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The impending visit of Indian Foreign Minister to Nepal even before the new government is formed should be welcomed. This visit was preceded by two calls from Indian Prime Minister inviting K.P.Oli to visit India and the response of Oli is very encouraging. In turn, Oli invited the Indian PM to visit Mukthinath and Lumbini and significantly not Janakpur!

Relationship between Nepal and India should be strictly reciprocal:

If the relationship had gone sour earlier by the indirect support of a blockade, the fact that India has finally realised its folly and making a course correction is all the more encouraging. It should be added that Oli should be really thankful to India as his party could not have come to power with an overwhelming majority but for the anti Indian platform on which he carried on the election campaign!

Oli may also need to make a course correction as he was seen earlier of deliberately leaning towards China in the last few months of his last government. Nepal needs India as much as India needs Nepal and a state of confrontation will not help in the long run. UML's manifesto has an ambitious economic agenda and it cannot be fulfilled without active and whole hearted support of India.

At the same time, India should be open to any discussion and review of the Indo Nepal Friendship Treaty which in the present globalised world is an anachronism. We should leave it to Nepal as to what kind of relationship it wants including security, work permits or the open border but ensure at the same time that all facilities and beneficial relationship are strictly reciprocal.

Indian policy makers should also be aware that the Nepali Congress and its affiliates with democratic credentials are still a force to reckon with and should not be neglected. To me, the setbacks they had faced in the recent elections are of their own doing and the party should be expected to bounce back under a bright and capable younger leadership with a good strategy to recover its lost ground.

Stability and Prosperity Thrown to the Winds:

In the elections for the federal constitution of 2015, the electorate voted overwhelmingly for the Leftist alliance in the hope that at least now there could be stability and economic progress for the next few years. It looks that the people are going to be disappointed.

First, is the arrogance of the main party- the UML. It was expected that once the UML has won an overwhelming majority, it would be generous in dealing with other parties. The Madhesi parties particularly the RJP-N and the SSF-N were very sincere in approaching the Leftist Alliance for seat adjustments for the National Assembly elections which eventually could pave the way for the parties to join the government. All they had asked was a promise that the constitutional amendment that would do justice for the Madhesi cause would be carried out. It was declined.

It is learnt that the leftist alliance was not willing to do so now and it claimed that it will be done only on rationale (whatever it means) and the necessity. They had also pointed out that the two mainstream parties had considerable number of votes from province number 2 in the elections and that the demand of the two main parties cannot be taken as “representative.” It is sad that the UML lost an opportunity to go for reconciliation and have an “inclusive” government that would have been beneficial to all.

The Nepali Congress has equally been petty in refusing to accommodate the Madhesi groups in the National elections. Having been decisively defeated in the national elections, the party could have been more generous in accommodating other well meaning groups. It is said that it is the Terain leaders within the Nepali Congress who are opposing the inclusion of the major Madhesi groups within their party. It is sad indeed!

Merger Problems:

The talks between UML and the Maoist Centre is not going on smoothly. There are even differences over the timing of the merger. The Maoist leader wants to have a complete merger before the formation of the government while the UML would like to go slow.

A party unity coordination committee as well as a special task force of both parties have been formed. The two leaders- Oli and Dahal have met twice over the merger, but there seems to be many thorny issues that cannot be resolved in the immediate future.

The coordination committee has not met so far and the two parties are stuck both on ideology and leadership. While the UML is willing to share power in leading the government, the party- particularly the rank and file are not willing to give up the leadership of the united party.

The Maoist centre is unwilling to give up the leadership of the party either and the members are not willing to have a subordinate position for its leader Dahal in the unified party. Dahal himself has rejected outright the second highest position in the party!

Ideology is going to be another sticking point- while UML would go for a people's multiparty democracy, the Maoist leaders are not willing to accept any downgrading of the people's war of theirs and Maoism in the united party government. Dahal is reported to have said that the Maoist Centre does not want to lose its proud history and that they have not abandoned Maoism! Then why go for the merger then unless it was to make it winnable in the elections?

UML's Problems:

It is almost certain that the rank and file of UML that has won a decisive victory in the elections will not accept anyone other their own leaders to lead the unified party. They feel that the Maoist Party joined the mainstream only 12 years ago and will have to wait.

Many of the cadres of the UML have suffered at the hands of the Maoists at the time of the people's war. I recall an incident during the first election for the interim government. Over a hundred UML cadres had to seek shelter in the Police post in Rasuwa when the Maoist cadres attacked them during the election campaign! There were many more.

There is a justifiable fear that the party- the UML with its ideology will be swallowed up by the Maoists in due course!

The two leaders Oli and Dahal may agree but the party cadres at the ground level may not accept a total merger.

It looks that finally the two parties - UML and MC-N may ultimately end up as two entities in running the government!

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