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Nepal: Indo-Nepal Relation Reaches a New Low: Update No. 332

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With the recall and dismissal of the Nepalese Ambassador to India for conniving with India to “topple” Oli’s government, Indo Nepal Relations reached a new “low.” Added to this was the sudden and abrupt cancellation of the visit of President Bidya Devi Bhandari to India.

Operation “Topple”:

It all started from the All Party Meeting convened by PM Oli on 1st of May. All the Parties save the PM’s party the UML, severely criticised the government on three issues namely failure to resolve the Madhesi crisis, failure to speed up reconstruction efforts since the devastating earthquake of last year and failure to implement the constitution.

In the process, both the Maoists and the Royalists (RPP) joined the chorus vigorously in condemning the government. It was also pointed out that the High level mechanism formed under the Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa had done nothing at all and that the threat of another round of agitation from the Madhesis was looming large.

PM Oli was certainly taken aback when almost everyone joined in condemning the government. He conceded that the demand of Madhesis should be addressed through dialogue and consensus (nothing happened since then) and the slow reconstruction work will also be addressed soon.

The next day, the newly elected chairman of Nepali Congress Sher Bahadur Deuba had a meeting with the Maoist leadership led by Dahal.

Deuba had also taken with him his top leaders, K.P. Situala and Bimalendhu Nidhi.

It was then that the Nepali Congress leaders suggested to Dahal that he should leave the coalition led by Oli and form a national unity government led by Dahal himself. Dahal was only too willing to oblige and informally agreed as he was assured of support from the Nepali Congress.

Incidentally, Deuba had just returned from India and had ostensibly gone to Delhi for the medical treatment of his wife. The suspicion in the valley was that Deuba had consulted the Indian leaders. I doubt whether anyone in a right frame of mind in India would have advised Deuba to get rid of Oli and hand over the leadership to the Maoists.

This was followed by another round of informal talks between Nepali Congress and the Maoist leaders on 4th of May followed by formal talks with the Madhesi groups -the UDMF. The UDMF was only too willing to support any attempt to topple Oli's government.

Dahal's Betrayal and his U Turn:

In a calculated move, Dahal not only declared his intention to form a "unity government", but personally met Oli to convey his decision and also appealed to the UML to join his consensus government!

It is not known what transpired between the UML and the Maoists in the next two days. There is an unsubstantiated Indian media report that Dahal was advised by the Chinese to let Oli continue. It is said that Oli at one point had decided to resign and was to address the nation. But later, he is said to have literally surrendered to Dahal and requested that he may continue till the budget session after which he would hand over power to the Maoist Chief.

On the 6th of May Dahal entered into a formal nine point agreement with the UML that allowed Oli to continue as the Prime Minister. The nine points were most humiliating to a proud person like Oli who in the normal circumstances is not a person who would agree to demean himself just to continue in office for a few more months.

The agreement starts with the first clause that Oli would commit harakiri by taking the initiative to form a national consensus government. Expediting the quake construction work is the last point though it should have been the first and the most important point!

But there were three outrageous points hidden within the nine points and those were 1. Time-bound plan for transitional justice 2. To provide reparations (mark the word) to family members of martyrs and 3. To register ownership of transactions made during the conflict period.

Dahal had no national interest in mind. The victims of the conflict have been left high and dry. He has taken care of his old cadres who had committed atrocities on the poor civilians. There is also a clause that Oli's government should provide medical treatment and sustenance to his comrades during the conflict. Another clause mentioned Oli's undertaking to initiate the process to withdraw or give clemency in insurgency area cases and "other" politically motivated cases filed. Oli is supposed to whitewash all heinous crimes committed during the civil war. Perpetrators are taken care of while the victims were left to themselves. What kind of justice is this?

Nepali Congress and the Madhesi Leaders were made to look Foolish!

It was a well-planned move by the Maoist leader and he has come on top. The Oli government will now be under his mercy and I doubt whether Oli will be allowed to go for long. Meanwhile he is also strengthening himself in his own party with the leaders who left him for Baidya having started to return to his fold. Only Baburam Bhattarai who proved his worth during his brief Prime ministership would continue to remain outside.

It was strange and rather foolish for the Nepali Congress leaders to join hands with the Madhesi groups to topple the Oli government and place the vile Maoist leader Dahal as the head a new government.

The Indian foreign policy establishment should take the credit for throwing a person of the stature of Oli who was normally not known to be well disposed towards either the Maoists or the Chinese into their arms just for his survival.

Economy takes a beating:

It is no surprise that the economy has taken a beating and the danger of a negative growth was narrowly missed. The growth reached a 14-year low to as little as 0.77 percent. Three factors appeared to be responsible. First was the four-month blockade by the Madhesi groups. The blockade not only affected the elite in the Kathmandu valley but also the common citizens of the Terai region. Rajendra Mahato one of the most aggressive pro blockade leaders admitted that the blockade should not have been there at all. The second was the unrest in Terai itself that continued for many months. Both the agriculture and the non agricultural sectors slowed down. And the third and perhaps the most important was the delay in the reconstruction work after the disastrous earthquake.

Was there any progress in any other area? - none at all. Not even in implementation of the new constitution!

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