

SIPG organized a seminar titled ‘Indian General Election 2024: Voting Patterns and Diplomatic Paths’ at NSU

Dhaka, April 21, 2024: India is currently holding the national election for 543 seats in the lower house of parliament, called the Lok Sabha, starting on 19 April 2024. Nearly one billion voters are expected to cast their vote in the election. The final result of the election will be announced on 4 June 2024.

Given the importance of the election, a seminar titled ‘Indian General Election 2024: Voting Patterns and Diplomatic Paths’ was held on 21 April 2024 at North South University (NSU). It was organized by the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of NSU. Two eminent scholars from India, Professor Sanjay K Bhardwaj of Jawaharlal Nehru University and Professor Sanjay Kumar, Co-Director, Lokniti, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), India were the panelists in the seminar. Professor Shahidul Haque, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and Professor of SIPG, and Dr. M Sakhawat Hussain, former Election Commissioner of Bangladesh and Senior Fellow of SIPG were the discussants of this seminar. The seminar was chaired by Professor Abdur Rob Khan, Treasurer at NSU. The seminar started with the welcome speech of Dr. Abdul Wohab, Coordinator of the Center for Peace Studies (CPS), SIPG.

Professor Sanjay Kumar stated in his speech that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will presumably retain its majority and form a new government. The ability to consistently win a seat multiple times indicates a stronghold position of BJP. Alliances with other parties have also helped BJP achieve a robust political position ahead of the election. West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura are pivotal states, as most Muslims and Bengalis are in these states. Earlier, BJP struggled in the southern states of Karnataka, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu, but the situation might improve this year. The minority communities’ vote cast seems to have an essential effect on BJP’s popularity. Presenting the results of the latest surveys on voting behavior in India conducted by CSDS, Professor Kumar argued that BJP’s increasing popularity will be a critical factor in the ongoing election.

Professor Sanjay K Bhardwaj emphasized on the significance of the current election on India’s future relationships with Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. He added that the present ruling alliance is shaping India’s foreign policy discourse in the context of India’s history, status, military power, and economic growth. Over the last two terms, as Professor Bhardwaj asserted, the BJP government has tried to address various deficits concerning these areas, strengthening the BJP’s position to achieve success in the ongoing election. He also indicated that India wants to maintain an effective relationship with its neighbors. Bangladesh is critical to India because it aims to ensure economic and political development in its eastern states, which are strategically close to Bangladesh.

Dr. M Sakhawat Hussain talked about the Indian election being the largest mobilization of voters in the world. He raised the issue of Nagaland and Manipur, which is still unresolved. He argued that the Teesta Deal might not be implemented even if the BJP comes to power in West Bengal. These complicated issues raise interest in the Indian election among Bangladeshi people, Dr. Hussain opined.

Professor Shahidul Haque discussed various aspects of Bangladesh-India relations. He analysed that India’s bilateral relations are currently guided by realism rather than idealism. He further stated that the BJP had brought critical foreign policy issues into their election manifesto while Congress

hesitated. He also argued that India and China would inevitably be prominent regional powers. Professor Haque added that India has the unique ability to create friendly relationships with its neighbors, which will help it become influential in the future.

Engaging questions from the audience livened up the discussion. Participants from national and international organizations, universities, development organizations, embassies, media outlets, and other organizations attended the seminar physically and virtually. NSU and SIPG faculty members and staff attended and shared insightful commentary during the open session.

