

Regional Overview: South Asia 26 January – 1 February 2020

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Bringing clarity to crisis

Key trends in South Asia last week include: escalation of electoral violence surrounding mayoral elections in Bangladesh's Dhaka city; continuing clashes between supporters and opponents of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) across India; serial explosions in the Indian state of Assam; and security operations against domestic rebel groups by Indian security forces in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Pakistani security forces in Balochistan.

In **Bangladesh**, continued violence was reported during campaigning for mayoral elections in the capital city, Dhaka. During the final week of election campaigning in the city, supporters of ruling Awami League (AL) reportedly shot at and injured a Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal (BJSD) leader, and attacked and injured a senior Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader and at least 10 supporters of BNP. On election day, AL supporters and their student wing reportedly attacked several members of the press who were reporting on irregularities and violations of election code of conduct by AL supporters at polling stations. BNP voters and city councilor candidates who visited the polling station were also reportedly attacked by AL supporters. Furthermore, several clashes were reported between supporters of BNP and AL candidates leading up to the polls and on election day. Amidst ongoing violence and intimidation by the ruling party, the voter turnout was reported at around 20 percent in the two city corporations of Dhaka. The opposition BNP also rejected the outcome of the election citing "irregularities", including intimidation and eviction of their polling agents from polling stations (Daily Star, 2 February 2020).

In **India**, nationwide demonstrations continued against the CAA. In several states, including Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, violent clashes were reported between supporters and opponents of the Act resulting in two reported fatalities. In Delhi, an armed youth, reportedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal, a militant wing of the Hindu organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), opened fire at a group of students demonstrating against the CAA. One demonstrator was reportedly injured in the shooting (Wire, 30 January 2020). Another individual opened fire at a separate protest in the city, organized mainly by Muslim women, with no reported casualties. Meanwhile, women's groups continued demonstrations against the CAA across several states including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, Tami Nadu, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

In Assam state, the United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I) claimed responsibility for five serial explosions which resulted in no reported casualties. The explosions occurred in the backdrop of a peace agreement between the Central Government and all four factions of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). The peace agreement aims to provide respite from five

decades of militancy for separate statehood in Bodo-dominated areas of Assam (India Today, 27 January 2020). However, ULFA-I, who were not a part of the agreement, remains the largest militant outfit in Assam and aims to create a sovereign state (Hindustan Times, 29 January 2020).

Meanwhile, Indian security forces continued their operations against militant outfit Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) in J&K. Four HM militants were reportedly killed during the operations. Similarly, in **Pakistan**, security forces conducted an operation against militant outfit Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Balochistan province. Two TTP militants were reportedly killed during the operation.



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