



Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi

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Press Release

Panel Discussion

on

“India: Forthcoming Elections and Foreign Policy”

(28 March 2014)

A panel discussion on forthcoming general elections and India’s foreign policy was organised at the Indian Council of World Affairs. The panel discussion entitled, “India: Forthcoming Elections and Foreign Policy”, focussed on the possible post-election scenarios and their implications for India’s foreign policymaking and practice.

In his introductory remarks, DG, ICWA, Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia stated that the 2014 general elections, to be held from April 2014, will be the biggest event of its kind to be organised by a country in the world. He highlighted the importance of organising smooth, free and fair elections, involving 816 million voters.

The panel discussion, chaired by Member of Parliament and eminent journalist

Mr. H.K. Dua, comprised two thematic sessions: “All About Elections” and “Changes in Foreign Policy After Elections”. Former Chief Election Commissioner of India Mr. Navin Chawla, spoke during the first session, while Ambassador Lalit Mansingh and Ms. Indrani Bagchi shared their views during the session entitled, “Changes in Foreign Policy After Elections”.



(L-R) Ms. Indrani Bagchi, Diplomatic Editor, The Times of India, Ambassador Lalit Mansingh, former Foreign Secretary, Shri H.K. Dua Hon'ble Member of Parliament, Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia, DG, ICWA & Shri Navin Chawla, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India

The Chair, Mr. Dua, said that irrespective of who governs, India will remain a political and economic superpower. He added that India will keep pursuing peace in terms of its relations with neighbouring countries and global powers alike.

Highlighting the importance of the electoral process and the huge task Election Commission has before itself, Navin Chawla

said that the existing list of around 816 million voters comprises a hundred million new voters. This has added an ‘extra youth punch’ to the gigantic electoral process. He highlighted the effectiveness, transparency and punctuality of general elections, and said that the transfer of power from one government to the successive government has always been smooth, which has strengthened India’s democratic credentials. However, he added that several steps such as public funding of elections and decriminalisation of politics are needed to make the electoral process more robust.

Addressing the audience, former Foreign Secretary, Lalit Mansingh said that contrary to popular belief, Prime Minister of India has a decisive role in foreign policy formulation. Successive prime ministers have shown how their outlooks determine the course of foreign policy making in India. He listed out prospective post-election scenarios on the basis of three major conceptual frameworks: The known; the known unknown; and the unknown unknown. He argued that so far as India’s foreign relations are concerned, with the signing of around two dozen strategic partnerships with friendly countries; India has become ‘non-allied’ rather than a ‘non-aligned’ country. Focussing on the scope of foreign policy issues in elections, he said that foreign policy issues do not get enough attention in the manifestos of political parties. However, one must not overlook the issues that political parties mention in their manifestos as they give vital clues to their foreign policy agenda.

Indrani Bagchi, Diplomatic Editor of The Times of India, shared her observations by pointing out that elections are times when a ‘self-obsessed’ India gets even ‘more self-obsessed’. Focussing on the forthcoming general elections, she added that since the major Prime Ministerial candidates in the fray were born after independence, there will definitely be



Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia, DG, ICWA giving the introductory remarks.

new elements in their approach towards foreign policy. She added that several issues such as restructuring of Ministry of External Affairs, economic diplomacy, border issues with neighbours and relations with great powers will be determined by the nature of political coalition that comes to power.

It was broadly agreed that drastic policy changes are not likely to happen in the post-election period, although early foreign policy-related decisions would merit close watch. The panel discussion was attended by diplomats, academics, scholars and media persons.
