

Insights for India from the Recent Bhutanese Parliamentary Elections

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ABSTRACT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was well aware of the shifting strategic needs in the Himalayas when he took office three years ago. He travelled to Bhutan for the first time, then Nepal in 2014; all the while his administration emphasized the "neighborhood first policy." In 1947, New Delhi took over the British Indian Empire's sovereignty over Bhutan. Although the 1949 Treaty of friendship modernized the two countries relations and kept a significant aspect of the prior agreement in place until that agreement was also amended in 2007, the real nature of the relationship has remained murky and complicated. Most Indians were unaware of Indo-Bhutan ties until vociferous outrage was directed at the crisis that broke out in the summer of 2013 and seriously strained India's "well cultivated and nourished" ties with Bhutan. The Himalayan state only stayed as an object of geopolitical play against China, where striking agreements by utilizing the carrot-and-stick approach to commerce became the norm. Still, it must be emphasized that India's historic "holy link" with Bhutan has been dismally allowed to deteriorate over the years. This strategy was unsustainable and did not represent wise foreign policy. India was the foreign policy encumbrance in the clamorous run-up to the general elections in Bhutan. Always there but taboo to address in public. Numerous election dispute cases have been brought up due to these peculiar unwritten rules. Political parties are not permitted to accuse people of being pro or anti-India but do so in chat rooms dedicated to elections. In light of the arguments above, this paper attempted to analyze the recent parliamentary elections in Bhutan and their implications for India.

Introduction:

In 2018, the tiny, landlocked South Asian nation of Bhutan held its third Parliamentary Elections. Bhutan is also known as the Landlocked Dragon Kingdom. In the year 2008, Bhutan made the shift from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, and in the following year, the country had its first elections for the national Parliament. Jigme Thinley, the leader of the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party (also known as the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa), won 45 seats and became Bhutan's first Prime Minister after his party was declared the winner of the election. After that, in 2013, the second Parliamentary elections were held, and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) won 32 of the 47 seats available. As a result, its leader Tshering Tobgay became Bhutan's second Prime Minister. A newly formed party known as Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT), which means 'Bhutan United Party', won 30 of the 47 seats, and its leader Lotey Tshering is expected to become the Prime Minister of Bhutan. Once again, history has been repeated in Bhutan, as the ruling party was removed from the running for the second round of voting and a newly formed party known as Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT).

Since 2008, when absolute monarchy ended and Bhutan became a constitutional monarchy, Bhutanese voters have repeatedly picked a new party to lead the country. The people of Bhutan have eagerly embraced democracy, which may be out of respect for the country's monarchy. This creates a peculiar dichotomy in Bhutan's political system. There is no question that the past rulers of Bhutan directly ordered the transition to democracy that has taken place in their country.

The evolution of the politics of Bhutan after the monarchy, on the other hand, shows that democracy in Bhutan is progressively and steadily becoming more entrenched with each succeeding election. This is excellent news not just for the people of Bhutan but also for the countries that border Bhutan.^[1]

Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) index is well-known worldwide. Bhutan is a country that has a population of almost 800,000 people and is located between the big countries of China and India. In light of this, unlike legislative elections in other democracies worldwide and on the Indian Subcontinent, political contests in Bhutan give the impression of an occasion for social celebration. Only 438,663 people out of Bhutan's approximate population of 800,000 are eligible to vote, even though this number represents more than half of the country's overall population. Bhutan is located in the eastern Himalayas. This demonstrates that Bhutan has a young population and, as a result, a significant advantage for economic progress in the form of a demographic dividend.

Nevertheless, unemployment and the ever-increasing debt were the primary subjects that the election campaign was organized along. As a result, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of change in the political leadership of Bhutan, as well as the anticipated impact this transition will have on the country's neighbors, particularly India and China.^[2] As a result, the author tries to explain Bhutanese polity and politics comprehensively and critically appraises the impact Bhutan's political system is likely to have on India.

State Administration of Bhutan:

The Bhutanese Parliament, known as the Chi Tshog, is split into two chambers: the Gyelyong Tshogde, also known as the National Council, has 25 seats, while the Tshogdu, also known as the National Assembly, has 47 seats. The upper chamber of Bhutan's National Parliament is known as the National Council, while the lower house is known as the National Assembly. Twenty members of the National Council are elected to serve terms of five years by a majority vote in single-member constituencies, while the monarch chooses the other five members to serve terms of five years each. There are a total of 25 members in the National Council. There is a strict prohibition against party membership for those serving on the National Council. It takes a majority vote in single-member constituencies to elect the 47 members of the National Assembly, each of whom will serve a term of five years and represent a political party. The method in question is one of the second ballots in the election for seats in the National Assembly. The first round, often known as the preliminary round, is organized among all the interested political parties, and voters cast their ballots exclusively for parties. Only the top two parties, determined by the total number of votes they received, are eligible to compete in the second round. In the run-off election, both parties put forth candidates in each of the 47 seats, and votes are cast using the first-past-the-post voting system. The winners of these races go on to represent their respective parties in the general election.^[3]

Although the King traditionally holds the position of Chief of State, the position of Head of Government is currently held by the Prime Minister. Although he retains his position as constitutional head of state, the hereditary King must step down from his position at age 65 and can be deposed with the approval of a two-thirds majority in Parliament. The monarch chooses who will run for the position of Prime Minister based on which political party earned a majority of members in the National Assembly during the final round of voting before the election. As will be covered in the following section, elections for the National Assembly and the National Council took place in 2018.

The system of parliamentary representation used in Bhutan is unique. After all the votes have been counted, only two parties will be represented in Parliament, although there will be many more parties operating outside of the legislature. This makes it a one-of-a-kind situation. As was previously mentioned, elections for the House of Representatives, more commonly referred to as the National Assembly, are divided into two rounds: the Primary Round and the General Round. Many parties contest the first round with no predetermined limit on their combined votes. In 2018, four political parties ran for seats in the National Assembly; out of those four, only two had existed since the very first election for parliamentary seats.^[4]

Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (also known as Bhutan United Party; DNT), Druk Phuensum Thosgpa (also known as Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party; DPT), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party were the four political parties that ran candidates in the first round of elections. Bhutan United Party (DNT) was the party that won the most votes (BKP, i.e., Social Democratic Political Party). The People's Democratic Party (PDP) was led at the time by an individual with an education from Harvard who had previously worked in the civil service and was seen as a

popular political leader. Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT), the party that opposed the People's Democratic Party (PDP), was victorious in its bid to unseat the PDP in the third General Elections to the National Assembly and went on to become the first democratic government in Butan in 2008. The DPT served as the opposition party in the most recent Parliament, held in 2013. The elections for the National Assembly in 2018 saw the participation of two new parties, both of which were recently formed. The Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa, the DNT, was the first new party to emerge. Lotey Tshering, a well-known medical practitioner and social activist, headed it up. The second party was the centre-left Bhutan Kuen-nyam Party (BKP), which has been led by Dasho Neten Zangmo, a former chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Commission, since May 2017.

Regarding their ideological stances and electoral manifestos, these parties did not differ from one another in any meaningful way. Nevertheless, the most notable distinctions were represented by the different levels of competence and individual ideals held by the leaders of each party.³ Therefore, one might also argue that the elections for Bhutan's third National Assembly revolved considerably more around the temperament and ability of the leader than they did anything else. This is something that has been a point of contention in recent years. It doesn't matter what side of the debate one takes; the fact that newer parties are flourishing and some of them are already in positions of authority after only their first try demonstrates that people want change, and they want it quickly. This is evidenced by the rapidity with which they want it.^[5]

Voting for members of the National Council:

In April 2018, the third round of voting for the National Council was held. The election for Bhutan's National Council had a participation rate that broke all previous records, with 54.3% of all eligible voters casting ballots. It was a 9 per cent rise from the turnout in the previous elections, which occurred in 2013 when 45.15 per cent of the total number of eligible voters engaged in the voting process. The voter turnout in Bhutan's first elections in 2008 was 53.05 per cent, while in 2013; it was only 53 per cent. Bhutan witnessed a fall in voter participation in 2013.⁴ As a result, it is clear that the reforms that were implemented in the voting procedures of the country in preparation for the general election that took place in 2013 have contributed to an increase in knowledge of these changes. This is certainly a step in the right direction toward consolidating democracy in Bhutan. It is also an indicator that the people of Bhutan are growing informed about democratic principles and practices.

The election outcomes for the National Council shed light on the depth of thought displayed by Bhutanese voters and their increasing degree of understanding. Since the first phase of the election for members of the National Council, it became clear that voters in Bhutan were interested in making changes, as just five of the 12 candidates currently holding their seats were re-elected. While the chairperson of the National Council did not run for reelection, the deputy chairperson, who had previously served as a legislator for two terms, was defeated by an individual who was running for office for the first time.^[6] It also shows that the people of Bhutan are keeping a close eye on the functioning of the democratic system and that they can evaluate how different political

leaders are doing in their jobs. Following this, people vote for the candidates who have demonstrated their capacity to lead and deliver results. Considering how recently democracy was introduced in Bhutan, this is a significant step in the right direction.

Voting for members of the National Assembly:

The lower house of Bhutan's national Parliament is known as the National Assembly. As mentioned, it has 47 seats, each determined by a single-member constituency. Voters cast their ballots for the various parties in the first round, referred to as the "Primary Round." After that, the two contestants who came out on top make nominations for the second round of voting, and they do so regardless of the percentage of the total votes that each of them received in the first round. The PDP had been in power since 2013 but was defeated in the first round of voting when it received only 27.44% of the total votes. This was compared to the 1.85% votes cast for DNT and the 30.92% votes for DPT. After eliminating the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the first round of elections this year, the two main opposition parties, the DNT and DPT, competed in the second round of elections this year. 5 According to the data that is accessible on the website of the Election Commission of Bhutan, the election was conducted without incident and had a turnout of 71.46 per cent in its second round.

In the second round of voting for the National Assembly, which took place on October 18, 2018, a brand-new party called DNT, located on the centre-left spectrum, won 30 of the 47 available seats, garnering 54.95 per cent of the total votes cast. The DNT campaigned on a platform that addressed rural poverty and increased young people's work opportunities. 6 The DNT was led by Lotay Tshering, a young surgeon who was only five years old. In 2013, he was a founding party member, and in May 2018, he was elected its head. Competitor DPT secured the remaining 17 seats in the run-off election with 45.05 per cent of the total votes cast. The primary round of elections to the National Assembly took place in September 2018. As a result, the People's Democratic Party, which had been in power previously, made an unexpected exit.

It was a close race between the DNT and the DPT in the second round, but the DNT pulled away in the third and final rounds. The DPT was victorious in the first election, which took place in 2008, and has served in the opposition since 2013. The DNT had previously stated that it would fulfill 25 campaign promises within the next 120 days. Additionally, the DNT has issued a press release stating that it will collaborate with the other political parties in Bhutan to form a Royal Government of Bhutan rather than just a DNT government. 9 It is indeed a rare example of the will that a winning leader expresses in a democracy to facilitate inclusive politics and governance, in which even the losers will be treated as part of the government and accommodated in the process of governance. This will allow an inclusionary politics and governance system to be established.^[7]

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPT) won an overwhelming majority of seats in the National Assembly elections held in 2008, and as a result, Jigme Thinley became Bhutan's first Prime Minister. Nevertheless, he was defeated by the PDP in the elections for the National Assembly in 2013, in which the PDP gained 32 seats and the DPT won 15 seats.

Tshering Tobey, a member of the PDP, was elected as Bhutan's second Prime Minister. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) could not qualify for the second round of voting in the third election for the National Assembly. As a result, it will not have any representatives in the National Assembly.

On the other hand, its former adversary, the DPT, will be the only party in the National Assembly to have previously held representation in the previous National Assemblies. This pattern, in which there has been a change of government following each of the previous three general elections, is an encouraging indicator of democracy. It demonstrates that the people and civil society of Bhutan, who are the primary opinion formers, keep a close eye on the democracy that exists in the country. It puts pressure on the incumbents to continue performing well during their terms in office since if they don't, voters will likely vote them out of office in the next elections. As a result, democratic progress in Bhutan is proceeding as planned and is becoming increasingly robust with each new election.

Bhutan's Political System:

The majority of Bhutan is made up of hilly terrain. The topography creates a lot of challenges in terms of accessibility and travel, and these challenges affect not only the voters but also the polling parties. The legislation requires that voters cast their ballots where they previously registered as citizens, which invariably directs them to polling stations within their respective hometowns. However, most Bhutanese people live in the country's capital and other big cities, which means that to cast their votes, they must travel significant distances to distant locations that are difficult to access. The majority of voters were dissuaded as a result, and they did not vote. If the necessary reforms hadn't been developed and put into place, this bottleneck might still be in place today. The vitality of democracy would have suffered as a consequence of this situation.

The fact that there were a greater number of people who exercised their right to vote in Bhutan's elections for both the National Council and the National Assembly is evidence that the reforms that have been implemented have been successful in fostering the growth of democracy in the country. As a result, there is virtually no room for speculation about the fact that democracy in Bhutan is deepening and becoming more stable with each new election. This was made possible by the Election Commission of Bhutan, which carried out massive civic education activities using the expertise and experience of mature democracies with the assistance of global organizations such as International IDEA. This made it possible for Bhutan to have a democratic election (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). In addition to implementing these procedural remedial actions, various other corrective measures were taken. One such illustration is that many voters in Bhutan were dissuaded from going to the voting booth centres because of the difficult mountainous topography of the country. In light of this, the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) set up 64 postal booths across the country to make voting easier for qualified people. As a result, out of the 102,531 people registered to vote through the "Postal Ballot Facilitation and Mobile Booths," a total of 79,515 people cast their votes, corresponding to a voter turnout percentage of 77.55 per cent in that category. One 2This made

it possible for voters, their spouses, and their dependents to vote in person for their civil registration district in a different location. It was also made available to Bhutanese citizens outside the country, convicts, and people with special needs who could vote using mobile voting booths. Consequently, the two parties that qualified in the first round had a proportion of postal ballots that left their competitors with a massive deficit they could not overcome. This also demonstrated the electorate's rising maturity in Bhutan, reflected by the previous sentence.^[8]

The voting percentage in Bhutan's most recent election is more evidence that the country's democracy is maturing and becoming more robust with each election. Just 3,13,473 out of Bhutan's total electorate of 4,38,663 people voted is a good indicator of how small the country is. This amazing quality of Bhutanese democracy and the power it has acquired in such a short amount of time is one of the reasons why it is so impressive. The country's constitution requires political parties in Bhutan to be nationally representative, meanings they must field candidates for election in each country's 47 constituencies. This has been done to build protection against a regional split, which has the potential to be divisive and unstable. There are, therefore, appropriate provisions in the constitution to ensure homogeneity in the country's polity and demography to prevent the country from falling prey to regionalization and divisiveness.

The first election was held in 2008, and the party that ultimately triumphed received 45 of the 47 seats available. This placed the opposing party in a precarious situation. It appeared that voters voted according to party lines rather than considering individual candidates from their areas while casting their ballots. Therefore, the voters could not differentiate between the parties and the politicians representing them. The trend began to shift after the second election because the party that formed the government had 32 seats in the National Assembly, while the other party only had 15 seats. This meant that the trend began to change in favour of the other party. This resulted in the opposition gaining a significant amount of ground within the legislature, in contrast to the previous National Assembly, which was unbalanced and granted the opposition only two members. This pattern was maintained at the third election, and as a result, the party that emerged victorious now holds 30 seats, while the opposition party holds 17 seats. As a result, the distribution of seats between the two parties indicates that democracy in Bhutan is maturing and becoming more balanced daily.

According to the results of the third election held this year, the votes cast in the first round were fairly distributed across all parties. The DNT received 92,722 votes, which is 31.85% of the total, while the DPT received 90,020 votes (30.92%), the PDP received 79,883 votes (27.44%), and the BKP received 28,473 votes (9.78%). After finishing in third place in the first round of voting, the reigning political party, PDP, was excluded from further consideration for the run-off to the General Round of elections, which will take place on October 18, 2018. The electoral outcomes broken down by party for the second round have already been covered in the previous section. As a result, there is also an increase concerning this factor.^[9]

A further significant development that has occurred due to the elections in Bhutan is the readmission of female

MPs to the National Council. In the first Council, which was elected in 2008, there were four women. There were none in the second Council, which was elected in 2013. However, two women were included among the five MPs nominated by the King. During the elections for National Council in 2018, there were 121 male candidates and six female candidates vying for the 20 elected seats; now, two women and three men are serving on the National Council of Bhutan.

Women in Bhutan have what is considered to be a significantly higher social standing than their counterparts in other countries in the region. However, achieving gender parity in democratic elections and other spheres of public life in Bhutan remains difficult. Together with IDEA, the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW) and the European Central Bank has been working to raise public understanding of the significance and value of women's political participation and candidacy for public office. This resulted in the Thimphu Declaration in 2017, which emphasized the necessity of encouraging women's involvement in the political process and recommended further affirmative legislative and policy support to achieve that aim. 15 Even elections for the National Assembly were a step forward because, in the second round of voting, a record seven out of a total of often female candidates from both parties successfully won seats in the National Assembly.

Aside from its recent beginnings, Bhutan's democracy also features a disproportionately young population. Voters in Bhutan have chosen for their nation's delegates a group of individuals who are in the prime of their lives. The 20 councilors elected to serve on the National Council have an average age of 40. The oldest person is 54 years old, and the youngest is 31. They bring a wide range of experiences and perspectives, an important quality for a legislative body. There are administrators, business owners, event organizers, legal professionals, actors, and journalists. As a result, the National Council of Bhutan has accorded a fairly diverse representation in the professions practiced and the interests pursued by its members. Although the age profile of the National Assembly has not yet been made public, it appears from what has been reported in newspaper reports that there will not be a significant difference between the two groups in this regard.

Important Questions to Be Answered in Bhutan's Third Parliamentary Election:

Both parties' election platforms placed a significant emphasis on addressing economic concerns as a top priority. Bhutan's economy grew by an astonishing 7.5% in 2017, yet the country still struggles with high unemployment and mounting external debt. During the election campaign, Lotay Tshering, the candidate who ultimately won the third general election in Bhutan, was heard promising to work toward "nation-building" in the country. Today, Bhutan is facing many challenges, including a significant amount of foreign debt, the majority of which is due to India, youth unemployment, rural poverty, and an increase in criminal gangs. Both political parties who could qualify for the Second Ballot made commitments to improve the economy, with the leader of the DNT party employing the slogan "Narrowing the Gap." Bhutan has tried to shield itself from the effects of globalization by prioritizing the rise of its Gross National Happiness (GNH) over its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and by preserving an

economy with a zero carbon footprint. It is interesting to note that India did not play a role in any of the political transformations in its neighbors' countries, even though these countries saw the Indian market and economy as beneficial characteristics that would contribute to their economic progress. The expectation must be that as our level of interaction with each of our neighbors rises, the value of our bilateral linkages will eventually become greater than the allure of pointless confrontation. The state of the environment and the economy were at the forefront of many voters' minds when making their decisions. Since Bhutan is currently experiencing economic progress, a heated political discussion has arisen to determine how the country can continue to experience growth while preserving its distinctive cultural traditions and natural environment.^[10] Therefore, during the election campaign, the most prominent themes discussed were the most pressing local problems and the growth and development of Bhutan's economy rather than the country's connections with other countries.

Possible Consequences for India:

There should be no questions that the elections can and will have ramifications for Indo-Bhutanese relations, notwithstanding reports from Bhutanese media suggesting otherwise. India enjoys one of the most cordial and productive bilateral relationships within its immediate neighborhood with Bhutan. Regardless of whose political party is in power on either side, India and Bhutan have made significant investments in grooming and strengthening their bilateral relations because both nations recognize Bhutan's geopolitical and strategic importance to India. Because Bhutan acts as a buffer state between its two big neighbors, it is constantly confronted with problems in its foreign policy, specifically about how it should keep its neighbors engaged in productive ways that serve Bhutan's national interests. Nevertheless, because of China's expansionist bent and its treatment of Tibet, Bhutan has always maintained a wary attitude toward China. Despite this, China's economic expansion and its performance in the neighborhood can be seen everywhere in South Asia. It has also been attractive to Bhutan, although China is aware that India may not be pleased with this development.^[11] As a result, Bhutan is confronted with the challenge of maintaining positive relations with its massive neighbor and itself, given that it depends on both.

However, Bhutan's political leaders have long been known for their independence, as evidenced by their refusal to explore relations with India or China openly. The Doklam standoff, which was nominally about territory in Bhutan that China is claiming as its own, did not come up during the 2018 elections. Both of Bhutan's major parties, the DNT and the DPT, had already reached a consensus to exclude the topic of Bhutan's international affairs from the election campaign. For many reasons, relations between Bhutan and its two most populous neighbors, India and China, tend to be contentious in Bhutanese society. The government also appointed authorities to monitor the internet forums used by the parties to guarantee that they complied with the terms of this agreement. During the election campaign, both parties kept their mouths shut on their diplomatic ties with China and India.^[12]

India faces a new and different kind of threat from Bhutan. On the surface, ties between the two countries appear

to be very positive, and India's geographical position guarantees that it maintains firm control over Bhutan. Despite this, things are not quite the same as they appear to be in the traditional sense. Because of this, India was shocked when the People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost, as the PDP was perceived to have close ties to India. This is something that requires thorough analysis. Because the DNT is a new issue, India must fight the temptation to view its interactions with Bhutan solely through the lens of security concerns. Bhutan is no different from any other nation because it needs to focus on economic growth. There's a good chance that Bhutanese diplomats and economists have been reading about China's practice of luring countries into a debt trap by investing in economic projects there. Bhutan is one of those countries.^[13] The leadership of Bhutan is aware that India does not currently have such an image or intention, and this information is public knowledge. Therefore, even though they have a significant amount of debt owed to India, this would not compromise their economic, political, or strategic autonomy.

Even though the third legislative elections in Bhutan were significant, there was very little coverage in the Indian media during either the National Council elections in April 2018 or the National Assembly elections in September and October 2018. The overwhelming win of a party, DNT, which was only established in 2013, signals that voters are eager for change internally in the country and its relationship with the rest of the globe. This is a result of the voters' dissatisfaction with the status quo. One possible meaning is that the Bhutanese might also be interested in experimenting with and exploring their relations with China. This is a possibility. Under these conditions, determining the strategic repercussions for India will take some time, and nothing can be predicted about them at this point.^[14]

On the eve of the elections in Bhutan in 2013, India removed its subsidies for kerosene and gas, which caused costs for fuel to skyrocket in that country. Many observers interpreted the move as indicating India's irritation with the Bhutan DPT. Even though India claimed that the termination of the subsidy was due to a "technical lapse," the party nevertheless lost the election that year. In the past, the DPT was considered biased toward China. However, in its election manifesto, the DPT made it plain that it aimed to maintain and further "good relations with the people and government of India." Additionally, it proposed increasing the production of electricity through the development of three new hydroelectric projects. This would increase Bhutan's principal export, electricity, to India.^[15]

This may be why, this time around, both parties that made it to the second round made it plain that they will not bring up the question of international relations with India or China while campaigning for office. In its manifesto, the DNT did not include a section on matters about foreign policy. On the other hand, it made it clear that it wanted to focus more on domestic issues, such as rebalancing the economy, which, in its view, was excessively reliant on hydropower exports. It is imperative that "Narrowing the Gap", the tagline of DNT, be interpreted in this manner. That the party that ultimately prevailed intended to broaden its exports rather than relying solely on India for the nation's exports and production of electricity. To what extent DNT would be successful in this endeavor once again is something that can only be determined

in the future.^[16] For the time being, India needs to convince Bhutan's new government that it has a brighter future with India than it does with China. This will help Bhutan feel more at ease with its relationship with India.

Even the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement between Bangladesh, Bhutan, and India was not a factor in the vote. In light of this, it is important to recall that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) government of Bhutan was unsuccessful in 2017 in passing an enabling legislation in the National Council, the country's upper chamber. It was abundantly evident that there was a popular feeling working against the agreement, which, if implemented, would have made the movement of motor vehicles more streamlined between the three countries. This needs to be done immediately since it would make integrating sub-regions easier, which most countries are eager to do. Because regional integration under the flag of SAARC is becoming a pipe dream increasingly, sub regional integration has emerged as an absolute prerequisite.^[17] Therefore, for this vision to become a reality in India, it is necessary to collaborate with the new regime.

It is difficult to imagine how India would feel if the current government, which Tshering Tobgay leads, were to be defeated. This is because India successfully managed the issue in Doklam in 2017, largely thanks to the backing of the Bhutanese government under the leadership of Tobgay. The DNT's approach to India and its position on Bhutan's border issues with China, which were the root of the Doklam issue, are murky. Bhutan's border issues with China gave rise to the Doklam issue. However, as of right now, it is thought of as a party that wants to concentrate on bringing about economic reform. Regarding the border question, India has no choice but to sit tight, keep its fingers crossed, and observe how the DNT government's foreign policy develops.^[18]

How the new Prime Minister and his party steer Bhutan in its efforts to strengthen ties with China without angering India remains to be seen. Many voters in this election were eager to see the administration take on difficult challenges, such as the nation's massive external debt, primarily due to India. The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT), which won Bhutan's first election in 2008 but did not obtain a seat in the elections held in 2013, sought to speed up the construction of hydropower projects, which dominate the economy today, with the majority of the country's electricity being exported to India.^[19] The DNT has exercised increased caution on increasing Bhutan's debt to pay for different power plants. However, the new political dispensation poised to seize

the seat of authority has declared determination to "narrow the gap," albeit the specifics of how this will be accomplished have not yet been revealed.

The potential for a transition in Bhutan's political leadership is, without a doubt, cause for concern in India and would have significant repercussions for India. The worry is heightened when one considers that a new administration has recently taken power, one that has not yet articulated the goals it will pursue in terms of international relations.^[20]

Conclusion:

Most of Bhutan's publications and websites have voiced their approval of the potential improvement that may be realized due to the procedural modifications that the Election Commission of Bhutan has implemented. It has been successful in reawakening the interest of voters and halting the further drop in voter turnout since the progress made in the election of the National Council was replicated in the election of the National Assembly in 2018. Bhutan did the same, and as a result, a sense of celebration continues to predominate in the country's social milieu. The most fundamental requirement for a democracy to be effective and peaceful is that the voters are increasingly engaged and vanquished parties gently accept defeat. Since India played a significant role in the democratization process in Bhutan, the Indian government also has grounds to celebrate. It has been helpful throughout the entire process of democratic development in Bhutan. The sustained growth of democracy in Bhutan is always in India's bigger interests and should be encouraged. Therefore, to realize the objective of a peaceful periphery, India must continue collaborating with each of its neighbors, making innovative use of development partnerships, its economic and technological capabilities, the development of cross-border infrastructure projects, and its civilizational linkages. In principle, India has always been eager to offer advantages to its neighbors without necessarily insisting on reciprocity; however, in practice, the aspiration does not even come close to matching the reality on the ground. Because of this, the future requirement is for India to express the imperatives of Bhutanese leadership and to continue supporting without expecting any form of return from Bhutan. However, India should, of course, aim to and expect reciprocity in behavior. The onus is on India to choose how it will cultivate its relations with the new government of Bhutan through constructive engagement to avoid following Nepal's example and going the same route.

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