar D. Damle: The RSS. A View to the Inside.

Penguin Random House India, New Delhi, 2018

ISBN 9780670089147

Walter Andersen is since the 1980's ('*Brotherhood in Saffron*') an excellent expert on the '*Rashtriya Sevak Sangh*' (RSS. 'Social Welfare Organisation of Hindus')

- Reham Khan. (without title)

Harper CollinsPublishers, Noida/Uttar Pradesh, 2018

E-ISBN: 978-93-5302-322-5

This book gives good insights into politics and society in Pakistan and above all aspects of the personality of Prime Minister Imran Khan, written by his second wife Reham Khan, who worked with the BBC and other media.

## **Part II India - Foreign Policy Developments**

In this part and the next Dr. Joyce S. Lobo writes on India's external relations with its neighbours and with new strategic partners while analysing the surprising verdict given by Maldivians on Yameen. Dr. Voll writes on the possibilities of rapprochement between India and Pakistan since Imran Khan as the premier.

### **India and the USA: 2 Plus 2 Talks**

For the first time, India and the USA held the first edition of a “2+2” *India-US Strategic Dialogue On Security and Defence* ties in New Delhi on September 6, 2018. The Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman hosted the US Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo and US Secretary of Defence James Mattis in the capital. The 2+2 was the result of talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump in June 2017. The format replaces the strategic and commercial dialogues between the foreign and commerce ministers.

The focus of the meeting has been clearly on the concept of the Indo-Pacific region—its security, stability and prosperity. The principles, that would govern the relations between India and the USA over the region, were rule of law, national sovereignty, good governance, the protection of fundamental freedom rights and liberties, free, fair and reciprocal trade relationships and peaceful resolutions of territorial and maritime disputes. During the meeting, the leaders endorsed the views of their respective heads of government in having a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region with ASEAN centrality at the core. The USA has evinced interest in expanding its economic footprint in the Indo-Pacific region, while focussing on cooperation with partners in building connectivity and infrastructure.

The USA and India have expanded bilateral trade by 12 billion last year, reaching 126 billion in 2017. However there are still some unresolved issues like tariff and non-tariff barriers or market access challenges.

The significance of the date September 6 marks the 10 years of India getting the waiver from the *Nuclear Suppliers Group* (NSG). This allowed India to engage in trades of civilian nuclear materials and technologies, paving the way for defence and commercial cooperation. The current talks on civil nuclear cooperation focused on what next to achieve in a span of 10 years. This included the finalising of the Westinghouse civil nuclear project.

#### *Defence a key takeaway*

Defence relations have strengthened in the present decade with extensive training and joint exercises marked by complexity, both bilaterally and in wider formats. India and the USA have decided to carry out the first time tri-services joint exercise off the eastern coast of India in 2019.

There is a growing trust in terms of defence relations between India and the USA. This reflects in the signing of the foundational agreement—the *Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement* (COMCASA) during the 2 Plus 2 talks. This leads to the build-up of positive defence relations, that have so far seen the signing of the *Logistics Exchange Memorandum Of Agreement* (LEMOA) in 2016 and the *Helicopter Operations From Ships Other Than Aircraft Carriers*(HOSTAC). In 2016, the USA declared India as its major defence partner. In July this year, the USA granted India the *Strategy Trade Authority Tier 1* (STA-1) status. This makes India eligible for USA imports of high technology products, without the requirement of individual licences, while enabling the latter companies to export dual-use items under a more streamlined licensed process.

The COMCASA will facilitate access to advanced defence systems and enable India to optimally utilise its existing U.S.-origin platforms, while achieving communications interoperability between both countries, given the latest buys of the former from the latter.

The India-USA defence trade in 2008 was nil and in 2019 it is estimated to reach US\$ 18 billion. The talks resulted in the future preparation of defence cooperation between the defence forces of both countries.

The USA has renamed its *Pacific Command*, which is responsible for relations with India, as *Indo Pacific Command*. India intends to build interactions with the US *Central command* too. In order to promote defence manufacturing in India under the *Make-in - India* initiative, New Delhi has requested the *Department of Defence* to address procedural complexities and help Indian companies to join the manufacturing supply chains of the U.S. defence companies. Both sides have identified cooperation in defence innovation and during this visit, the memorandum of intent between the respective defence innovation agencies was signed.

Further, the talks revolved around the situations in Afghanistan and in North Korea, while focussing on the challenges emanating from terrorism and measures to enhance counter terrorism. Both the USA and India have agreed to deepen cooperation at the *United Nations* and the *Financial Action Task Force*. The USA recognises *Lashkar-e- Taiba* as posing a threat from the soil of Pakistan, which affects interests of India and America. The USA, along with India, openly condemned, that Pakistan used terrorism as an instrument of State Policy.

Both countries have agreed to follow the implementation of the decisions taken at the meeting. This is to be done through regular communication via a new hot line, that has been established between the foreign ministers and defence ministers. The USA emphasized on securing India's membership of the NSG at the earliest. The pillars of the India-USA strategic relations today clearly spell as trade and investment, defence and security, and nuclear.

The talks have, no doubt, focussed on irritants like the *Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act*( CAATSA), that affects India's interests in terms of its defence imports from Russia and oil imports from Iran. India intends to finalise the S-400 'Triumf' missile shield deal with Russia in October. Even if this deal will pass through the CAATSA net, any future deal with Russia and Iran may not find leniency with the Trump administration.

One of the senior administration officials of the USA government, during the special briefing, confirmed, that the "*Trump administration is fully committed to implementing CAATSA, including section 231. We have discussed CAATSA with the Government of India, along with other partners, and we continue to look for ways to work with India and other countries to help them identify and avoid engaging in potentially sanctionable activities.*" (Previewing the Upcoming U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. August 30, 2018URL:<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/08/285629.htm>)

For Trump, relations with India are more on a transactional than transformative plane. It will depend on India, and not the USA, as to how it will accommodate the latter's interests, while distancing Russia from strategic areas of cooperation (nuclear, oil and defence).

#### **Fourth BIMSTEC Summit**

The fourth *Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation* (BIMSTEC) Summit was held in Kathmandu (August 30-31, 2018).

BIMSTEC is a regional grouping of seven countries with five countries from South Asia— Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal & Sri Lanka and two countries from South East Asia—Myanmar and Thailand.

These countries seek to cooperate on 14 sectors such as trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism, fisheries, agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counter-terrorism, environment, culture, people to people contact and climate change.

The strength of this association is, that it is considered as a platform for intra-regional cooperation between the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* (SAARC) and the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) members.

BIMSTEC members have collectively responded to adversities and together share their capabilities. It provides access to the landlocked member countries, i.e. Bhutan and Nepal. For India, BIMSTEC complements with its foreign policies of *Neighbourhood First* and *Act East Policy*. Particularly, it enables India to engage with countries on its eastward flank as the west relations are conditioned by the tense relations with Pakistan. Also, India's north-east region can be part of the connected developments in South and South East Asia. The aim of the members is to form a regional economic bloc. BIMSTEC has a population of 1.6 billion people that is 22 % of the world's population and a combined GDP of \$2.8 trillion.

Each member state leads at least one of the multi-sectors within BIMSTEC. India leads with the highest in numbers. India has taken up leadership in the area of transport and communication. BIMSTEC members are currently finalizing a *Motor Vehicle Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger and Cargo Vehicular Traffic* between and among BIMSTEC Member States and also an *Agreement on Coastal Shipping*. Progress is also being made towards the finalization of a *BIMSTEC Master Plan for Connectivity*. In the second area in which it has taken leadership is in tourism. The focus today is on promotion of specialized tourist circuits and eco-tourism with focus on the development of a *Buddhist Tourist Circuit* and *Temple Tourist Circuit* within the region. The third area, where India has taken the lead is in environment and disaster management. The BIMSTEC region is considered as one of the most disaster prone regions. The fourth area of Indian leadership lies in counter-terrorism and transnational crime.

It has been more than two decades since the formation of BIMSTEC on June 6, 1997. However, it is yet to get its due share of attention. The BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and the BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement are yet to be finalised. The draft BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity is being prepared. It includes rail, road, port and air connectivity. Once adopted, this plan would serve as a strategic document. This plan is to complement with the existing plans of ASEAN *Master Plan on Connectivity 2025* (MPAC 2025), the *Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya- Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy* (ACMECS) etc.

In terms of military cooperation, member countries such as Nepal and Thailand have not participated in the joint military exercise held in Pune from September 10 to 16, 2018. This military cooperation takes the association away from its development purpose. India has been disappointed by the last minute withdrawal, as the exercises are held to counter terrorism which is one of the areas of BIMSTEC cooperation. Nepal cited "*internal political pressure*" for its non-participation and rather held the same with China during the same time.

The other area of weakness within the BIMSTEC is trade. The intra-regional trade accounts for only about 5% of the total trade in the region. This pales in terms of the intra-regional trade, that other groupings have—ASEAN (26%), NAFTA (52%) and EU (58%). Again, the BIMSTEC *Free Trade Area* (FTA) negotiations are yet to come to a conclusion.

There are some strengths the BIMSTEC member states can put into optimal use. For instance, the road transport accounts for about 70% of the freight movement within the region, while it has one of the largest railway networks in the world. Apart from mentioning the working of the 14 sectors of BIMSTEC, the summit declaration also referred to the promotion of mountain economies and blue

economy. In this regard, it has been decided, that the idea is to be developed by establishing two *Inter-governmental Expert Groups*.

### **Part III South Asia**

#### **Improvement of India-Pakistan relations?**

The opinions of how to deal with Imran Khan as Prime Minister are quite different in India. Seshadri Chari, BJP, opines, “*that a new Prime Minister in Pakistan does not at all mean a change in the policy of the army Besides, Khan is leading a minority government.*” Desh Ratan Nigam, RSS spokesperson, advises “*to wait and observe.*”

Dr. Farooq Abdullah, a former Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir as well as Union Minister, referred to earlier pro-India statements of Imran Khan. “*Certain vested interests wish to keep the conflict alive.*”

A.S. Dulat, a former chief of India’s foreign intelligence service *Research & Analyses Wing*, opined, “*we should not make Imran Kahn smaller than he is. What difference does it make, if he is a candidate of the army. He is his own man and cannot be pushed around. It is easier to deal with him.*”

Mani Shankar Aiyar, a former Congress minister and erstwhile General Consul in Karachi, referred to the constraints “*After the summit in Agra, there was a dialogue for three years. Any vacuum of dialogues leads to an escalation of violence.*”

Ajai Sahni, Director of the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* (SATP) mentioned “*a strong anti-India sentiment in Pakistan*”, quite contrary to what Mani Shankar Aiyar observed., “*For a sustainable dialogue, a lot of preliminary work is required. The relations should not be directed to persons. There is no multitude of options available.*”

Farooq Abdullah appealed: “*Pakistan has an interest in better relations with India. We have to break the cycle of violence. We should try a dialogue and not be negative.*”

The former *Chief of Staff* of the Indian army, General Deepak Kapoor, emphasized, to think about the methodology of the dialogue. “*We should involve the Pakistani army into the dialogue.*”

Instead, Seshadri Chari opined, “*the Pakistani army has been always at the helm, we should speak with the Prime Minister.*” A. S. Dulat said, “*there are always ways to speak with the army. 2005 till 2008 was a peaceful period. We should not always unload the critique on Pakistan. We should jointly fight terrorism with Pakistan.*”

Desh Ratan Nigam, RSS spokesperson, opined, “*China cannot at all be ignored in the context of our relations with Pakistan. Half of the cabinet of Imran Khan consists of men, who served under Mubarak.*”

A.S. Dulat underlined: “*During the last 30 years Pervez Musharraf was the most reasonable person in the relations with India.*”

Chari is of the opinion, to wait for another six months and observe. Even the ever optimistic Aiyar anticipates no substantial developments till the *Lok Sabha* elections. Yet, Farooq Abdullah opines: “*Let us begin with talks at the side-lines, why should we waste eight months.*”

Shyam Saran, a former *Foreign Secretary*, opined, “*we should try to explore the possibilities with the new government. The China factor influenced negatively our relations with Pakistan in the past, also with regard to its nuclearisation and weapon systems. But it is not in China’s interests, also because of the CPEC, to have an open conflict between India and Pakistan. But I do not foresee a positive Chinese role. We have to deal ourselves with Pakistan. It is positive, that Imran Kahn has spoken about trade with India.*”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is silent till now and does not provide insights, how his government wants to conduct itself in the near future. In my opinion, at least we could see rather sooner than later the resumption of various Track II discussions, after the well-known *Neemrana Dialogue* already did so.

### **Maldives presidential elections revives democracy**

President of Maldives Abdulla Yameen's rule has been more repressive in the form of imprisoning political opponents, exile, and arrest of judges of the Supreme Court etc.

Yameen imposed a state of emergency in February this year when the Supreme Court demanded the release of the political prisoners. Judges, opposition leaders and different party workers were incarcerated. Given the international pressure, the emergency was lifted after 45 days. Indiscriminately, he also started to give contracts to the Chinese, who had no qualms about defying the rule of law. Yameen's rule in terms of the foreign policy took a sharp turn, where there was complete disregard for its traditional ally, i.e. India. Yameen embraced China rather. Some of the nations, that have moved closer to Beijing, have seen their leaders suffering defeats during the polls and which may be the case with Yameen during the presidential elections that were held recently,

On September 23, 2018, the voter turnout and the extended hours of voting suggested, that people were keen on a change of leadership. The Maldivian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that the voter turnout was 89.22%. This voter turnout was reinforced with the USA and European Union threatening to lay sanctions on Yameen and his associates in his government, in case of rigging of elections.

In the race, the opposition leader from the *Maldivian Democratic Party* (MDP), Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, and Yameen were the key contenders. Solih won 134,616 votes (58%) to Yameen's 96,132 (41%).

Yameen's political fortunes were affected not only due to the issue on freedoms, but also on the manner of handling the economy, that was titling in favour of crony capitalists. Secondly, close trade relations with Beijing have affected the tourism sector.

The tourism industry is driven by business tycoons, who have political leanings. They expect their employees to vote for the respective political affiliations. However, the workers hold contrary interests and therefore preferred the MDP. More than 27,837 Maldivians work in hotels and resorts. Tourism contributed to 22.7 percent of the Maldives' GDP in 2016 and up to 70 percent of its foreign exchange.

The government policies towards tourism and the hotel industry have been in favour of the owners with political affiliations. The opposition parties especially the MDP has sought to bring political accountability and rule of law, when it comes to tax policies, minimum wage etc. These measures have also contributed to the fortunes of the MDP during the presidential elections.

In the 2013 presidential elections, Yameen (a half brother of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom) of the *Progressive Party of Maldives* (PPM) won the run-off by a minuscule margin of 51.39%. Yameen had received only 29.7% votes in round one of the elections, while Mohamed Nasheed of the MDP polled 46. 93% and 48.61% in both rounds respectively. It is only with the due support from the then alliance with parties like *Maldives Development Alliance*, *Adaalat Party* (AP),

*Jumhooree Party (JP), Gaumee Itthihaad Party (GIP) and Islamic Democratic Party (IDP)*, that Yameen was able to win. The 2013 elections were alleged to have been rigged.

### **Ibrahim Mohamed Solih: A profile**

Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (54 years), popularly known as 'Ibu', has been the co-founder of the MDP. He was one of the leaders involved in the political reforms of his country between 2003 and 2008. Also being a part of the *Majilis* (Council), Solih has been involved in the drafting of the constitution. He has maintained a low profile and has a calm disposition. His appealing personality lets him be acceptable across the party lines. If, and when sworn on November 17, 2018 Solih would become the fourth president of Maldives since 2008. He has served as a member of the Parliament for 25 years and is a very close aide of former President-in-exile Mohammed Nasheed.

Solih born on May 04, 1964 started his career as a journalist with a state broadcaster and with an opposition magazine. At the age of 30, he made his innings in 1994 to the Parliament. In the absence of Mohammed Nasheed, who is in exile in Sri Lanka, Solih led the opposition coalition of MDP, *Jumhooree Party*, *Adaalat Party* and a faction of Yameen's PPM to the presidential victory.

The challenges that lie before Solih's leadership are to maintain cohesion and consensus within his anti-Yameen coalition. The second task is to steady the economy and bring in the much needed development. And lastly, to manage foreign relations, particularly with India and China.

The Indian *Ministry of External Affairs* has welcomed the elections outcome in the Maldives: "*We welcome the successful completion of the third Presidential election process in the Maldives, which, according to preliminary information, Mr. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has won. We heartily congratulate Ibrahim Mohamed Solih on his victory ... This election marks not only the triumph of democratic forces in the Maldives, but also reflects the firm commitment to the values of democracy and the rule of law. In keeping with our 'Neighbourhood First' Policy, India looks forward to working closely with the Maldives in further deepening our partnership.*"

However there is still an unease given the authoritarian tendencies that Yameen has portrayed. Till the new president takes over the reins, Yameen can pull some last minute tricks, as he controls several government institutions, especially the military and the police. Though the ministry has confirmed the results, the independent observers were either denied or given partial access.

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