

Topic 1: The power of two: on simultaneous elections to the Assemblies and Lok Sabha

Assembly election campaigns could have a bearing on the parliamentary polls

Parliamentary elections in India have increasingly been influenced by State-level political variables beyond the performance of the ruling parties and the Opposition at the Centre. And this factor is likely to be even more salient in the four States facing simultaneous elections to the Assemblies and the Lok Sabha: Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, the two main rivals are regional forces, the Chandrababu Naidu-led Telugu Desam Party and the Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy-led YSR Congress Party. In 2014, the TDP had successfully fought elections in alliance with the BJP, and the Congress faced a backlash because of the bifurcation of the State during its tenure. This time, however, with the TDP having broken its alliance with the BJP, the regional parties are in a direct contest, and the national parties relegated to being minor players. Andhra Pradesh has faced acute fiscal concerns after bifurcation, and the TDP government would be keen to reassure voters over concerns about the State's economy. It fared the best in the country on economic growth parameters, with a significant increase in per capita income during the last five years and successful delivery of irrigation schemes. On the flip side, delays in the construction of the new capital city and the ballooning public debt suggest that Andhra still has structural issues to overcome. The TDP and the YSRCP have tried a game of one-upmanship on relations with the Centre and the denial of "special category status" for the State, which it is argued is crucial to overcome fiscal issues. Both parties have significant support bases among OBCs and other landowning communities, and the lack of any substantive differentiation between them could make this a closely contested election. The two parties are also likely to be important players in a post-election scenario at the national level.

In Odisha, the Biju Janata Dal led by Naveen Patnaik has been in power for 19 years, having bucked anti-incumbency largely due to welfare-driven governance. Unlike in Andhra Pradesh, the Congress and particularly the BJP have a stronger presence. The BJP, buoyed by its performance in the 2017 local body elections, is expected to put up a stronger fight in the State's Assembly and Lok Sabha polls. In fact, the BJP is keen to make up for expected losses in its strongholds in the north with gains in the east. India's longest-serving Chief Minister, Pawan Kumar Chamling (in power since 1994), and his Sikkim Democratic Front are expected to face a more pronounced challenge from the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and the new party launched by former footballer Bhaichung Bhutia, the Hamro Sikkim Party. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Permanent Resident Certificate issue will figure as a dominant narrative during the elections even as the ruling BJP seeks to link its campaign to the performance of the Central government.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Influence	Noun	The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself	Effect, Impact
Salient	Adjective	Most noticeable or important.	Important, Main, Principal, Major, Chief, Primary, Notable, Noteworthy
Rival	Noun	A person or thing competing with another for the same objective or for superiority in the same field of activity	Competitor, Opponent, Contestant, Contender, Challenger
Alliance	Noun	A union or association formed for mutual benefit, especially between countries or organizations.	Association, Union, League, Treaty, Pact, Compact, Entente, Concordat
Backlash	Noun	a strong negative reaction by a large number of people, especially to a social or political development	Adverse Reaction, Adverse Response, Counteraction, Counterblast
Bifurcation	Noun	The division of something into two branches or parts	Separation, Dividing, Parting, Forking, Branching
Acute	Adjective	(of an unpleasant or unwelcome situation or phenomenon) present or experienced to a severe or intense degree	Severe, Critical, Drastic, Dire, Dreadful, Terrible, Awful, Grave, Bad,
Fiscal	Adjective	Relating to government revenue, especially taxes.	Tax, Budgetary, Revenue
Concern	Verb	Relate to; be about	Be About, Deal With, Cover, Treat, Have To Do With
Fare	Verb	Perform in a specified way in a particular situation or over a particular period	Get On, Proceed, Get Along, Progress, Make Out, Do, Manage, Muddle Along,
Parameter	Noun	A numerical or other measurable factor forming one of a set that defines a system or sets the conditions of its operation	Instructions, Stipulations, Requirements, Conditions, Provisions
Significant	Adjective	Sufficiently great or important to be worthy of attention; noteworthy.	Notable, Noteworthy, Worthy Of Attention, Remarkable, Outstanding, Important,
Irrigation	Noun	The supply of water to land or crops to help growth, typically by means of channels	
Flip side	Noun	Another aspect or version of something, especially its reverse or its unwanted concomitant	Other Side, Reverse Side, Back, Rear, Underside, Wrong Side, B-Side, Verso
Ballooning	Noun	The sport or pastime of flying in a balloon	Thriving, Prosperous, Prospering, Booming, Burgeoning
Structural	Adjective	Relating to or forming part of the structure of a building or other item	Constructional, Organizational, Systemic
Overcome	Verb	Succeed in dealing with (a problem or difficulty)	Bring Under Control, Get Under Control, Bridle, Tame, Master, Gain Mastery Over
One-	Noun	The technique or practice of gaining	

upmanship		an advantage or feeling of superiority over another person	
Denial	Noun	The action of denying something.	Contradiction, Counterstatement, Refutation, Rebuttal,
Crucial	Adjective	Decisive or critical, especially in the success or failure of something.	Pivotal, Critical, Key, Climacteric, Decisive, Deciding,
Landowning	Noun & adjective	A person who owns land, especially a large amount of land.	
Substantive	Adjective	Having a firm basis in reality and so important, meaningful, or considerable	
Differentiation	Noun	Distinguishing between two or more things or people.	Distinction, Distinctness, Disparity, Polarity, Contrast, Difference, Divergence
Contest	Noun	An event in which people compete for supremacy in a sport or other activity, or in a quality.	Competition, Match, Tournament, Game, Meet
Scenario	Noun	development of events.	Sequence Of Events, Course Of Events, Situation
Buck	Verb	Oppose or resist (something oppressive or inevitable)	Resist, Oppose, Contradict, Defy, Fight, Fight Against
Anti-incumbency	Noun	Anti-incumbent definition is - characterized by or expressing opposition to or disapproval of current political officeholders	
Governance	Noun	The action or manner of governing a state, organization, etc.	
Buoy	Verb	Make (someone) cheerful and confident	Cheer, Cheer Up, Brighten Up, Ginger Up, Hearten, Rally, Animate, Invigorate,
Keen	Adjective	Having or showing eagerness or enthusiasm	Eager, Anxious, Impatient, Determined, Desirous
Strongholds	Noun	A place where a particular cause or belief is strongly defended or upheld.	Bastion, Centre, Refuge, Hotbed
Pronounced	Adjective	Very noticeable or marked; conspicuous	Noticeable, Marked, Strong, Conspicuous
Dominant	Adjective	Having power and influence over others.	Presiding, Ruling, Governing, Controlling
Narrative	Noun	A spoken or written account of connected events; a story.	Account, Story, Tale, Chronicle, History, Description
Campaign	Noun	an organized course of action to achieve a goal.	Crusade, Drive, Push, Effort, Struggle

Topic 2: Final showdown: on IS

The IS is facing defeat, but the search for a political solution in Syria should continue

The Islamic State, which at its peak controlled territories straddling the Iraq-Syria border of the size of Great Britain, is now fighting for half a square kilometre in eastern Syria. The Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurdish-led rebel group assisted by the U.S., has effectively laid siege to Baghouz, the eastern Syrian village where about 500 IS jihadists along with 4,000 women and children are caught. When the IS lost bigger cities such as Raqqa and Deir Ezzor in eastern Syria, militants moved to Baghouz and the deserts in the south. After the SDF moved to Baghouz, several civilians fled the village. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates that nearly 59,000 people have left IS-held territory since December, and at least 4,000 jihadists have surrendered since February. Both President Donald Trump and the SDF commanders say victory against the IS is imminent. Victory in Baghouz will also mean the IS's territorial caliphate is shattered. Since the battle for Kobane in 2015, which marked the beginning of the end of the IS, Syrian Kurdish rebels have been in the forefront of the war. Naturally, the SDF would claim the final victory against the IS.

However, the liberation of Baghouz or the destruction of the territorial caliphate does not necessarily mean that the IS has been defeated. It is basically an insurgent-jihadist group. It has established cells, especially in Syria and Iraq, which have continued to carry out terror attacks even as IS territories kept shrinking. The group has a presence in Syria's vast deserts, a tactic its predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq, successfully used when it was in decline during 2006-2011 after its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed by the U.S. When the Syrian civil war broke, the remnants of AQI found an opportunity for revival and rebranded themselves as the Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. The IS was born when al-Nusra split. The U.S., the Kurdish rebels, the Syrian government and other stakeholders in the region should be mindful of the geopolitical and sectarian minefields that groups such as the IS could exploit for their re-emergence. Mr. Trump has already announced the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria. The Turkish government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is wary of the rapid rise of the Syrian Kurds, who are organisationally and ideologically aligned with Kurdish rebels on the Turkish side. The Syrian regime, on its part, has vowed to re-establish its authority over the Kurdish autonomous region in the northeast. If Turkey and Syria attack Kurdish rebels, who were vital in the battle against the IS, that would throw northeastern Syria into chaos again, which would suit the jihadists. To avoid this, there must be an orderly U.S. withdrawal and a political solution to the Syrian civil war.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Territories	Noun	An area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state	Area Of Land, Area, Region, Enclave
Straddle	Verb	Sit or stand with one leg on either side of.	Sit Astride, Stand Astride, Bestride, Bestraddle
Flee	Verb	Run away from a place or situation of danger.	Run, Run Away, Run Off, Make A Run For It, Run For It,
Observatory	Noun	A position or building that gives an	

		extensive view.	
Surrender	Verb	Stop resisting to an enemy or opponent and submit to their authority.	Capitulate, Give In, Give Up, Give Oneself Up, Yield,
Imminent	Adjective	About to happen.	Impending, At Hand, Close, Near, Approaching, Fast Approaching, Coming, ,
Caliphate	Noun	The rule or reign of a caliph or chief Muslim ruler	
Shattered	Adjective	Very upset.	Worried, Upset, Distressed, Fraught, Devastated
Destruction	Noun	The action or process of causing so much damage to something that it no longer exists or cannot be repaired.	Demolition, Knocking Down, Pulling Down, Tearing Down, Levelling, Razing
Insurgent	Noun	A person fighting against a government or invading force; a rebel or revolutionary	Rebel, Revolutionary, Revolutionist, Mutineer, Agitator, Subversive
Shrinking	Adjective	Becoming smaller in size or amount	
Tactic	Noun	An action or strategy carefully planned to achieve a specific end.	Strategy, Scheme, Stratagem, Plan, Set Of Tactics, Manoeuvre,
Predecessor	Noun	A person who held a job or office before the current holder.	Former Holder Of The Post, Previous Holder Of The Post,
Remnant	Noun	A part or quantity that is left after the greater part has been used, removed, or destroyed	Remains, Remainder, Leftovers, Leavings, Residue, Rest
Revival	Noun	An improvement in the condition, strength, or fortunes of someone or something.	Improvement, Rallying, Picking Up, Betterment, Amelioration
Rebrand	Verb	Change the corporate image of (a company or organization)	
Sectarian	Adjective	Denoting or concerning a sect or sects	
Minefields	Noun	A subject or situation presenting unseen hazards.	
Exploit	Verb	Make use of (a situation) in a way considered unfair or underhand	Utilize, Make Use Of, Put To Use, Use, Use To Good Advantage
Ideologically	Adverb	In a way that relates to ideas or an ideology, especially of a political or economic nature.	
Align	Verb	Place or arrange (things) in a straight line	Line Up, Range, Arrange In Line, Put In Order, Put In Columns, Put In Rows,
Regime	Noun	A government, especially an authoritarian one	Government, Authorities, System Of Government, Rule,
Vow	Noun	A solemn promise.	Oath, Pledge, Promise, Bond, Covenant
Autonomous	Adjective	(Of a country or region) having the freedom to govern itself or control its own affairs.	
Vital	Adjective	Absolutely necessary; essential.	Essential, Indispensable, Crucial, Key, Necessary, Needed, Required, Requisite,
Throw	Verb	Push or force (someone or something)	Move Quickly, Move Suddenly,

		violently and suddenly into a particular physical position or state	Push Suddenly,
Chaos	Noun	Complete disorder and confusion.	Disorder, Disarray, Disorganization, Confusion, Mayhem

