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Theme :-

The **2019 Indian general election** is currently being held in seven phases from 11 April to 19 May 2019 to constitute the 17th Lok Sabha. The counting of votes will be conducted on 23 May, and on the same day, the results will be declared. Legislative Assembly elections in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim will be held simultaneously with the general election.

Some of the Key features of Lok Sabha elections 2019 :-

1. According to the Election Commission of India, 900 million people were eligible to vote, with an increase of 84.3 million voters since the last general election in 2014, making this the **largest-ever election in the world**.
2. 38,325 transgenders will be able to vote for the first time as members of the third-sex and not as male or female.
3. This is the first time **VVPAT** will be used in Lok Sabha polls in all constituencies.

The Ruling party: BJP, its promises and performance :-

1. **Economy :-** BJP, in the last 5 years, has brought about a lot of changes to improve India economically like the Insolvency and Bankruptcy code, GST, Jan Dhan Yojana, rural cooking gas, FDI policies, etc. India has been growing at one of the highest GDP rates in the world. India also improved in Ease of Doing by 23 places. But, Demonetization was a huge failure of this government. 99.3% of the currency came back into circulation. The poor classes are still to cope with the damage caused by the move. The implementation of GST has also been very uneven, with several changes being made to it repeatedly causing a lot of discomfort to traders. GDP growth rates have also been questioned, with several experts questioning the process by which it is calculated.

Promises for 2019 :- Raise India's ranking further in "ease of doing business".

Double India's exports, introduce single-window compliance procedures for all businesses.- BJP Manifesto.

2. **National security and Defence :-** In the last 5 years, BJP has achieved some considerable feats in terms of operations by the defense forces. The Surgical Strikes in PoK and Myanmar & Air strikes in Balakot, Pakistan have been key highlights of their tenure. Procurement of 36 Rafale MMRCA Planes in fly-away condition is also one of them.

But, these actions have had reactions as well. Cease-fire violations have increased to unprecedented levels in the tenure of this government. Unrest in the Kashmir Valley has also increased drastically. Indo-Pak relations have also depleted. The Uri, Pathankot and Pulwama attack which targeted the security and defense forces should not have happened. The retaliatory attacks by India should have been accompanied by stricter and more efficient Intelligence and security networks which was completely ignored. The ruling government has also politicized the incidents by asking votes on the account of the actions taken by the defense forces and the death of security personnel in the Pulwama Attack.

Promises for 2019 :- "End special status and special rights to natives of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution because these provisions have prevented the development of the state". "Zero tolerance for terrorism, fund resources to strengthen national security, guarantee veterans and soldier welfare, modernize police forces." -BJP Manifesto.

3. **Unemployment :-** Unemployment is one of the major issues haunting India. Initiatives like Skill India, Make in India, Start-up India, FDI changes, etc have been implemented to bring about more jobs.

Despite these efforts unemployment in India is at a 4-decade high. Indian population is also young with the average age of the population being 28 years which makes it particularly important to have more jobs for their survival.

Promises for 2019 :- Nothing noteworthy.

4. **Agrarian Crisis :-** In budget 2018, the government announced an MSP of 1.5 times on Kharif crops. Some had applauded this move. But, the farmers have largely been unhappy with the calculation procedure of this MSP. 5 large scale farmer protests have taken place in the year 2018. Suicide rates of farmers are also at an all-time high.

Promises for 2019 :- "Double farmer incomes by 2022 by completing all major and micro-irrigation infrastructure projects, opening adequate markets and modern farm produce storage centers, implement minimum price supports for farmer produce, farmer loans, and all-weather rural roads. Introduce a pension bill for small and marginal farmers." - BJP Manifesto.

5. **Communalism :-** This is a phenomenon that has come to fore in recent years. Indian

society has become increasingly polarised and divided in the tenure of this government. Cases of mob lynchings have surged in recent years. Violence against Muslim and backward communities have increased.

Promises for 2019 :- Ram temple in Ayodhya has long been in the manifesto but this time Sabarimala is a new entry in the manifesto.

The opposition and its allies; promises :-

1. **Economy :-** “Revise the national GST law from three tax tiers to GST 2.0 law with a single moderate rate of tax. Reduce taxes on exported products to zero. Exempt from the GST essential goods and services that are currently not exempt. Enact a new Direct Taxes Code in addition to this revised GST 2.0 law.” - Congress Manifesto.
2. **National Security and Defence :-** Increase defense spending to strengthen Indian Armed Forces.” “Preserve special status and special rights to natives of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution.” Reduce the presence Army and central armed police forces in Kashmir, it will make suitable changes to balance requirements of security and protection of human rights after consulting the army’ - Congress Manifesto.
3. **Unemployment :-** “Create 1 million “Seva Mitra” jobs in rural and urban local government bodies. Fill all 400,000 central government vacancies before March 2020, and encourage state governments to fill their 2,000,000 job vacancies. Enact a law that requires all non-government controlled employers with over 100 employees to implement an apprentice program.” - Congress Manifesto.
4. **Agrarian Crisis :-** “Introduce a Nyuntam Aay Yojana welfare program wherein ₹72,000 (US\$1,000) per year will be transferred directly to the bank account of a woman-member in each family in the poorest 20 percent households in India.” Enact a permanent National Commission on Agricultural Development and Planning and introduce a “Kisan Budget” (Farmer Budget) in the parliament every year. Waive all farmer loans in all states with any amounts outstanding.- Congress Manifesto.

The promises made so far have had mixed reactions from the public. Some experts like Raghuram Rajan, DS Hooda, etc have come out in support of the manifesto since they were consulted by Congress over their implementation feasibility. Others have expressed their doubt.

Conclusion :-

In light of the above information, both sides have put up effective arguments. BJP has failed to deliver fully on some of its promises made last time. Congress, on the other hand, is

contesting from the lowest number of constituencies in the history of its existence. The Mahagathbandhan is also a potent threat to the ruling party.

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