MitKat Special Report – 2023 Legislative Assembly Elections in India

MitKat Advisory Services Pvt. Ltd.



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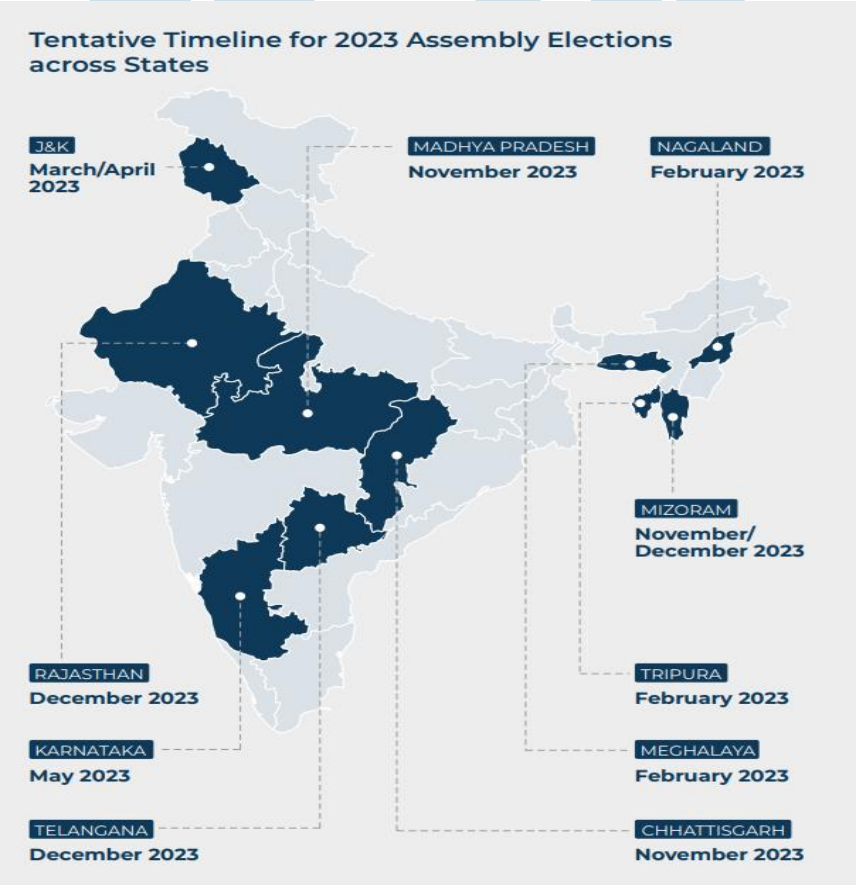
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Introduction

2023 is set to be a busy political year in India, with as many as 10 states scheduled to head into Assembly polls. These elections assume greater significance in the run-up to the 2024 General Elections. Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Karnataka, Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Rajasthan, and the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir are all set to witness high political activity, as the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seeks to consolidate support ahead of Lok Sabha elections in 2024, and opposition parties seeking to disrupt their influence.

Several states have witnessed a change in political landscape since their previous election, and states such as Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh may even witness charged rhetoric due to political volatility and communal incidents. Multiple issues including defection, anti-incumbency, infighting, changes in leadership, and political alliances breaking down may prove to influence the run-up to elections. Along with the political developments within and among the parties, policy decisions in issues like the Karnataka-Maharashtra border row, the Meghalaya-Assam border row, separatist activism in the Northeast, increasing cases of communal violence, etc., will also have a combined effect in the 2023 polls.



Tripura

Tripura is scheduled to have a single-phased election on 16 February 2023 for all 60 members of its constituencies. In the 2018 elections, the BJP put together an alliance with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) winning 36 seats in the parliament with Biplab Kumar Deb (BJP) becoming the Chief Minister. Manik Saha (BJP) became the CM following Biplab Kumar Dev's resignation in 2022.

The election schedule as decided by the Election Commission of India is as follows:

Poll Event	Schedule
Notification Date	21 January 2023
Last Date for filing a nomination	30 January 2023
Scrutiny of nomination	31 January 2023
Last Date for Withdrawal of nomination	02 February 2023
Date of Poll	16 February 2023
Date of Counting of Votes	2 March 2023

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Contesting Political Parties:

No.	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bharatiya Janata Party		
2.	Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura		
3.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)		
4.	Communist Party of India		
5.	Revolutionary Socialist Party		
6.	All India Forward Bloc		

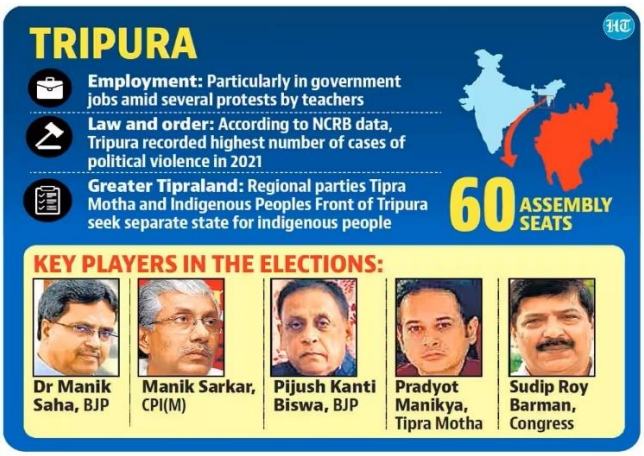
7.	Indian National Congress		
8.	Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance		
9.	All India Trinamool Congress		

Analysis

The competing parties would require 31 seats for a simple majority in the parliament. In the 2018 elections, the BJP put together an alliance with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) to form the majority. The alliance will continue for the 2023 elections with the Hindu Bengali population supporting its vote bank. However, the growing resentment among the Muslim and tribal sentiment towards its leadership is likely to put a dent in its influence. The IPFT will only be contesting for 5 constituencies since it lost many of its members to Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA).

The secular democratic alliance involving the CPI, CPI (M), Congress, and six other regional parties is likely to face tough competition with the Bengali-speaking elites supporting the BJP and tribal groups moving towards the TIPRA, the leaders are likely to use arguments on anti-incumbency and raising political violence in the state to influence votes of the not-tribal Bengalis in the region. The TIPRA Motha, although new to the game, is likely to influence the elections due to its support to the indigenous tribal population and the demand for the Greater Tipraland as evident by its win in the 2021 Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council election.

Meanwhile, incidents of election-related violence have been reported from the state. On 18 January many members of the INC were injured following when BJP members allegedly pelted stones at riders during a bike rally. The election campaign and polling are likely to happen amidst heightened security of over 200 companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) Assam Rifles, Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, and Central Industrial Security Force companies.



Source: Hindustan Times

Meghalaya

Meghalaya is scheduled to have a single-phase election on 27 February 2023 for all 60 of its constituencies. In the 2018 election, Congress won seats in 21 constituencies and became the single largest party with the most seats. However, the lack of a majority caused a hung mandate. Following this, the Nationalist People's Party (NPP) (with 19 seats) formed a post-poll alliance with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), and other regional players including United Democratic Front (UDF), People's Democratic Front (PDP) and Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) with Conrad Sangma (NPP) as the CM.

The election schedule as decided by the Election Commission of India is as follows:

Poll Event	Schedule
Notification Date	31 January 2023
Last Date for filing a nomination	07 February 2023
Scrutiny of nomination	08 February 2023
Last Date for Withdrawal of nomination	10 February 2023
Date of Poll	27 February 2023
Date of Counting of Votes	02 March 2023

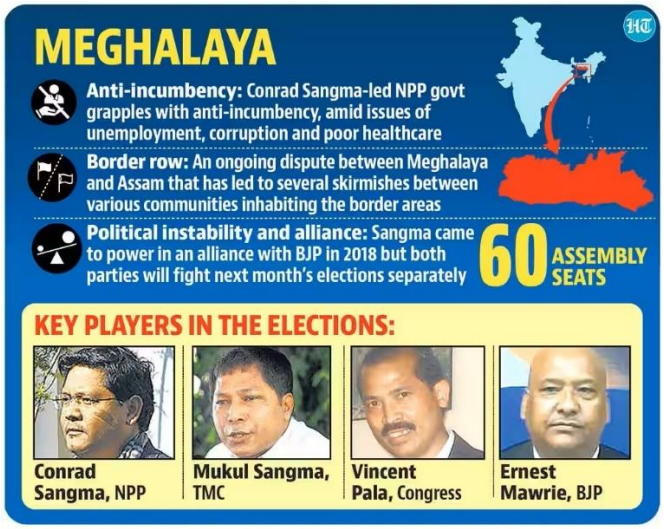
Contesting Political parties

No.	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	All India Trinamool Congress		
2.	Bharatiya Janata Party		
3.	Hill State Peoples Democratic Party		
4.	Indian National Congress		
5.	National People's Party		
6.	United Democratic Party		

Analysis

The competing parties would require 31 seats for the majority in the Parliament. Following the hung mandate in the 2018 elections where the Congress fell short of seats to form the majority, the Nationalist People's Party (NPP) formed a post-poll alliance with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), and other regional players including United Democratic Front (UDF), People's Democratic Front (PDP) and Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP). However, all constituents of the ruling coalition are contesting in the 2023 election separately.

However, relations between the NPP and the BJP have soured over the years as evidenced by the BJP State leaders withdrawing their support to the government accusing them of misrule and poor governance, and the arrest of the BJP State President Bernard R. Marak. NPP has strengthened its influence substantially post the 2018 election and the party's stance in the border row with Assam is likely to play a major role in the campaign.



Source: Hindustan Times

While Congress proved to be a formidable rival in the 2018 elections, its position has since been weakened due to the fissures within the party caused by factional fights. The party currently does not have a sitting legislator in the assembly after 12 of its MLAs joined the AITC and the rest joined the NPP. While Mukul Sangma led the Congress campaign in the 2018 elections, he will stand for the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC) in the 2023 elections. Meanwhile, regional parties including HSPDP and GNC are also likely to stage campaigns demanding a separate state for Garo Hills and Khasi-Jaintia Hills respectively.

Nagaland

The upcoming Nagaland Legislative Assembly election is scheduled to be held on 27 February 2023 to elect all 60 members of the state.

In 2018, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) formed an alliance with National Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), led by Neiphiu Rio – the current Chief Minister of the state. This alliance has been named the Northeast Democratic Alliance (NEDA) and is expected to continue for the upcoming elections as well, with the BJP contesting for 20 seats of the 60 seats.

The election schedule as decided by the Election Commission of India is as follows:

Poll Event	Schedule
Notification Date	31 January 2023
Last Date for filing nomination	07 February 2023
Scrutiny of nomination	08 February 2023
Last Date for Withdrawal of nomination	10 February 2023
Date of Poll	27 February 2023
Date of Counting of Votes	02 March 2023

Contesting political parties:

Contesting political parties include:

	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bhartiya Janata Party		
2.	Janata Dal (United)		
3.	Communist Party of India		
4.	Nationalist Congress Party		

5.	Aam Aadmi Party		
6.	Rashtriya Janata Dal		
7.	Indian National Congress		
8.	Naga People's Front (NPF)		

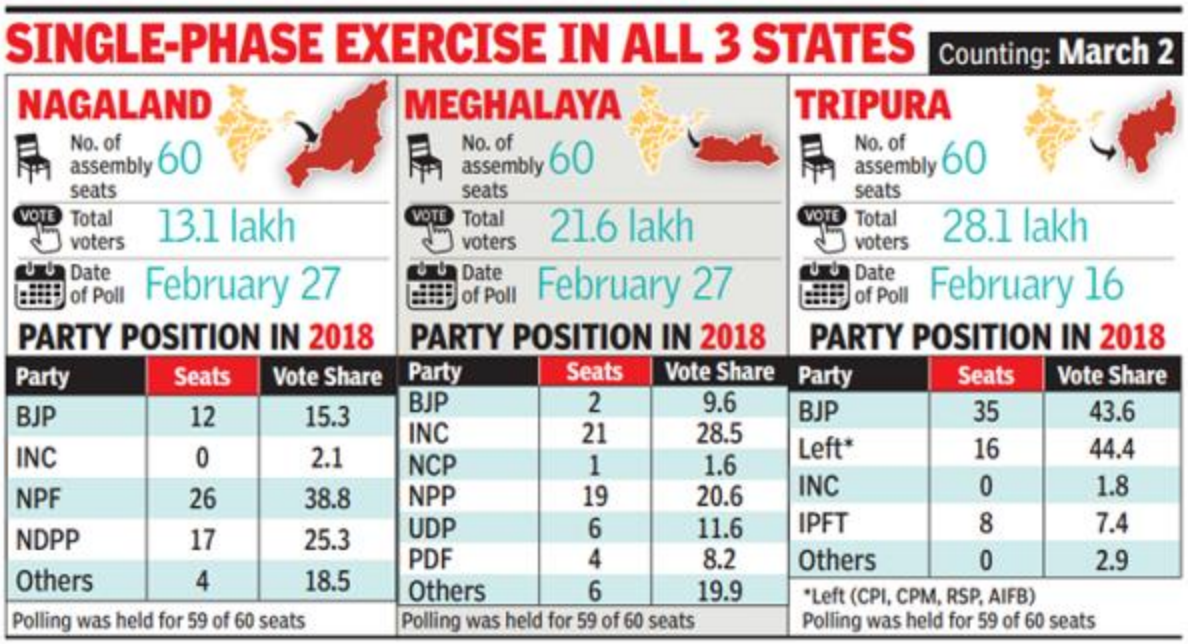
Analysis

The Naga People's Front (NPF) which was the single largest party during the 2018 elections has currently witnessed around 21 members leaving the party and joining the ruling NDPP in 2022. However, the members of Janata Dal (United), while announcing Kitoho Rotokha as the party's candidate for the elections, alleged that the BJP has made inadequate efforts to resolve their issues which center on the Indo-Naga dispute.

The Indo-Naga conflict is a long-standing territorial and political dispute between the Indian government and Naga separatist groups in the state of Nagaland. The conflict stems from the Naga people's demand for greater autonomy and their assertion of a distinct cultural and historical identity. Over the years, several attempts have been made to resolve the conflict through negotiations and peace talks, but a final settlement has yet to be reached.

Various parties have been promising a resolution to this dispute as a part of their manifesto. Further, the Janata Dal (United) has also promised to cater to the immediate issues of the state including employment, reviving traditional industries, and empowering the youth.

So far, the JD(U) has been the only strong opposition against the ruling NEDA alliance. Meanwhile, the Congress has shared its willingness to form an alliance with the NPF however, the latter has reportedly remained non-committal so far.



SINGLE-PHASE EXERCISE IN ALL 3 STATES

Counting: March 2

NAGALAND

No. of assembly seats: 60
Total voters: 13.1 lakh
Date of Poll: February 27

PARTY POSITION IN 2018

Party	Seats	Vote Share
BJP	12	15.3
INC	0	2.1
NPF	26	38.8
NDPP	17	25.3
Others	4	18.5

Polling was held for 59 of 60 seats

MEGHALAYA

No. of assembly seats: 60
Total voters: 21.6 lakh
Date of Poll: February 27

PARTY POSITION IN 2018

Party	Seats	Vote Share
BJP	2	9.6
INC	21	28.5
NCP	1	1.6
NPP	19	20.6
UDP	6	11.6
PDF	4	8.2
Others	6	19.9

Polling was held for 59 of 60 seats

TRIPURA

No. of assembly seats: 60
Total voters: 28.1 lakh
Date of Poll: February 16

PARTY POSITION IN 2018

Party	Seats	Vote Share
BJP	35	43.6
Left*	16	44.4
INC	0	1.8
IPFT	8	7.4
Others	0	2.9

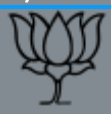
*Left (CPI, CPM, RSP, AIFB)
Polling was held for 59 of 60 seats

Source: TOI

Karnataka

The Legislative Assembly election for Karnataka is scheduled to be held before May 2023 to elect all 224 members of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly. After the 2018 election, a coalition of Janata Dal (Secular)(37 Seats) and Indian National Congress (80 Seats) formed the state government. However, the coalition fell through in 2019 after 17 sitting of MLAs from the coalition resigned. Following this, the BJP came into power with B.S. Yeddyurappa as the CM after his resignation in 2021 Basavaraj Bommai was sworn into power.

Contesting Political Parties

No.	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bharatiya Janata Party		
2.	Indian National Congress		
3.	Janata Dal (Secular)		
4.	Bharat Rashtra Samithi		
5.	Janata Dal (United)		
6.	Aam Aadmi Party		
7.	Bahujan Samaj Party		

Analysis

The competing parties would require 113 seats for a majority in the Parliament. After the coalition of Janata Dal (Secular) (37 Seats) and Indian National Congress (80 Seats) fell through in 2019, the BJP came into power with B.S. Yeddyurappa as the CM. In 2021, Basavaraj Bommai was sworn into power after Yeddyurappa's resignation.

Karnataka being the only state in the south with a BJP leadership, the upcoming elections are likely to witness large-scale campaigns. However, rumors of infighting among supporters of Yeddyurappa and Bommai and the lack of consensus on the decision for cabinet expansion may cause further fissures within the leadership.

The government is facing allegations of large-scale corruption in the implementation of civic contracts and the functioning of the Educational Ministry along with rising communal tensions. The government's policy on the Belagavi border row will also be a deciding point. Meanwhile, members of several communities including the Lingayat and the Vokkaligas have been protesting for reservations. These issues are likely to be the bargaining chip for the INC and JDS campaigns.

Madhya Pradesh

The 2023 Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly election is scheduled to be held by November 2023 to elect all 230 members of the state's Legislative Assembly. The Indian National Congress formed the state government following the elections in 2018. However, 22 members of the party including Jyotiraditya Scindia defected to BJP, subsequently resulting in Shivraj Singh Chouhan of the BJP becoming the Chief Minister.

The schedule of the elections is yet to be disclosed by the Election Commission of India. However, as per the previous election, the voting process is likely to conclude by 28 November.

Contesting political parties

	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bhartiya Janata Party		
2.	Communist Party of India		
3.	Bahujan Samaj Party		
4.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)		
5.	Samajwadi Party		
6.	Indian National Congress		

Analysis

The BJP has reportedly set a target to increase its vote share by 10 percent, taking to 51 percent. The party is therefore working towards gaining the support of people from Scheduled Castes and Tribes as people from this section of the economy have a history of supporting the Congress. A similar exercise of gaining their support is likely to be conducted by the BJP in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan as well.

Meanwhile, the Congress with Minister Kamal Nath as the candidate, has decided to issue an election manifesto for each district separately in order to address the issues of every area as per its requirements.

With strong support witnessed during Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra in Madhya Pradesh as well as during the mayoral elections in 2022, a close contest is likely. Therefore, while the schedule of the elections has not been decided yet, members of both the parties are expected to hold elaborate campaigns and public rallies in the months leading up to the voting period. Reports of other parties' campaigns and planned strategies are likely to surface in the coming months.

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Telangana

The Legislative Assembly election for Telangana is scheduled to happen before December 2023 to elect all 119 members of the Telangana Legislative Assembly. The Telangana Rashtra Samiti (Now Bharat Rashtra Samithi) won 88 out of 119 in the 2018 Assembly election, following which K. Chandrashekhar Rao came into power.

Contesting Political Parties

No.	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bharat Rashtra Samithi		
2.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)		
3.	Communist Party of India		
4.	Indian National Congress		
5.	Bharatiya Janata Party		
6.	All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen		
7.	Bahujan Samaj Party		

Analysis

The competing parties would require 60 seats for a majority in the Parliament. The Telangana Rashtra Samiti (Now Bharat Rashtra Samithi) won 88 out of 119 in the 2018 Assembly election, following which K. Chandrashekhar Rao was elected as Chief Minister.

Before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress lost 12 of its MLAs to the BRS, thereby losing its status as the main opposition of BRS. In the recent local government elections and by-polls the party scored even fewer votes than the BJP thereby weakening its status as BRS's main competitor. Moreover,

increased infighting among the members mainly due to the appointment of Revanth Reddy (former TDP member) as the new state president in 2021 is further likely to divide its votes.

BJP however performed well in the 2019 General election and 2020 Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) polls. They also won two by-polls and is emerging as a potential challenger for BRS in the upcoming election. While the BJP leadership is campaigning to highlight the alleged corruption of the ruling party and accusing the CM of leading the State to a debt trap, BRS leaders are highlighting the price rise, especially the steep hike in the prices of petroleum products, rising unemployment, falling Indian rupee, privatization of public sector companies, etc., against the BJP central leadership.

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Rajasthan

The Legislative Assembly election for Rajasthan is scheduled to happen before December 2023 to elect all 200 members of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly. The Indian National Congress won 100 seats and got support from the RLD and independents to form the state government, with Ashok Gehlot becoming Chief Minister.

Contesting Political Parties

No.	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Indian National Congress		
2.	Bharatiya Janata Party		
3.	Aam Aadmi Party		
4.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)		
5.	Rashtriya Lok Dal		
6.	Samajwadi Party		
7.	Communist Party of India		
8.	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation		
9.	Janata Dal (Secular)		
10.	Bahujan Samaj Party		

Analysis

The competing parties would require 101 seats for a majority in the Parliament. The Indian National Congress formed the state government in 2018, with Ashok Gehlot becoming Chief Minister. The BJP followed closely behind gaining 73 seats in the parliament. Rajasthan is likely to be the most focused election-bound state due to its reputation as a swing state.

The Congress is carrying out large-scale campaigns across the state discussing multiple allegations against the Central government. The Centre's alleged involvement in stalling the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project is a major point of contention.

However, the State faced a political crisis in 2020 when the then Deputy CM Sachin Pilot along with 18 MLAs rebelled against the party. In late 2022 82 MLAs close to Gehlot threatened to submit their resignation if Pilot is named as the CM candidate after Gehlot announced his intention to run for the INC presidential election. Following this, Gehlot was forced to step away from the Party presidential election. The rift between Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot may play an important role in the elections.

While the BJP is likely to bank on the Gehlot-Pilot dissension, it is itself facing infighting between former chief minister Vasundhara Raje and state party president Satish Poonia. The BJP-led Jan Aakrosh Yatra (political rally) criticizing the government on issues related to farmers and governance, however, received considerable support across the State.

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Mizoram

The upcoming Mizoram Legislative Assembly election is scheduled to be held by December 2023 to elect all 40 members. Following the 2018 state election, Mizo National Front formed the state government, with Zoramthanga becoming Chief Minister.

The schedule of the elections is yet to be disclosed by the Election Commission of India.

Contesting Political parties

	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bhartiya Janata Party		
2.	Mizo National Front		
3.	Nationalist Congress Party		
4.	Zoram People's Movement		
6.	Indian National Congress		

Analysis

The BJP has not been able to form a state government in Mizoram so far. The party is therefore expected to carry out several election campaign programs along with elaborate rallies. Senior members of the party including Prime Minister Modi is likely to visit the state in the coming months to consolidate support. The party is expected to contest for all 40 seats.

Additionally, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is expected to take part in the election for the first time and contest for about 25 seats.

Meanwhile, during the Mara Autonomous District Council (one of the three autonomous district councils of Mizoram), the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) formed an alliance with the Congress Party to win the polls. However, following a no-confidence motion, and defection of three MNF members to BJP, the latter formed the single-largest party with 12 members, forming the council.
Should more members of the Congress or MNF defect to BJP before the legislative elections, and with a weak presence of AAP in the region, the BJP may stake a strong claim to form the government.

Chhattisgarh

The upcoming Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly election is scheduled to be held by November 2023 to elect all 90 members of the state. Following the previous election in 2018, the Indian National Congress formed the state government, with Bhupesh Baghel as Chief Minister. The schedule of the elections is yet to be disclosed by the Election Commission of India.

Contesting Political parties

	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bhartiya Janata Party		
2.	Communist Party of India		
3.	Bahujan Samaj Party		
4.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)		
5.	Aam Aadmi Party		
6.	Indian National Congress		

Analysis

The BJP has already started rallying for the Chhattisgarh election with a mega rally led by Home Minister Amit Shah in January 2023. Over 50,000 people from four districts - Korba, Manendragarh, Koriya and Gaurella-Pendra-Marwahi (GPM) in north Chhattisgarh reportedly attended the rally.

On the other hand, the Aam Aadmi Party is working towards gaining the people's support. However, considering the party did not manage to win a single seat in 2018 Chhattisgarh election, the chances of them coming into power remain reasonably low.

Meanwhile, the incumbent Chief Minister from the Congress Party has announced a monthly allowance for the unemployed youth in the state, in view of the upcoming elections. This was one of the key promises that resulted in the party's victory in the 2018 elections. Given the popularity and the support received by the Chief Minister during his tenure, it is likely that the party can retain its position in the upcoming elections.

Jammu & Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir is set to have its Legislative Assembly elections in the present year - the first since 2014, and since Article 370 was abrogated, which took away the state's special status and led to its conversion into a Union Territory. Currently J&K is under the President's rule - previously under alternating periods of Governor's or President's rule ever since the Assembly dissolved in 2014 when BJP withdrew from a coalition with the National Conference.

As per the recent delimitation, a total of 90 members will be elected – 43 from Jammu and 47 from Kashmir. Elections are not conducted in 24 seats that fall under Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

While the elections are expected to be held in 2023, the exact schedule has not been decided upon. As per reports, the Election Commission of India is likely to pay a visit to complete the formalities of the electoral rolls following which, the schedule will be planned.

Contesting Political parties

	Party	Flag	Symbol
1.	Bhartiya Janata Party		
2.	Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party		
3.	Nationalist Congress Party		
4.	Aam Aadmi Party		
5.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)		
6.	Indian National Congress		
7.	Jammu and Kashmir National Conference		
8.	Democratic Progressive Azad Party		

Analysis

The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) which included the J&K National Conference (NC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), Awami National Congress (ANC), Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] and Communist Party of India (CPI), faced a setback last year when the J&K People's Conference and the J&K People's Movement left the alliance.

Ghulam Nazi Azad, a veteran member of the Indian National Congress and the party's face in J&K, left to form his own party - Democratic Progressive Azad Party. While the candidates have not been announced, PAGD had recently announced the names of the constituency in-charges, who are most likely to get the ticket.

As per the white paper released by the alliance, the PAGD wishes to restore the special constitutional status that was accorded to J&K as per the currently abrogated Article 370. Pushing for abrogation can create further grounds of successive periods of Central takeover, through the imposition of Governor's rule and President's rule. Any steps to close down Kashmir will likely impact businesses that have recently invested heavily in J&K - especially if it involves capital heavy industries which have acquired land for their ventures.

Meanwhile, the BJP is likely to win the support of the Hindu Kashmiris. The party has reportedly promised to nominate a Hindu candidate making it the first time that a Hindu would become the Chief Minister of the state. However, this is likely to discourage the Muslim majority to vote for the party.

Additionally, the elections in Jammu and Kashmir are at risk of not only internal issues but also external issues. Pakistan has not recognized the elections in Kashmir as a rightful democratic representation of the people. Moreover, several militant forces operate within the region that could cause disruptions in the state in the months leading up to the election. In Jammu and Kashmir, security can therefore, cannot be separated from the elections.

Conclusion

Since the 2023 elections play an important role as a precursor to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, increased political activity, multi-level campaigning, and rallies will be rampant in the participating states. State and Central leaders of various parties have already set the pace with political rallies and foot marches across the region. INC's Bharat Jodo Yatra (Unite India March) covered Telangana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh while the regional leaders in the Northeastern States staged parallel rallies. The BJP is also staged similar rallies including the Jana Sankalpa Yatra in Karnataka, and the Jana Aakrosha Yatra in Rajasthan.

Regional political parties also staged rallies and foot marches across the constituencies while the members of BJP and INC central leadership including Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, PM Modi, and Home Minister Amit Shah visited the poll-bound states to address gatherings.

While the election rhetoric is likely to be charged with political anticipation in Karnataka, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana, the northeastern states are likely to witness heavy security ahead of the elections. Instances of election-related violence and vandalism have already been reported in Tripura, the first state to go to polls this year.

Increased presence of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) Assam Rifles, Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, and Central Industrial Security Force companies in major cities and the border regions are likely to cause operational disruptions in the region. Minor bombings, shootings, acts of intimidation, and attacks on political party offices, candidates, and supporters have been reported in these states during the previous elections.

Elections in Jammu & Kashmir is also likely to face similar risks from both internal and external forces. The UT has been witnessing an increase in terror attacks in the past few months. Recently, 9 people were injured in twin blasts in Narwal days before the Republic Day celebrations and the scheduled Bharat Jodo Yatra passage.

The upcoming elections is likely to put more stress on internal security. Several groups have already staged protests and demonstrations criticizing the electoral changes in the region. Similar activities, protests and call for boycotting the election is likely to increase the political tension in the region further.

*****End of the Report*****

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Sarthak Mukherjee

Management Trainee

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Nandini Bhatnagar

Management Trainee

Nandini Bhatnagar is a Management Trainee at Mitkat Advisory. She is a postgraduate student from O.P. Jindal Global University, pursuing M.A. Diplomacy, Law, and Business. Her interests include South Asian politics, migration, security, and foreign policy.



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