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Nepal: PM Oli's India Visit: Pressing the Reset Button on Indo-Nepal Relations: Update No. 364:

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PM Oli's visit to India appears to have been a great success and a rapprochement in relations between the two countries has come not a day earlier. The Press on both sides have positively reported on the outcome of the three-day visit of Prime Minister Oli.

It is to Oli's credit that despite his ultra nationalist rhetoric and his election on an anti Indian wave, he had realised that confrontation with India will do no good for both countries and rightly he has chosen to visit India first after taking over.

It is to India's credit too, of having realised the folly of indirectly supporting a blockade in the agitation by the Madhesi groups and the urgent need for immediate remedial measures to reset the relationship between the two countries for mutual benefit. Efforts taken at the personal level both by Prime Minister Modi and Indian External Affairs Minister to reach out to Nepal should be appreciated.

Oli had said in one of his meetings that his priorities were on improvement in energy. Agriculture, IT, tourism and above all infrastructure. Oli's able Finance Minister in his "white paper" has described the 'fiscal anarchy' that has been preventing stable growth. The economy is said to be in bad shape, with a rising trade deficit, decline in remittances, negative balance of payment position and worse- empty coffers. There was therefore a need to have a balanced economic relationship with both the neighbours- India and China

The US Ambassador in one of articles had said recently that "Nepal has a clear and straight forward path to greater prosperity, but achieving its full potential requires deeper connectivity with the dynamic south Asian economy".

In its Asian Development Outlook 2018, the ADB had said that India's economic growth will rise to 7.3 percent this fiscal year and further to

7.6 percent in the next financial year thus retaining of being the fastest growing Asian economy on the back of GST and banking reforms.

What is being pointed here is that despite differences that always occur in two countries that are close to each other, there is need for Nepal to fully utilise the opportunities now being offered by India and not continue with the anti Indian stance which had already brought in dividends in being elected but will be of no use anymore.

Of the many deals, connectivity between Nepal and India has taken the highest priority with a Railway link to Kathmandu from Raxaul and extension of Railways from Nepalgunj road to Nepalgunj, Bhirawa to Nautanua and Kakarbita to Jalpaiguri. There is also an offer for a rail link from Jogbani to Jayanagar and to Janakpur. Agriculture cooperation is another area of agreement between the two countries. This will particularly be useful to Province number 2.

The Indian Press has unfortunately given a twist to these agreements in saying that these projects were agreed to with China in mind!

PM Oli in one of his interviews to an Indian Newspaper had already pointed out about many schemes approved by both sides but had never taken off at all. One such complaint has been on the agreement on Pancheswar Project. It is necessary for the Indian side to make a doable time line and stick to it by all means. It is said that the survey for the Raxaul- Kathmandu line will be completed within one year after which the DPR will be made. It is hoped that delay is avoided at any cost and the officials responsible for the projects should be made accountable for any delays and cost over run that may occur.

In other areas- Oli's government is yet to induct the Madhesi group of SSF (N) of Upendra Yadav into his government though there were hopes that it would happen soon after PM Oli's visit to India. This has not happened. It looks that Upendra Yadav and some of the leaders are very eager to become ministers even if there is no iron clad guarantee of amending the constitution from the government. They do not seem to be either unduly perturbed over the non release of the report of the commissions on the Madhesi agitation of 2015 and 2016 where excessive and unjustifiable force was used to put down the movement!

The supposed merger of the two major parties the UML and the MC of the Grand Alliance is not expected to take place on April 22nd as was announced. The Maoist Centre of Dahal now wants a fifty percent representation at least in the Central Committee and there are differences on the matter of ideology in the joint document that is being prepared. Dahal perhaps wants to make out that his "people's War" that took the lives of over 12000 innocent lives had "achieved" its political goals. He feels justifiably insecure and he cannot be blamed with the press reminding almost every day of the woes of the victims during the civil war. The latest one was the reminder in the press on the nasty attack at Beni which took the lives of many people including civilians during the conflict.

It was a bit of a surprise that both the government from the Prime Minister downwards and the Press strongly criticised the recommendation of the Election Observers from the European Union that the major dominant combine Khas Arya should not be eligible for any quota. This

was an innocent observation but the fact remains that Khas Arya combine does hold an effectively dominant position in all walks of life in Nepal!

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