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The View from Nepal: Indian General Election 2014: Growing Expectations from Modi

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Guest Column by Dr. Hari Bansh Jha

The Indian voters have given clear verdict in favour of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 16th Lok Sabha elections, the lower house of parliament. Apart from winning election from Varanasi, the 63-year old Prime Ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, won the elections in Vadodara in Gujrat by over 570,000 votes, which is a record in itself.

At the national level, BJP won 282 seats out of 543 seats, surpassing the 272 seats needed to form a majority government. After the lapse of 25-long years since 1989, it is for the first time that there will be a single party rule in India. And more so it will be the sole opposition party after Indian independence which got majority on its own strength to form the government. Together with its ally NDA, it has been able to secure 336 seats in the parliament.

Indian election is the world's largest exercise in democracy. With 814 million eligible voters, over 551 million people voted in the elections. There was a record voting of 66.38 per cent in the nine-phase general election, beating the previous 1984 poll record. This was so because a larger number of people in urban India and also the youth cast their votes in the election.

The 128-year old Indian National Congress Party has met worst ever defeat and is almost dissipated. It secured only 44 seats in the Lok Sabha, and even along with its ally UPA its strength was limited to 59 seats. It accounted for only 19.3 per cent of the total votes cast in the elections. In 10 states, it failed win even a single seat. Because of its humiliating defeat, it does not even qualify to have a leader of opposition in the parliament for its failure to secure the threshold limit of 10 per cent of the total seats in the parliament. It is not merely a serious blow to the Congress Party, but in fact it is the political *harakiri* of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty rule in India.

Election result shows that Modi-led NDA would form the government. BJP has got enough of majority on its own. In this election, Narendra Modi exhibited presidential style campaign by addressing 437 rallies, which is unequalled in Indian history. No other leader in the past had worked so hard in the elections.

Welcoming the robust victory, the BJP President Raj Nath Singh observed that the verdict given by the people was a verdict for change and that time had come to rewrite India's success stories. On this occasion, Narendra Modi observed, "India has won. Good time ahead."

BJP is said to be a party that promotes Hindutva. But in the past the party has rated the interest of India higher than Hindutva. The party for the first time has made its dent in south, north-east and other parts of the country, where its presence was marginal, if not nil, in the past.

There are four important factors that led to the victory of BJP. Modi's leadership and his focus on bringing economic change in the country worked electronically. People expected that his Gujarat Model of development will be applicable in other parts of India as well. Apart from this, the organizational capacity of the party and the active support of the fellow members of his Hindu nationalist outfit, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) were also important factor. But more than this the corruption scandals and high inflation during the Congress regime had disgusted the people to such an extent that they really wanted a change.

Modi became most popular after becoming Chief Minister of Gujarat state of India in October 2001, where he introduced sweeping change and brought about tremendous economic prosperity. With over 11 per cent rate of economic growth, Gujrat now boasts of being fastest growing economy in India. During his period as Chief Minister, there has not been even a single case of communal violence in this state unlike in the past when the frequency of communal violence was quite high. Though he is not in favour of appeasement policy towards the Muslims, many of the Muslims are believed to have voted for him in the anticipation that he would provide political stability and bring social and economic change.

Expectations are that nationalist Modi will steer India to the right. Towards this end, he will prioritize supply side economics and development. His "Gujarat Model of Development" is world famous, which is based on the economic philosophy "minimum government, maximum governance." Accordingly, it is likely that free market economy will be promoted and foreign retailers like the Wal-Mart and Tesco would have access to the Indian market. This could be a marked departure from the Fabian formulas of maximal government of the Nehruvian model and Indira Gandhi's license raj system.

In his bid to give a boost to the receding Indian economy, Modi might focus on economic growth with the help of cabinet colleagues with technocratic background. He will try to create massive jobs for all the sections of the society and bring the inflation rate to a sizeable limit. Development of infrastructural facilities, including roads and electricity, will be given a priority. In the social field, he might focus on basic education. In Gujrat, he helped to install 76,000 lavatories in schools with a view to promoting girls education, which can be emulated at the

national level.

Modi might make a dent in India's domestic and foreign policies as well. Widely known as a reformer, he might improve the governance system in the country. Besides, there could be a major shift in India's foreign policy in which national interest could be given central place. Foreign investment and trade might spur slow growth and curtail government spending.

India's relations with USA might improve despite the fact that Modi was denied visa for this country. Israel might get better footing in India. Similarly, India's relations with Europe, Russia and even with China might change for the better. Unlike in the past, China might not embarrass India with regard to border issues as the latter might emerge stronger. With Pakistan, too, India's relations could improve. This will be so because his foreign policy is likely to be based on the principle of "Vashudhaib Kutumbkan" meaning all the people in the world are the relatives.

In making India strong, there would be massive effort to improve the defence system of the country for which many of the war weapons could be produced within the country and the era of dependence on other countries for this will be largely reduced. Apart from the traditional security system, India might prioritize its security system on cyber front as there is a prospect for generating employment opportunities in some of these sectors on a massive scale.

In fact, the change that is coming to India will have its impact in many parts of the world, particularly in South Asia and Nepal.

We the Nepalese cannot remain aloof from this change given the geographical proximity and the relations that we maintain in social, cultural, economic and political fronts. As being India's nearest neighbor, Nepal should look forward to improve its relations with India in the newly emerging situation with a view to attracting Indian investment in development front on a large scale.

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