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It is more than a year and a half that the new constitution was promulgated. Yet there has been no progress at all in implementation as the parties are still quarreling over reconfiguration of different provinces.

The local body elections that are to precede other regional and national elections before January 2018 are bogged down firstly in the demarcation of the boundaries and secondly by two major groups opposing the conduct of the elections. The Madhesi Groups are insisting on the constitutional amendments before the elections, while the second largest political party- the UML is insisting on going ahead with the elections without the constitutional amendments.

In fact the UML sensing that it has an upper hand in the events, is now calling for Parliamentary polls directly to “remove any possibility of a constitutional vacuum.” What democratic credentials can they boast of when they have been systematically stalling the proceedings in the Parliament since November 29? I will not be surprised if they turn around and say that the same thing had happened in India too!

There has been no progress on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Rehabilitation and Reconstruction for the earthquake victims are moving at a snail's pace though no politics is involved. Another surprising development is that the Government is unable to spend the bulk of its budget allotment this year so far.

Almost all stake holders in Nepal are responsible for this sorry state of affairs and it is unfortunate that India had also contributed a little to the mess! It is not surprising that former King Gyanendra who had generally kept away from politics should make an open statement that he is concerned with the developments in Nepal.

The blame should first be placed at the door of the Nepali Congress who were in power when the new constitution was promulgated. There was no urgency when many years had already been wasted to produce a constitution that was not inclusive and what was worse, over 30 percent of the population- the Madhesis who were affected by the new constitution were not consulted at all. The explanation that over 90 percent of the members of the interim parliament endorsed the new constitution does not hold water when a large proportion of the populace was ignored!

Too late in the day, the Indian government sent an emissary to delay the promulgation and go for a more inclusive constitution. There were two flaws in this approach. This was an open and active intervention and no country however small it is, would accept such an advice that would be an affront to their sovereignty and self respect. Second, it should have been done quietly behind doors much before the promulgation and people who should know and did know that such a non inclusive constitution coming out in a hurry would adversely affect the Madhesis and the stability of the region!

The Nepali Congress is riven by factions now and their time is spent more on dividing the spoils rather than concentrating on good administration. It was expected that after the exit of "dynastic politics", the party would do better. On the other hand, it is getting worse with four groups openly declaring their separate identity within the party.

It is important that from a long term point of view for India that the Nepali Congress with its high democratic credentials survives and strengthens itself. For this, it would need a strong leader with charisma and this is lacking. Much hope was placed on younger leaders to take over the party and revive its old glory, but this has not happened. Even a potential charismatic youth leader like Gagan Thapa has not distinguished himself well in running the Health ministry!

One party that gained most at the expense of other parties is the UML led by former Prime Minister K.P. Oli who is riding high on a "nationalist plank" (read anti Indian). If the elections are held now there is no doubt that his party would get through in larger numbers at the expense of the other two parties- the Nepali Congress and the Maoists led by Prachanda. It is believed that Prachanda would not have gone for toppling the UML and its PM Oli, had it not been for the fear that he and his party were steadily losing against the UML. Prachanda's frantic efforts to reconcile with those who had left him is a pointer. The call to Baburam Bhattarai recently is another case in this point. His efforts to bend backwards to please the Nepali Congress is not his style but he is doing it for his survival!

For many who have been following the developments in Nepal, it was surprising that K.P.Oli

should have turned totally against India. Today, leaving the Terai, anti Indian sentiment is sweeping in a large section of Nepali populace. Oli is being credited for standing up to India during the informal blockade that has caused havoc to the country's economy. The blockade was conducted in the "No Man's Land" by the agitating Madhesi groups, but it was widely believed that India had actively supported those groups. People in the valley refused to believe even today that Oli was toppled by the Maoists and the Nepali Congress and not at the behest of India!

The Madhesi leaders have not conducted themselves well in their agitation against the new constitution. After over fifty deaths and scores injured and with economy in shambles they have caused immense harm to the ordinary people. So far they have nothing to show by way of gain to the people and I am sure that many of them cannot go back to their villages without getting the constitution amended to some extent.

The Madhesi groups should have been satisfied when proportional representation in the legislature and in the state apparatus was agreed to by the government soon after the constitution was promulgated. Instead they focussed more on the reconfiguration of the provinces and forced the government to create another controversy by reconfiguring provinces 4 and 5 that were not called for by the people!

Another crisis may soon arise in April when the Nepali Congress should get the chance to take over the Prime Ministership from Prachanda. It was only an informal understanding and it is not clear whether Prachanda would be willing to give up without achieving anything so far!

What needs to be done now? :

1. The Madhesi Groups should for the present give up their demand for reconfiguration of the provinces and leave it to a high-powered Commission to review the boundaries of the provinces. The more they agitate, the more would be the UML gain at the expense of other parties. There is a danger of the country being polarised not by the Madhesi groups but by the UML.
2. Allow the local bodies elections to take place with either the old configuration or the new one recommended by the LBRC. (744 from 507). The latter would have been preferable but it should not at any rate delay the elections.
3. Allow the TRC to function without fear or favour and deal with the cases expeditiously. The country cannot claim to be at peace with itself until the war wounds are settled.
4. Expedite the reconstruction and rehabilitation work. Very little has been done so far though two winters have gone by.

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