

INDIA

2014 Parliamentary Elections and Challenges from Rebel Groups



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The South Asia Conflict Monitor (SACM) aims to provide in-depth analyses, country briefs, summary sketches of important players and a timeline of major events on issues relating to armed conflicts, insurgencies and terrorism. It also aims to cover the government's strategies on conflict resolution and related policies to tackle these risks and crises.

The South Asia Conflict Monitor is a monthly bulletin designed to provide quality information and actionable intelligence for the policy and research communities, the media, business houses, law enforcement agencies and the general reader by filtering relevant open source information and intelligence gathered from the ground contacts and sources

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India: 2014 Parliamentary Elections and Challenges from Rebel Groups

Indian democracy witnessed multiple challenges. Disruption of elections by the rebel groups in the three conflict theatres – Jammu & Kashmir, central India and the north-eastern states of India – is one of them. Unlike the 2004 and 2009 Parliamentary elections, some Islamist extremist groups have planned to disrupt the 2014 elections. Some of them have even been preparing for the last six months or more to disrupt the elections. Ever since the Election Commission of India declared the nine-phase Parliamentary elections from April 7 to May 12, the rebel groups have declared a poll boycott in their strongholds. They warned the voters of dire consequences if they participated in the democratic process. The call for poll boycott had affected the election campaigning in the eastern districts of Maharashtra, north-eastern part of Andhra Pradesh, southern-western districts of Odisha, southern Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Jammu & Kashmir.

Other than the north-eastern region and Jammu & Kashmir, in the 2004 and 2009 general elections, the six Maoist-affected states had accounted for 108 and 124 violent incidents and 9 and 24 deaths respectively, which was highest in comparison to other conflict theatres of India. In a single incident, around 17 persons, including five election officials and almost a dozen police officers were killed on the first day of elections in Chhattisgarh on April 17, 2009.

Anticipating increase of poll-related violence compared to the previous elections, the Election Commission (EC) has made elaborate security arrangements for conducting free, fair and peaceful elections. The EC had identified 33 districts in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh where the highest numbers of incidents were reported in the 2004 and 2009 Parliamentary and Assembly polls in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2013. Therefore, the EC doubled the deployment of armed forces to 2.4 lakh, from the last elections. In the 2009 general elections, the EC had deployed 1.2 lakh armed forces personnel.

In the EC's assessment, the Maoists have emerged as the biggest challenge. Ideologically, the Maoists believe that Indian democracy is a bourgeois democracy and they want to establish a people's republic by armed struggle. They also defy the Indian Constitution. Ideologically, therefore, they oppose the elections under the present political system. The CPI-Maoist statement issued for the 2014 elections on March 24 indicated that "[t]he present exploitative system cannot be transformed with elections...That is why [CPI-Maoist] is giving a call to the entire people of India to boycott...parliamentary and assembly elections and to march forward in the path of PPW for the victory of the NDR...for building an Indian people's democratic federal republic.¹

Like previous elections, the Maoists have adopted special tactics to disrupt the elections within their strongholds. The 2014 elections also coincide with the completion of ten years of the founding of the CPI-Maoist. The outfit wants to celebrate the year by intensifying both military and political campaigning to establish itself as an alternative political force. First, the CPI-Maoist, which is responsible for 90 per cent of the left-wing extremist violence, has formed special attack groups in various special zones to carry out attacks on security forces during their deployment in the elections. Second, the outfits has distributed pamphlets in Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal against the elections and asked the local people not to participate. There are reports that the Maoists ask people to boycott the elections by SMS. Third, in some places the Maoists have threatened candidates not to contest the elections. In eastern Maharashtra, 33 polling boothshad to be relocated anticipating Maoist attacks before or during the poll. Last but not the least the Maoists have intimidated villagers through posters, pamphlets and routine village visits, that the present security arrangement in the area is temporary. They would punish those who voted after the withdrawal of the forces.

Apart from the Maoists, radical Islamist groups also wanted to disrupt the elections. For the first time, the Indian Mujahideen (IM) perpetuated violence through communal riots and bomb blasts during election campaigning. It felt this was a good opportunity to highlight their cause by targeting political leaders, who are vulnerable during the elections. The IM plan was foiled with the arrest of around seven of its members including India operation chief Tehsin Akhtar alias Monu from Nepal, and the dismantling of the newly-

¹ Find the press release here, <http://maoistroad.blogspot.in/2014/04/boycott-sham-parliament-assembly.html>

formed Rajasthan module. Police seized an unspecified amount of explosives from the arrested IM members. In Jammu and Kashmir, the JKLF opposed the 2014 elections. Its chief Yasin Malik was placed under preventive custody while organising an anti-poll rally in the state.

In the Northeast, separatists groups like the NDFB and the Manipur revolutionary force opposed the elections. Both the outfits asked the voters not to participate in the elections. The NDFB reportedly collected security money from the candidates for contesting elections. Interestingly, the ULFA (anti-talk faction) has not issued any poll boycott instructions to the voters. The outfit generally opposes the democratic exercise since it has been demanding a sovereign Assam.

The present security arrangement in the insurgency-affected regions cannot be expected to wholly address the anxieties of the electorate. The people of the region are aware that these are temporary measures, and the forces will soon be withdrawn once the electoral exercise is completed. At that stage, the insurgents are expected to wreak vengeance on those who may have dared to disobey their election boycott diktat. Therefore, many people may not take the risk of casting their votes even if they want to. The Maoists' unilateral peace talks offer just before the first phase of elections could be a boost to the poll managers. But it is too early to believe the Maoists who have used the peace talks in the past as a tactic to regroup and recoup.



GUEST COMMENTARY:**Northeast India: The Emerging Scenarios***Dr. Namrata Goswami*

Of late, the Northeast India has emerged as one of the most strategic regions in this part of the world. In today's age of globalization and trans-border connectivity, the Northeast is fast emerging as the potential gateway for India to Southeast and East Asia through Myanmar. There is increased focus on it through mechanisms such as the Delhi Dialogue involving the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Countries such as Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, etc, have shown increasing interests in investing on the infrastructure development in the Northeast. The political reform process under way in Myanmar with greater focus on democratization has brought in the US as an important stakeholder right up to Northeast India's doorsteps. China's presence in Myanmar and its territorial claim over Arunachal Pradesh too has brought this region to a larger geo-political chessboard. How the dynamic of this region will emerge in the next few decades will have major strategic implications for India and the Southeast Asia at large.

In analyzing the emerging scenarios for Northeast India, four drivers play important role -- of its history; ethnic conflicts; how the Indian state manages/resolves these conflicts; and finally, the external dimension of the armed ethnic conflicts.

History of Northeast India: Historically, the most dominant kingdom in Northeast India was the Ahoms, who migrated to Assam in 1228 A.D. from Thailand. This kingdom lasted till 1826 A.D after which the British took over Assam. Other smaller kingdoms like those of the Dimasas, Kacharis, the Bodos, the Nagas, the Kukis, and the Meiteis governed their own territories and paid tribute to the Ahoms. Tributes were also paid by smaller tribes to the larger more dominating ones in a given area in order to preserve space and independence of their own villages.

One of the most critical inferences that can be drawn from this history is that the Northeast India resisted dynasties/empires from the rest of India when attempts were

made to penetrate into their lands. The example that stands out in this regard is the Battle of Saraighat in 1671 when the Ahom kingdom led by Lachit Borphukan defeated the Mughal Empire led by Raja Ram Singh I. This battle is commemorated in Assam as a show of independence and as witness to the political disconnect between Assam and the rest of India. Similar violent resistances were witnessed against the entry of the British into the Northeast. Amongst the most remembered is also the Battle of Khonoma in 1879 when the Angamis resisted valiantly the entry of the British into the Naga hills, but could not succeed in stopping the British entirely. With the British came such laws as the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and the Excluded Areas Act of 1880, further creating mechanisms of distance between the ethnic communities of Northeast India and the rest of India.

Hence, when India became independent in 1947 ethnic communities like the Nagas demanded the right to secede from India on the ground that there existed minimum or no connection between them and India. A Z Phizo, one of the main leaders of the Naga National Council (NNC) formed in 1946, stated that while Nagas harbored no animosity towards India, to suggest that Naga areas should form part of India was based neither on historical facts nor on cultural or political connections. These historical narratives of difference have continued to influence the political discourse of Northeast India till date.

Ethnic Conflicts: Armed ethnic conflicts have affected Northeast India since the independence. Most dominant amongst these conflicts have been that of the Nagas led from the 1940s to the 1970s by the NNC, later by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and at present by the NSCN led by Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah (NSCN-IM). The NSCN-IM demands independence of Naga areas from India. Manipur, adjoining Nagaland, suffers from multiple armed conflicts led by the United Liberation Front of Manipur (UNLF), the People's Liberation Army of Manipur (PLA), the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), etc, all demanding secession of Manipur from India. Assam also witnessed armed conflict waged by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). The common theme cutting across these armed conflicts is their demand for political independence from India on grounds of ethnicity, identity, safeguard from resource exploitation, lack of historical and cultural connections, their absence from the larger Indian political imagination, and the inability

of the Indian mainstream political discourse to state that the region matters to India in a vital way.

These attributes have got further amplified by limited representation from Northeast India in India's central administrative services, the military and the diplomatic corp. The armed ethnic conflicts have been protracted, bloody and have complicated the development potential of the region, obstructing smooth economic growth and investment.

State Response to Ethnic Conflicts: The Indian state, since independence, has had to deal with armed ethnic conflicts in Northeast India. The first concrete resolution mechanism to deal with assertions of ethnic difference by the Nagas was the Akbar Hydari agreement signed between the NNC and the then Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, on June 29, 1947. This agreement offered a great deal of autonomy to the NNC to deal with Naga affairs. However, the phrase in the agreement, "The Governor of Assam as the agent of the Government of India will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure that due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period, or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at, " created a political contradiction with the NNC interpreting it as amounting to secession after 10 years whereas the Government of India interpreted it as formulating a new agreement which would continue to legally include Naga areas as an integral part of India.

The NNC took to arms in the 1950s led by Phizo. It led to the imposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in the Naga hills. With the deployment of the Indian military on a counter-insurgency mode, life in the Naga hills became difficult. In the 1960s, a Naga Peace Mission was established and in 1963 Nagaland was declared as a state within the Union of India. Similar constitutional mechanisms were utilized with the 1972 re-organization of states establishing Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura as full-fledged states. Mizoram, after going through a 20-year violent conflict since 1966, was established as a state within India in 1987. With regard to the ongoing NSCN (IM)-led Naga conflict and the ULFA in Assam, the Indian state has utilized the mechanism of negotiations.

However, the UNLF and the PLA of Manipur are yet to respond to the state's offer of peaceful resolution of the armed conflicts.

External Dimension of the Armed Ethnic Conflicts: The ethnic conflicts in Northeast India have sustained for long due to availability of bases, arms and resources from across the international borders of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. ULFA had base camps in Bhutan from 1979 until 2003 when a joint counter-insurgency operation by the Indian military and the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) flushed out the camps and arrested several top ULFA leaders, including Bhimakanta Burhagohain, the ULFA ideologue. Bangladesh also provided a safe haven for the armed groups until 2008-2009 after which the Sheikh Hasina government in collaboration with India successfully arrested top ULFA leaders like Arabinda Rajkhowa and Raju Baruah. Myanmar has now emerged as the most likely place for establishing external base for these armed groups. ULFA's Paresh Barua has already set up a camp in that country along with the NSCN (Khaplang group), the UNLF and the PLA.

Ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, like the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Shan State Army (SSA) etc., charge rent in terms of space provided to northeastern armed groups for their base camps. The UWSA is one of the largest producers and sellers of illegal small arms of whom the northeast armed groups are the biggest consumers. The KIO has also acted as middlemen for sale of arms and ammunition. The route from Myanmar via Cox Bazar in Bangladesh into India is a very lucrative illegal trade route serving the interests of both the Myanmar armed groups for sale of their arms and weapons, and the northeastern armed groups for their demand for arms in order to sustain their armed campaigns back home. Chinese illegal armed factories from Yunnan have also set up shops in Wa territory, especially on the Myanmar-Thai border. Infamous amongst them is Norinco followed by others. The UWSA, numbering nearly 30,000 armed personnel, is the group to watch closely in the interlocking chain of small arms, drugs, ethnic conflicts, and trans-border crime.

Emerging Scenarios: Based on an interactive assessment of the history of northeast India, armed conflicts, the Indian state's response and the external dimension, three significant and important scenarios can be considered.

Scenario I: Myanmar holds the key

Given the centrality of Myanmar, not only for opening up Northeast India to Southeast Asia, but also due to the support provided by the Myanmar armed groups to Northeast conflicts, changes within the institutional structure of Myanmar could potentially change the game plan in Northeast. Once groups like the KIO and the UWSA are made to pay heavily for their illegal activities and their energy and attention can be diverted to more legal trade, the arms flow to the northeast groups will reduce.

China is a major player and the main influencer in this ethnic drama. Collaboration between India, Myanmar and China will prove instrumental in dealing with the Myanmar ethnic armed groups. However, getting China's support will depend on how much the Communist Party of China stands to gain from such cooperation. After all, leveraging its influence on the ethnic conflicts ensures its influence over the border areas of Myanmar. With the Myanmar government wanting to cut an independent path for itself and with the re-entry of the United States into Myanmar as an important actor, such cooperation from China may be hard to come by. India will, therefore, have to work with the Myanmar government directly to address the issues in Myanmar's borderlands, which have direct impact on India's own ability to deal with the multiple armed conflicts in the Northeast.

Scenario II: Peace Negotiations Succeed

Another likely scenario is that the ongoing peace negotiations with the NSCN (IM) and the Government of India since 1997 finally succeeds in addressing issues of historicity, ethnic self-worth, political representation and cultural preservation of the Nagas. Non-territorial resolution mechanisms like an overarching Naga Development Council that addresses the development of Nagas beyond territory emerges. This kind of resolution mechanism succeeds in doing two significant things: it recognizes the historical rupture between Northeast India and the rest of India, and successfully establishes a mechanism to maintain and preserve cultural uniqueness, while at the same time addressing the sovereignty concerns of India by finding a resolution within constitutional parameters. Success with the Nagas could be replicated with the other armed groups like the UNLF,

the PLA and the ULFA. Successful resolution of conflicts will have positive effects on the Northeast boosting investment, tourism and international connectivity.

Scenario III: Ethnic Conflicts Escalate

The third likely scenario is that instead of gearing towards resolution, ethnic conflicts especially in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland escalate due to a weak state structure, absence of creative and realistic resolution mechanisms or just simple short-sightedness both on the part of the Indian policy-makers and the leaders of armed groups. Ethnic conflicts in these states can escalate due to the presence of conflicting intra-ethnic violence, multiple armed groups as in the case of Manipur, issues of land grab and illegal migration into ethnic homelands. These conflicting issues could be fueled by an exclusionary political discourse that is propagated by both the armed groups and the ethnic bases they represent. Example is the Meitei or the Naga exclusivist discourse that is propagated by the UNLF and the NSCN (IM) and the ethnic social bases that they represent. This kind of “othering” of someone with a different ethnicity could result in violent conflict escalation in areas inhabited by several ethnic communities further buttressed by absence of inclusive state institutions.

In conclusion, all the three scenarios are plausible, but the two most likely ones are peace negotiations succeeding or the failure of it resulting in conflict escalation. Ensuring support from neighboring countries in dealing with the armed ethnic conflicts is vital as is seen from the case of Bangladesh and Bhutan. Bilateral agreements with specific focus on areas of cooperation will prove useful in capacity building to deal with cross border armed conflicts. It is also critical that there is recognition of the historical dimension of the Northeast armed conflicts, the importance of ethnicity and the political aspirations of these groups. The desire for cultural preservation and recognition of self-worth is not mere slogans raised by the armed groups, but are felt deeply by the ethnic communities that they represent. An attitude of fair-play based on a level-playing field will hold the day if resolution of northeast armed conflict is a priority for the Indian state.

[Author is Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi. The views expressed here are solely that of the author.]



COUNTRY ROUND UP

BHUTAN

Despite the fact that more than 90,000 Bhutanese refugees out of 1,08,000 are rehabilitated in different countries, the issue still haunts both Bhutan and Nepal. The issue was discussed again between the prime ministers of both the countries on the sidelines of the meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). During the meeting, the



Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala stressed on early repatriation of elderly Bhutanese refugees from Nepal since young people have resettled in different countries. The Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay in response said: “We will see”.² Moreover, refugees are resettled within one-third of the country. The elderly oppose this. There are also reports that those who have resettled in other countries are unhappy. Some in fact committed suicide after resettling in the US.

Since Prime Minister Tobgay has not given any clear response to Prime Minister Sushil Koirala’s proposal; perhaps Bhutan is not interested in the repatriation of the remaining refugees living in Nepal. Although the number looks small, the issue has the potential to affect bilateral relations between Bhutan and Nepal in the future.

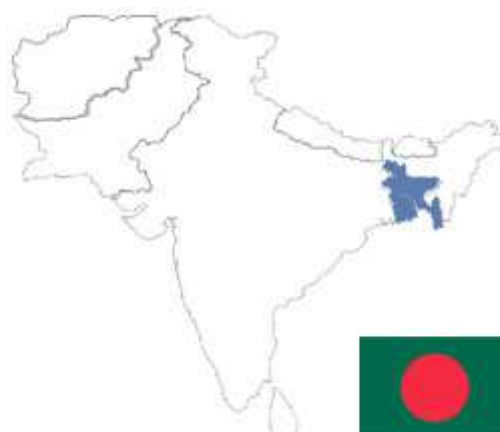
Major Events

March 26: As many as 88,000 of the 1,08,000 Bhutanese refugees living in camps in Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal are resettled in third countries. They are resettled in different countries through the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal, 85,651 are settled in the US, 4,819 in Australia, 5,778 in Canada, 852 in Denmark, 326 in the Netherlands and 550 in Norway (Setopati, March 26, 2014).

² <http://www.onlinekhabar.com/2014/03/172777/>

BANGLADESH

Around 11 persons were killed and many more were injured until the completion of the fourth phase of the upzila elections, which began on February 19. While only two persons were killed in the first and the second phase, nine persons were dead in the third and fourth phase. The violence intensified due to intra and inter-party rivalry. This was the most violent upzila elections in Bangladesh's political history. There were also reports of rigging, booth capturing, irregularities and other poll-related violence on election day(s). Although the opposition parties secured majority in the upzila elections, they were very critical of the way the elections were conducted. The BNP in fact carried out a protest rally in front of the upzila Nirbahi Offices.



BNP's joining the upzila elections is a positive sign. However, the bitterness and intense unhealthy political competition continues between both the parties. They have not reconciled yet to the results of the Parliamentary elections. The BNP has accused the AL of annihilating the opposition leaders and organised protest demonstrations after denial of bell to BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on March 27. Most importantly, the BNP has threatened a 'historic revenge' on the AL for its political oppression on the opposition alliances. This will lead to more inter-party killings in future.

Major Events

March 16: The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) declared March 17 as a day of demonstration across the country protesting the arrest of its three top leaders. The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court on March 16 rejected bail petitions of the BNP leaders and sent them to jail in connection with three separate cases lodged with Ramna police station (New Age, March 16, 2014).

March 16: Three people died during elections to 81 upazillas (administrative unit) in 41 districts in the third phase. There are also reports of extensive violence in which ballot box stuffing, booth capturing, suspension of polling and boycott of polls by leaders of the BNP and Jamaat (New Age, March 16, 2014).

March 23: Four people were killed during the fourth phase upazilla elections in 43 districts. There were also reports of stuffing of ballot boxes, booth capturing, and suspension and boycott of polls by the opposition parties (New Age, March 24, 2014).

March 27: The war crimes investigation agency, which suggested banning Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI)

and six organizations that were associated with the party in 1971, such as the Islami Chhatra Sangha, the Peace Committee, Razakar Bahini, Al-Badr Bahini, Al-Shams Bahini and JeI's mouthpiece, Daily Sangram, handed over its report on JeI to the Prosecution (Daily Star, March 27, 2014).

March 27: Nearly 30 people injured in clashes between activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of Awami League (AL) and the cadres of Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) at Natherpetua (Monohorganj), Comilla district. Police recovered one crude bomb, some joint pieces of pipe and some Jihadi literatures at the Shibir office in the Monohorganj area. Chhatra League activists also set fire to a library of the Shibir-run Islami Social Welfare Parishad during the clash (UNBconnect, March 28, 2014).

INDIA

With the declaration of Parliamentary election dates on March 05, anti-democratic forces reactivated to disrupt the democratic exercise and take advantage of the deployment of security forces for the elections. The rebel groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir, North-eastern states and central India rejected the elections and asked people not to participate. The union government allocated additional 6,000 security forces (SF) and 70 senior IPS officers for ensuring violence-free elections in the three conflict theatres – Jammu and Kashmir, the Northeast and Maoist-affected states. Of those 70 officers, around 30 are expected to be sent to Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Jammu and Kashmir.



The Maoists' opposition to the elections was marked by the killing of around 14 SF personnel and a civilian at Tongapal in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh. The attack was supported by the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), a rebel outfit in Manipur, that declared that they were the 'strategic partners' with the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). The Maoists also distributed pamphlets for poll boycott in Jharkhand and at the Andhra-Odisha Border Zone. The CPI-Maoist appointed a new spokesperson for the Dandakaranya special zonal committee (DSZC) before the elections. The Maoists also planned attacks in Kerala and other new geographical regions. The NDFB and the ULFA also tried to disrupt the election campaigning organised by various political parties. Moreover, the Indian Mujahideen (IM) made elaborate arrangements to carry out attacks on senior political leaders during the elections. It, in fact, attempted one such attack at a BJP rally in Patna in October 2013.

Since the voting in the Parliamentary elections will continue till May 12, the country may witness some poll-related violence during that period. There are possibilities of increase in infiltrations and terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir due to ongoing peace talks in Pakistan with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Major Events

March 04: India along with other BIMSTEC countries agreed to expedite the ratification of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking. According to a report, India is deeply concerned over the presence of militants and Maoist bases in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal in particular (Assam Tribune, March 05 2014).

March 10: Two Lashkar-e-Taiba militants were killed and an army officer was injured in an encounter in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir. Two AK-47 rifles and two hand grenades were recovered from the site (The Hindu, March 11, 2014).

March 11: Two Assam Rifles personnel were killed and two others critically injured after suspected Revolutionary People's Front militants ambushed a post of 24 Assam Rifles, along the Manipur-Myanmar border. At least six powerful remote-controlled bombs were detonated near Kambang village, in Chandel district. The attack took place while the personnel were travelling in four vehicles to inspect a post (The Hindu, March 12, 2014).

March 11: Nearly 14 security force (SF) personnel and a civilian were killed in the Maoist attacks at Tongapal in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh. The Maoists have looted at least 15 automatic weapons belonging to the Security Forces. The incident took place in the same area where the Maoists had killed 76 police personnel in April 2010 (Deccan Chronicle, March 11, 2014).

March 13: The Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), a rebel outfit in Manipur, claimed that they were the 'strategic partners' with the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). The revelations came after the Maoist laid a deadly ambush in Sukma district, killing 15 security force personnel (Nagaland Post, March 14, 2014).

March 23: Four Indian Mujahideen (IM) members, including Zia Ur Rehman (a.k.a. Waqas, a Pakistani), were arrested at different places of Rajasthan. An unspecified amount of explosive materials, detonators and electronic circuits/timers were seized from them. The police claimed that IM members wanted to target senior political leaders of the country during the elections (The Hindu, March 23, 2014).

March 25: Indian Mujahideen head Tehseen Akhtar (a.k.a. Monu) was arrested somewhere at India-Nepal border. Akhtar was allegedly involved in several terror strikes in India, including the Patna and Bodh Gaya blasts in Bihar (IBN Live, March 25, 2014).

March 25: Three police personnel were injured in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast allegedly planted by People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI). The incident took place at Muhru in Jharkhand's Khunti district while they were travelling (Indian Express, March 26, 2014).

March 27: Four Maoist operatives of Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) surrendered before police in Visakhapatnam. The four, identified as Killi Malakanna, Killo

Sinoro, Pangi Ananda Rao and Pangi Narasinga Rao, belong to Kuvvi tribe and were arranging food and other facilities to the Maoists (The Hindu, March 28, 2014).

March 28: Five suspected IM militants were arrested by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) from Sikar in Rajasthan. They have been identified as Mohammed Aqib, Mohammed Sajjad, Mohammed Waqar, Mohammed Umar and Mohammed Wahid, all from Sikar. They were reportedly recruited through Maroof (a.k.a. Ibrahim) who was arrested by Delhi police's special cell and Rajasthan ATS in Jhotwara locality, near Jaipur on March 22 (The Times of India, March 28, 2014).

March 28: At least six persons, including three Pakistani militants, two civilians and one soldier were killed in Kathua district during a 12-hour long gun fight between security forces and Pakistan-based terrorists. A militant outfit, the Al-Shuhada Brigade, claimed responsibility for the attacks (The Tribune, March 29, 2014; Greater Kashmir Media March 28, 2014).

MALDIVES

The month witnessed intense and heated debate over the dismissal of two election commission (EC) members by the Supreme Court. The ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) defended the decisions. The international community was critical of the judiciary's interventions. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) also criticised the judiciary's intervention before the elections. The PPM and its alliance secured majority in the March 22 Majlis elections. The victory has consolidated the PPM-led government and also their position in the Peoples' Majlis. The MDP had secured a majority earlier in the Peoples' Majlis. Interestingly, despite becoming very critical of removing the EC members before the elections, the MDP participated in the elections. It performed well in cities and urban areas. One NGO report indicated that money was used to influence the voters during the elections.



The March 22 election results indicated the victory of status quoist forces in Maldives over the revisionist-liberal democrats. With absolute majority in the Majlis and influence over the judiciary and security agencies, the PPM and its allies may now focus on to weaken the MDP in the next five years.

Major Events

March 09: The Supreme Court ordered to dismiss Election Commission (EC) President Fuwad Thowfeek and Vice-President Ahmed Fayaz Hassan of their membership in the Commission

and sentenced the former to six months in jail. The jail sentence was however suspended for three years. The action was taken under Article 88 of the Penal Code, which states that it is an offence to 'disobey a lawful order' (Minivan News, March 09, 2014).

March 19: The Supreme Court advised the EC that March 22 parliamentary elections can go ahead despite 16 independent candidates not signing voter lists for 13 electoral constituencies (Minivan News, March 19, 2014).

March 22: The ruling coalition of parties, the Progressive Coalition, has won a majority of the seats in the Peoples' Majlis elections. According to the Elections Commission, the Progressive Coalition won 56 seats – the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) won 34, Jambooree Party (JP) 16 and MDA 06, and the Adhaalath Party 02 seats in the Peoples' Majlis. The Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) won 24 seats (Miadhu News March 23, 2014).

March 20: President Abdulla Yameen has compared allowing international actors to criticise the Supreme Court and its verdicts as being similar to allowing people to criticise the tenets of Islam. The President's comments come shortly after international actors roundly condemned the Supreme Court's decision to dismiss senior members of the Elections Commission ahead of the March 22 Peoples' Majlis elections (Minivan News, March 20, 2014).

NEPAL

Instead of focusing on the Constitution-drafting process, the ruling coalition government were fighting over who should authenticate the final draft of the Constitution, portfolio distribution and conducting the local body elections in mid-June. The ruling parties' proposal over local body elections was opposed by the two Maoist factions. In fact, over this issue, for the first time, both the Maoist factions

came out with a joint statement. They also demanded formation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and high-level national council for drafting of the Constitution. The CPN-Maoist, a radical Maoist group headed by Mohan Baidya, has also hinted that a new Constitution with Federalism, republican ideals and secularism may not be achieved under the status quoist parties. Therefore, the outfit has been advocating another round of people's war to achieve that goal. In this regard, the outfit has laid down preconditions for its unification with the UCPN (Maoist) that includes indentifying India as principal enemy and adhering to people's revolution as the party's political line.



The Maoists feel that they have been marginalised by the status quoist parties in the post-November elections. They fear that the present ruling coalition is deliberately trying to delay a

new Constitution. A similar feeling of the Maoists in post-1991 and 1994 elections led to the armed struggle in 1996.

Major Events

March 11: Political parties settled the disputed issues concerning the Constituent Assembly (CA) rules of procedure, paving the way for the Constitution drafting process (Ekantipur, March 12, 2014).

March 18: The government unveiled its Common Minimum Programmes (CMPs), spelling out its priorities of promulgating a new statute within a year, holding local level elections at the earliest and forming a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Disappearance Commission to ensure transitional justice (Republica, March 19, 2014).

March 19: CPN-Maoist Chairman Mohan Baidya claimed that they have forged a working alliance with the UCPN (Maoist) with a view to making the coalition of Nepali Congress and CPN-UML a failure. The UCPN (Maoist) was divided in May 2012 (Republica, March 20, 2014).

PAKISTAN

The negotiations for ceasefire and peace talks gained momentum with the intervention of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and changes in the negotiation teams. Sharif convinced the army, which was vehemently opposing the peace talks. Since the TTP is not monolithic, other factions and Baloch groups had carried out attacks on the security forces in their strongholds despite a unilateral ceasefire declared by the TTP on March 01. For example, 11 people including a judge and four lawyers were killed and 29 other injured in a suicide attack on a court complex in Islamabad on March 03. The Ahrar-ul-Hind militant group, which had split from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility for the attack. Similarly, many attacks on civilians and security forces were carried out by unidentified groups. The little known Ansar-ul-Mujahideen also claimed responsible for some attacks during the ceasefire. This reflected that there are serious divisions within the TTP on the ceasefire issues and some new factions have been formed during the post-ceasefire period.



Just three days before the first round of direct negotiations, the TTP accused the government of increasing attacks on militant hideouts and security checking in houses of its members in tribal areas. Although both the sides had agreed to increase the ceasefire in the first round of talks, the

trust deficit between both the sides continues and both interpret the negotiation as tactical. The TTP seems agreed for the ceasefire to support the Afghan Taliban to disrupt the elections there.

Major Events

March 01: Around 13 people, including 12 security personnel, were killed and 11 others injured in twin bomb blasts targeting a polio vaccination team in Jamrud area of Khyber Agency (Daily Times, March 02, 2014).

March 03: Eleven people including a judge and four lawyers were killed in a suicide attack on a court complex (district courts) in Islamabad. At least 29 other people were injured in the incident. The Ahrar-ul-Hind militant group, which had split from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility for the attack (Nation, March 04, 2014).

March 04: Two persons were killed in an attack by unidentified gunmen on four vehicles carrying NATO supplies for Afghanistan in Jamrud area of north-western Khyber tribal agency (Dawn, March 04, 2014).

March 12: Shahidullah Shahid, the spokespersons of the TTP, claimed security forces continue operations, arrests and torture of Taliban members despite the announcement of a ceasefire. The statement added that raids, arrests and torture of prisoners were a violation of the ceasefire (Dawn, March 12, 2014).

March 14: A powerful explosion killed at least 10 people and injured 35 other in Quetta, Balochistan. The unidentified militants had planted explosive material inside a bicycle parked in the Science College Chowk area allegedly targeting a Frontier Corps' vehicle (Dawn, March 14, 2014).

March 14: An explosion took place in Sarband area of Peshawar killing nine persons and wounding 47 others. Those among the victims of the blast included women, children and policemen. The blast appeared to have targeted a police mobile van and was carried out by a suicide bomber (Dawn, March 14, 2014).

March 20: Nine people, including two policemen, were killed and four others injured in separate incidents of sectarian violence in Karachi (Daily Times, March 21, 2014).

March 22: At least five militants were killed and eight arrested during a counter-insurgency operation by security forces in Balochistan's Kech district (Dawn, March 22, 2014).

March 23: The TTP accused the government of increasing attacks on militant hideouts and raids on houses of its members in tribal areas. It said despite a ceasefire announced by it earlier this month, its members in the custody of law enforcement agencies are not only being tortured but tortured with greater intensity (Dawn, March 23, 2014).

March 27: Unidentified gunmen attacked a team of polio health workers in Nasarabad area of Loralai district of Balochistan, killing a policeman and injuring a couple of others. No outfit claimed responsibility for the attack (Dawn, March 28, 2014).

March 30: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has indicated that the talks with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are moving forward in the right direction. He further said that development of

the country was connected with peace, which would be restored at all costs. (Dawn, March 30, 2014).

SRI LANKA

The effect of the March 27 UNHRC resolutions reflected both in national and local politics. The Rajapaksa government criticised the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) for submitting a special report to UNHRC chief Nina Pillay. The government felt that some Muslim countries, sympathetic towards Sri Lanka, turned negative because of that report. The Sri Lankan government tried to justify its military presence in the Northern



Province by saying that the LTTE is trying to revive in that region with the support of the Diaspora.

The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), a radical Buddhist organisation, had put pressure on the minorities to apologise for submitting reports to the UNHRC on attacks on minorities. Despite that the BBS continued to attack the minorities and threaten the Muslim business community. It, in fact, on March 23, created mayhem in Mawanella area. The minority groups feel insecure over BBS' activities and the silence of law enforcement agencies on their activities. If this continues for some more time then the minority groups may be forced to devise new tactics for their security.

Major Events

March 10: The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) welcomed the draft resolution to establish an international investigation led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights into accountability during the war. The TNA said the appropriation of land by the military, the overbearing presence of the military in civilian life, and the increasing reports of sexual violence targeting Tamil women in the North and East are of particular concern to the Tamil people (Colombo Page, March 10, 2014).

March 13: Sri Lankan authorities deployed police and army teams to apprehend an absconding suspect who shot a police sub inspector of the Terrorist Investigation Unit in Kilinochchi. Police claimed the suspect is a former LTTE intelligence officer (Colombo Page, March 14, 2014).

March 14: Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leader Namal Rajapaksa said members of the LTTE Diaspora were still trying to establish an Eelam. Namal Rajapaksa has added that although peace has returned to the country following the military defeat of the LTTE, the activities of the LTTE-affiliated Tamil Diaspora against the government are being guided and assisted by

International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) and imperialist camps which harbour ulterior motives of dividing the country (Colombo Page, March 14, 2014).

March 17: The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) condemned a report submitted to the UNHRC on alleged religious disharmony in the country by a minister, Rauf Hakeem. It charged that the contents of the report were false and the minister should immediately rectify his actions (Daily Mirror, March 17, 2014).

March 18: The Bodu Bala Sena warned that they could alienate the 90 per cent Sinhala market from the Muslim business community if they thought of doing so. The BBS branded the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader Rauf Hakeem as a pariah and demanded him to apologize to the Sinhala community for producing a report against the BBS on violence against Muslims given to the UN Human Rights Council (Colombo Page, March 18, 2014)

March 19: The TNA has said that they are willing to revive direct talks with the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to find a political solution to the ethnic issue. The direct talks should not have any pre-conditions attached (Colombo Page, March 19, 2014).

March 21: The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) said the issues faced by the Muslim community in the country have not yet been redressed (Colombo Page, March 21, 2014).

March 25: The Sri Lankan Army has reportedly increased security in the Northern Province to prevent a possible regrouping of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sympathizers (The Hindu, March 25, 2014).

