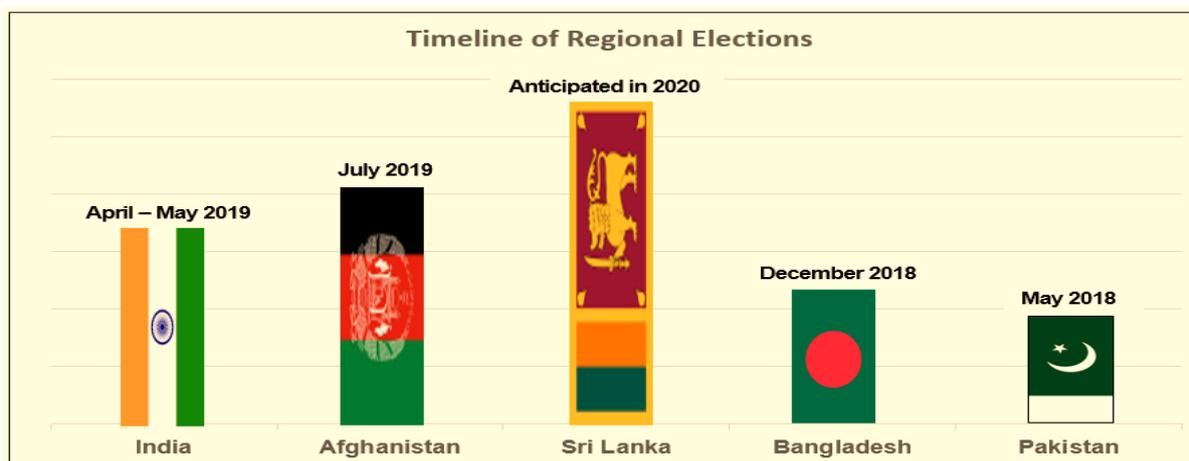


Spotlights

Institute of Regional Studies

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Hindu Card again, will it work?

To woo Hindu voters for the April/May Indian general elections, BJP has backed settling the Ayodha land case in order to build a huge Ram temple; initiated a citizenship bill excluding new Muslim, Nepalese and Sri Lankan immigrants; heavily guarded Modi photo op-ed in Kashmir and refused to resume dialoging with Pakistan.

Congress countered to showcase its liberal face by entering Priyanka Gandhi into the fray. It is also aggressively fighting on the 'front foot' on three major issues: farmers' distress, joblessness and the dubious Rafale deal to discredit Narendra Modi.



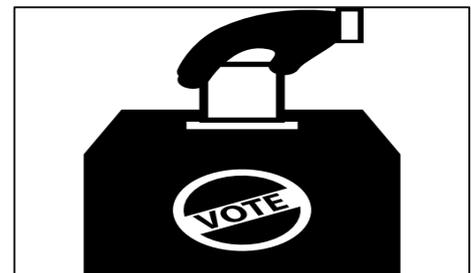
Learning from the past, Congress has opted for a constituency-specific approach. It is responding to the differing demands of each constituency and won Assembly elections in three states. Congress will play on the 'front foot' where it is the only challenger to BJP and make alliances where weak. Overall, Congress is targeting the large rural and youth vote. While the election

manifestoes of both BJP and Congress reiterate resolve to pursue peace with Pakistan, both simultaneously mention purported cross-border terrorism. This, reinforced by anti-Pakistan rhetoric on electronic media and in election rallies, indicates that hostility towards Pakistan may continue post-election. **Overall, continuous focus on domestic issues has largely pushed the BJP to the defensive.**

July 2019 – Afghan Elections: War End, but Peace?

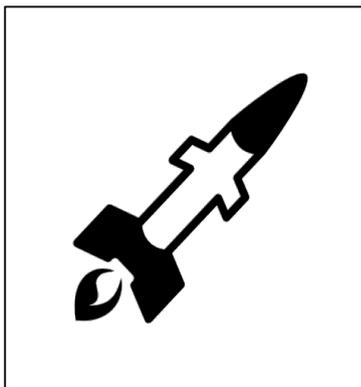
Presidential elections in Afghanistan are scheduled for July this year, continuing the democratic process. However, the country still faces high security risks from the dissident Taliban. If Ashraf Ghani wins again, foreign, especially American troops may withdraw but would there be a political settlement between the Taliban and Kabul government? The Taliban are talking peace everywhere – Moscow, Qatar, Delhi, Islamabad, with US envoys, and even sharing meals and praying alongside past enemies like ex-President Hamid Karzai. They are refusing to speak with US-backed Ghani and his representatives. Peace can only happen if the Taliban agree to the electoral process. The Taliban are negotiating from the position of strength, which is not ignored by other negotiating parties.

- ❖ For the US, peace talks are all about exiting gracefully; for the Taliban it's about reestablishing their political hold.
- ❖ Can elections prevaricate aspirations to reestablish the Islamic Emirate of Taliban?



Military Might Reasserts: INF & USA, Russia, PRC, Iran

Donald Trump on February 2 scuttled the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF) and effectively ended the post-Cold War era existing since June 1988. While Russia and the US have traded accusations of violating the INF, China, North Korea and the South China Sea also preoccupy Trump. NATO, though backing the US, is unhappy with this development, as it has to fend for itself against growing Russian military might.



Also on February 2, in honour of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran tested a new ballistic surface-to-surface missile named Hoveyzeh, with a range of 1350 km. Iran reiterated that its missiles are defensive and a deterrent in a hostile region. US legislators have already been targeting Iran's missile programme, using it as a pretext to sanction Iran.

Also, with India deepening its land, air and sea footprints, **the end of the INF bodes ill for restarting the arms race in our region.**

Save the date:

Fake News & Facts in Our Region

IRS International Conference April 24-26, 2019