

# Regional Overview: South Asia 12-18 January 2020

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

In **Bangladesh**, campaigning for mayoral elections in the capital city, Dhaka, was marred by violence. Supporters and activists of the ruling Awami League allegedly resorted to obstructing electioneering and assaulted supporters and activists of candidates backed by the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Bangladesh is notorious for electoral violence, and the ruling party and their cadres have been accused of using fear and intimidation against opposition candidates in past elections to undermine the democratic process (Diplomat, 24 December 2018).

In **India**, nationwide demonstrations by opposition parties, students, and various religious communities continued against the CAA. Opponents of the Act criticize its discriminatory policy towards Muslim immigrants, while others in northeast India are threatened by its ramifications for the indigenous communities of the region. Activists of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its affiliated right-wing Hindu groups organized pro-CAA rallies as well. In many states including Odhisha, Jharkhand, Gujarat, and West Bengal, violent clashes were reported between supporters and opponents of the Act. In addition, province-wide demonstrations against the CAA were held in Pakistan's Sindh province.

In J&K, further relaxation in communication restrictions by the local administration were reported. Voice calls and SMS services on prepaid mobile phones and 2G internet services on postpaid SIM cards were reportedly restored in selected districts of J&K. However, access will be limited to government-approved sites only (NDTV, 18 January 2020). Nearly six

months ago, strict security and communications restrictions coinciding with the abrogation of Article 370 were imposed in the region. Meanwhile, Indian security forces conducted operations against militant outfits Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in J&K, reportedly killing five HM militants and arresting five JeM militants.



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