

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (A Recognized Body under ICSSR, Ministry of Education, GOI)

&

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (Affiliated to Ministry of Culture, GOI)

Collaboratively Organized

Morning Dialogue on Neighborhood Elections and its Impact on India

At The Harmony, Vivanta Kolkata, EM Bypass, 1930 Rajdanga Main Road, Kolkata-700107

Date -28th March 2026

Time- 8.30am onwards

Recently, pivotal elections took place in several countries neighboring India which included Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The outcomes of these elections in one hand are crucial as they directly influence each country's foreign policy, economic priorities, and diplomatic ties with India. On the other hand, it influences India's security, trade, and regional influence. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of these elections is vital for assessing India's strategic interests and stability in South Asia.

In light of these developments, The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, a Kolkata-based think tank recognized by the Ministry of Education on 28th March 2026 organized a panel discussion titled "Neighbourhood Elections and Their Impact on India". The event attracted a diverse group of participants, including leading academicians, seasoned political and security analysts, students, members of civil society.

Moderated by Shri Manoj Kumar Lall, IPS (Retd) & Distinguished Fellow ISCS it had eminent speakers like Shri Ranjit Rae, Former Ambassador of India to Nepal, Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik, Research Fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis(IDSA), New Delhi, Shri Amrit Lugun IFS (Retd).

The academic discussion began with the address of Shri Manoj Kumar Lall, the programme moderator, who emphasized Kolkata's significance in relation to Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. He discussed about the mass movements in Bangladesh and Nepal highlighting their pivotal role in regime changes and the subsequent electoral process. However, he noted that the post-election situations in these countries are quite different. Regarding Myanmar, he characterized the recent election as restrictive. He expressed hope that the distinguished

speakers would shed light on the strategic, economic, and security implications for India stemming from political changes in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

The first speaker Shri Ranjit Rae, initiated his deliberation highlighting the need to understand a couple of things while analyzing the recent election in India's neighbourhood and its potential impact. He underscored the need to have a comprehensive understanding of the domestic situations of India's neighbouring countries, how major power dynamics particularly the relationships among India, China, and the United States is shaping New Delhi's ties with its neighbours and how the recent turbulence in international affairs is shaping India's relationship with its neighbours.

The speaker thereafter identified how a young demography in India's neighbourhood empowered by digital power and supported by an active diaspora population is acting as a key force driving political development in the region.

He then referred to the adoption of the new constitution in 2015, which he described as a major milestone in Nepal's political landscape since independence. He noted that the constitution was more accommodative in nature but added that persistent issues such as unstable governance, widespread corruption, and the limited initiative of the older leadership have stalled further reforms, leading to growing public dissatisfaction.

He explained that this dissatisfaction led to a change of regime in Nepal, resulting in replacement of the old political guard with new young leadership. He highlighted that the present Prime minister of Nepal is young and his party is dominated by a younger leadership.

He observed that India's approach to Nepal's election was positive, as evidenced by New Delhi's support for the electoral process, Prime Minister Modi's endorsement of the Gen Z movement and his warm telephonic conversation with the newly elected leadership.

The speaker also pointed out that in the recent Nepalese election, both the communist parties and the monarchy-aligned party underperformed, noting that historically, both groups have supported anti-India rhetoric.

He noted that with the defeat of Nepal's communist parties, China's influence in the country might diminish, and expressed hope that the current Nepalese leadership might reconsider the Chinese-funded Belt and Road Initiative projects in Nepal. He emphasized that the new government has a development-oriented vision and is committed to promoting corruption-free governance. To achieve these goals, he added, Nepal must maintain a strong relationship with India. In his discussion, he also addressed key issues such as the India–Nepal border dispute over the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipu Lek region, the potential revision of the 1950 India–Nepal Friendship Treaty, river water management, and bilateral trade between the two countries.

The next speaker Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik focused her discussion over the recent election of Bangladesh and its impact over India and South Asia in general. She initiated her discussion by analyzing the evolution of the student agitation in Bangladesh that primarily demanded abolition of quota system in the country to a broader anti discrimination movement that finally led in the downfall of the Hasina led government.

In her analysis, she argued that the heavy-handed approach of the Hasina government in restricting civil liberties, along with widespread corruption particularly linked to the quota system created deep dissatisfaction among the public. This discontent, she suggested, fueled the mass anti-government movement. She also referred to the death of Abu Syed, noting its significant impact in intensifying protests across the country.

During her discourse, the speaker discussed Jamaat-e- Islami Bangladesh, describing it as anti-liberation and pro – Pakistani political organization. She noted that its student wing, the Chhatra Shibbir, successfully infiltrated the anti- quota movement.

She further highlighted the breakdown of law and order following Hasina's resignation. According to her, police forces refrained from reporting to duty due to mob attacks resulting in the death and injuries of several officers and personal. She opined that the police were perceived as having supported the Awami League in suppressing dissent, making them a target of public anger. As a result of this the Bangladesh Army had to step in to restore order.

She also drew attention to coordinated attacks on minorities and Awami League supporters, including incidents of mob lynching and vandalism. She said violence continued even after Muhammad Yunus assumed leadership of the interim government. Mob violence incited by Islamic radical forces in the name of Towhidi janata reached its peak and added that concerns over women's safety and freedom became particularly acute during this period.

Turning to the 13th parliamentary elections, she observed that some student leaders from the anti-discrimination movement became disillusioned when the National Citizen Party formed an alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami. She also highlighted the electoral rise of Jamaat-e-Islami, which secured 77 parliamentary constituencies. According to her, this rise was partly due to the Awami League's long-standing focus on weakening the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, its primary rival,

while underestimating Jamaat. This allowed Jamaat cadres to quietly infiltrate the Awami League and its affiliated bodies, later emerging more prominently after Hasina's fall.

She then discussed the electoral success of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party under the leadership of Tarique Rahman. While noting his relatively positive signals toward India after assuming power, she cautioned that key bilateral issues remain unresolved and will require careful negotiation. As an example, she cited the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, which is set to expire this year and remains a potential point of contention between the two countries.

The last panelist Amrit Lugun centered his discussion on the recently held election in Myanmar. He commenced his disquisition by analyzing the difference between the recently held election in Myanmar and those in Nepal and Bangladesh. He said that while election in Myanmar was taking place in the midst of a civil war the elections were taking place in Nepal and Bangladesh were held following anti-government protests that led to the fall of their respective governments.

He then provided a brief overview of the political developments that led to the military coup and the ensuing civil war in the country.

The speaker highlighted that while in 2020 more than 90 parties had contested the election. It dropped to 57 in the 2026 election, largely due to strict registration requirements and banning of certain parties. He also added how due to civil war in the country the military Junta was able to conduct election in only 265 out of 330 townships.

Following this, he shifted his focus to the recent electoral amendments enacted by the military Junta. He emphasized that one of the most significant electoral change was the introduction of a proportional representation (PR) system, marking a major shift from the earlier First Past the Post (FPTP) system. The speaker stated that such electoral amendment had benefited military-aligned and smaller parties, allowing them to gain seats without broad popular support and reduced the advantage of large opposition parties, especially those with concentrated voter bases. He added that the military leadership came up with the proportional representation system as because they thought that they would not be successful through the First Past the Post System.

Sri Lagun said that combined with restrictive party laws and introduction of proportional representation system the speaker opined that military-backed system have been successful in tilting the electoral field in their favor.

The speaker briefly addressed the responses of China and the United States, noting their cautious 'wait and watch' approach.

Turning to India-Myanmar relations in the post-election context, the distinguished speaker stated that India maintains a balanced and neutral stance toward both the democratic forces and

the military regime, and is likely to continue doing so. He noted that the ongoing civil war disrupted India's key infrastructure projects in Myanmar, leading to delays. However, he expressed confidence that India's soft power diplomacy could play a significant role in addressing this crisis. He also discussed the potential impact of the civil war in Myanmar on the Kuki-Chin-Mizo belt of India.

The programme ended with the vote of thanks from Sarup Prasad Ghosh, Director, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies.