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The Grand Surge:

As expected, the Grand Leftist Alliance led by K.P. Oli swept the polls in Nepal both at national and provincial levels with the exception of Province 2 where the Madhesi groups have prevailed. In terms of performance it was one of the worst for the Nepali Congress who have themselves to blame for this huge set back. For India, having supported shifty and incompetent leaders the decimation of the democratic forces must have been expected, but there is no need to panic as is seen in the Indian media.

While the Leftist Alliance has crossed the two thirds mark in the FPTTS (First Past the Post System), in the overall strength of the Parliament of 275, they will not be able to retain the two thirds majority as the Nepali Congress has done adequately well in the Proportional Representational system. Thus the present constitutional structure cannot be changed as was being threatened by the Maoist leader Dahal!

Prominent Winners and Losers:

From the UML, all the three members of the triumvirate K.P.Oli, Madhav Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal have won. Veteran Ishwor Pokhrel of UML has also won.

From the Nepali Congress, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prakash Man Singh (son of late Ganesh Man Singh), Dr. Mrigendra Rijal and youth leader Gagan Thapa have won.

From the Maoists Centre, their chief Dahal has won. So has Baburam Bhattarai the leader of the Naya Shakthi group from Gorkha 2 constituency. The Terrain leaders have all won including Upendra Yadav and Rajendra Mahato. One welcome addition from Terai is the popular pediatrician Dr. Suryanarayan Yadav from Saptari I constituency.

Among the losers would be Narayan Kaji Shrestha from the Maoists Centre, Ramachandra Paudel and Bimalendu Nidhi, Arjun Narsingh KC from Nuwakot, the Mahat brothers and K.P. Situala former Home Minister from the Nepali Congress.

Converting Friends into Enemies:

As expected, the UML riding on a wave of ultra nationalistic anti Indian platform won handsomely. K.P. Oli was seen to be someone who had stood up to India during the blockade period. His inflexible attitude towards the Madhesi groups in refusing to make any amendment to the constitution helped him to rally the hills in his favour. The general feeling in Nepal is that the people have voted for UML for preserving Nepal's sovereignty and territorial integrity!

Traditionally, the UML and their leaders have many contacts with their counterparts in India and were not earlier seen as antagonistic towards India. What has made them turn against India is some thing of a surprise.

The blockade enforced by the Madhesi agitators was seen in the hills as one encouraged by India. The UML used this opportunity to galvanise the rural masses on a nationalistic (read anti Indian) platform and consolidate its position in the hills.

On the other hand, the democratic forces led poorly by the Nepali Congress had no counter strategy to deal with the upsurge in favour of the leftist forces. Though negotiations between the UML and the Maoists who were then in the government had been going on for over a month through low level intermediaries, the Nepali Congress was blissfully unaware of the developments until the alliance was announced. Their intelligence had failed. By then it was too late to make any counter strategy. The Nepali Congress even failed to rope in all the democratic forces to challenge the leftist alliance!

An opportunity for China and a challenge for India:

It is almost certain that K. P. Oli will be taking over as Prime Minister. There is no need to panic as is being displayed in the Indian media- I have said earlier in another paper and I quote-

“ Once when they come to power the UML cannot continue with the antagonism they are displaying now towards India. The left alliance manifesto has a very ambitious agenda and even if it has to implement a quarter of all that is said, it needs the help and cooperation from

India. It is hoped that the UML leadership would sooner than later realise the need to have good relations with India for mutual benefit.”

The Nepalese are a very pragmatic people. For stability and prosperity, Nepal can neither play one against other nor it can afford to anatanogise one power in favour of the other. In this connection, following points arise.

1. There will be very enthusiastic response to the Chinese offer of financing projects under the Belt Road Initiative. It is hoped that Nepal will not fall into a debt trap as is happening to other countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kampuchea, Zimbabwe and Myanmar. Chinese aid is hardly benign!
2. There will be an attempt to dilute dependence on India and diversify trade. India should be ready for it and in fact welcome it.
3. There will be pressure on India to review and revise the special relations and the Indo Nepal Friendship Treaty. The best approach from the Indian side would be to let the Nepalese decide what kind of relationship they would prefer- but facilities should be mutual and not one sided. Let the Nepalese decide on the kind of trade and economic relationship, they would be comfortable with. Fixed exchange rate of two currencies is not a sustainable option and in due course - free floating could be thought of.
4. To me, the leftist surge looks like a temporary one and in course of time, if the democratic forces play their cards level, they could regain the sympathy and support of the masses. But their leadership needs a thorough change. But are they ready?
5. There should be some introspection from the Indian side. The anti Indian sentiments and the surge in the leftist influence should be taken note of. There is a great reservoir of goodwill for India in every walk of life. There is no need for panic either. India needs Nepal as much as Nepal needs India. Hopefully, status quo ante to pre blockade days will be restored!

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