

COVER STORY

rious developments of last five years, including decommissioning of Article 370 and downgrade of the historical state to Union Territory.

In November 2018 when Governor Satya Pal Malik dissolved the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, which was in suspended animation since the fall of Mehbooba Mufti government in June that year, there was a refreshing wave of politics eager to rise from the ashes of a ruined alliance between Peoples Democratic Party and Bhartiya Janta Party.

As Governor Malik blocked two proposals, one led by Mehbooba Mufti and another by Peoples Conference leader Sajad Lone, to stake claim for government formation, the general elections to Lok Sabha were barely five months away at that time. Matching Malik's ridiculous pretext of dysfunctional fax machine, the rival claims for government formation were also non-serious attempts eventually paving way for imposition of President's Rule.

Malik's unconstitutional decision didn't attract befitting criticism from local parties as each one of them had actually wanted the Assembly to die so as fresh elections are held soon. The National Conference saw a greater opportunity in this situation. As everyone expected Assembly elections to be held together with the Lok Sabha elections, there was a crazy rush of party deserters, new comers and retired bureaucrats to join the National Conference.

It was a mix of surprise and anger when the Election Commission declared Jammu and Kashmir unfit for facing Assembly elections even as the Lok Sabha elections were announced to be held. The National Conference won all three seats in the valley where elections were marred by poor turnout of 31%. NC's overall voter share was meagre 7.9%. The BJP also won an equal number of seats -two in Jammu and one in Ladakh -bagging 46% of the polled vote and thus emerging as largest party in terms of vote share. The Congress, contesting in alliance with NC and PDP, drew blank in second consecutive elections even as the party secured 28% of total votes polled in Udhampur, Jammu and Ladakh constituencies.

At the time of these elections in early 2019, no one had any idea of the impending political developments unfolding later that year. In the autumn of 2018, the Governor's administration decided to hold Panchayat elections. Major regional parties, National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party, decided to boycott these elections as they wanted an assurance on maintenance of Article 370 and 35-A from the Prime Minister. The boycott cost these parties space at the grassroots level of democracy. NC president Farooq Abdullah has regretted this decision many times over.

Barely a couple of months after abrogation of Article 370, the Governor's administration conducted elections to second tiers of Panchayats -the Block Development Councils -on party basis. These were indirect elections with members of the Panchayats, elected the previous year,

making the electoral college. The NC and PDP were again not able to participate in elections as most of their senior leadership was in jails.

In the fall of 2020, the administration conducted elections to District Development Councils. The existing rules provided for a limited electoral college for the DDCs comprising the chairpersons of Block Development Councils and presidents of municipalities. However, the rules were quickly changed to call elections through universal adult suffrage.

ence exiting soon after the results were declared.

How are the parties placed?

Jammu and Kashmir was a one-party state for close to three decades. Beginning with the elections of 1977, the National Conference and the Congress emerged as each other's competitors, and sometimes allies. By the time PDP arrived as first major regional alternative to NC, the BJP had already made its presence felt as a formidable force against the Congress. Two re-



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This was the first test of stability and the political sentiment post the abrogation of Article 370.

The PADG or Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration -a big tent alliance of NC, PDP, Congress, CPI(M) and a couple of smaller parties formed to defend the special status -decided to participate in elections. Even as the PAGD emerged as the largest alliance with around 130 seats, the BJP returned as single largest party securing 75 seats.

Even as the PAGD was an ideological alliance based on the premise of a joint struggle for restoration of special status, the internal competition between the parties for their respective political space caused a breakdown of unity with Congress walking out of the alliance in the middle of elections and the Peoples Confer-

gional parties -NC and PDP -and two national parties -Congress and BJP -have dominated last four Lok Sabha elections.

Currently there are seven players. The post 2019 conditions have seen launch of two new parties -Apni Party under Syed Altaf Bukhari and DPAP of Ghulam Nabi Azad -and massive expansion of the Peoples Conference of Sajad Lone. These parties have the serious potential to alter results away from the traditional outcomes. The BJP is confident of retaining two seats it holds -Udhampur and Jammu. The remaining three seats are up for tough contest.

The National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party have been the founding partners in Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) and together with the Congress they have also been part

of the INDIA bloc. However, a seat sharing between the two regional parties could not be reached while Congress has support from both for Jammu and Udhampur seats.

New Boundaries

The Justice Ranjana Prasad Desai led Delimitation Commission, a direct consequence of August 5, 2019 reorganisation, has changed the boundaries of Lok Sabha constituencies in a such a way that there are two complete seats each in Kashmir and Jammu divisions. The fifth seat is created in such a way that it includes areas from both sides of the Pir Panjal range -a first ever trans Pir Panjal entity.

Rajouri and Poonch districts, earlier making part of Jammu Lok Constituency, are now part of Anantnag-Rajouri seat, while the Reasi district has been delinked from Udhampur seat and added to Jammu constituency.

As a unique feature, each Lok Sabha constituency is comprised of 18 Assembly seats. Below is complete composition of five Lok Sabha constituencies with list of Assembly segments in each:

Baramulla Constituency

Karnah, Trehgam, Kupwara, Lolab, Handwara and Langate (Kupwara district); Sopore, Rafiabad, Uri, Baramulla, Gulmarg, Wagoora, Kreeri and Pattan (Baramulla district); Sonawari, Bandipora and Gurez (Bandipore district); Budgam and Beerwah (Badgam district).

Srinagar Constituency

Kangan and Ganderbal (Ganderbal district); Hazratbal, Khanyar, Habakadal, Lal Chowk, Channapora, Zadibal, Eidgah and Central Shalteng (Srinagar district); Khansahib, Chrar-i-Sharief, and Chadoora (Badgam district); Pampore, Tral, Pulwama and Rajpora (Pulwama district); Shopian (Shopian district).

Anantnag-Rajouri Constituency

Zainapora (Shopian district), Damhal Hanji Pora and Kulgam (Kulgam district), Devsar, Dooru, Kokernag, Anantnag West, Anantnag, Srigufwara-Bijbehara, Shangu-Anantnag East and Pahalgam (Anantnag district); Nowshera, Rajouri, Budhal, Thana Mandi (Rajouri district); Surankote, Poonch Haveli and Mendhar (Poonch district).

Udhampur Constituency

Inderwal, Kishtwar and Padder-Nagseni (Kishtwar district); Bhadarwah, Doda and Doda West (Doda district); Ramban, Banihal, Udhampur West, Udhampur East, Chenani and Ramnagar (Udhampur district); Bani, Billawar, Basohli, Jasrota, Kathua and Hiranagar (Udhampur district).

Jammu Constituency

Gulabgarh, Reasi and Shri Mata Vaishno Devi (Reasi district); Ramgarh, Samba and Vijaypur (Samba district); Bishnah, Suchetgarh, R.S. Pura-Jammu South, Bahu, Jammu East, Nagrota, Jammu West, Jammu North, Marh, Akhnoor and Chhamb (Jammu district); Kalakote-Sunderbani (Rajouri district).