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On 17th of May, the Chiefs of UML and Maoists Centre, Nepal announced the merger of their two parties and the formation of a new party-called Communist Party of Nepal. The day also marked the 25th anniversary of late Madan Bhandari of UML who died in a car accident though many still believe that he died under suspicious circumstances.

This formal announcement of a merger came after intense negotiations for two hours at Baluwatar between Oli the UML chief and Dahal- the head of the Maoist Centre the previous day.

The following decisions appear to have been taken and it is said that both the chiefs gave in on some issues to allow the merger. Compromises had to be made and it was done. Dahal did not insist on a fifty-fifty proportion of office bearers while Oli agreed to accept the benefits of People's War as an ideological line. The details as known from the press are as follows.

* The new party will be headed by both Oli and Dahal as Co. Chairmen of the party.

* The Sun will be symbol of the new party. (Sun was the symbol of UML)

* There is an informal understanding that the prime ministership will be rotated between the two and Oli will step down after three years to make way for Dahal.

* There will be a nine-member Secretariat with Bishnu Paudel as General Secretary and Narayan Kaji Shrestha as the Spokesman. This will include the three senior leaders of UML- Madhav Nepal, Jhalanath Khanal and Bamdev Gautham as well as other members- Ishwor Pokhrel of UML and Ram Bahadur Thapa of Maoist Centre.

* There will be a standing Committee of 45 members to be divided between UML and MC in the proportion of 26 to 19.

* Similarly there will be a Central Committee of 441 members with UML having 241 members and the MC 200 members

* The ideological frame work will include the positive aspects of People's multi party democracy and that of the People's democracy of the 21st century of the Maoists. The final document is supposed to include the political achievements of the people's war that ushered secularism and federalism as well as the philosophy of Marxism and Leninism (whatever it means!)

* The structural arrangements of the party will remain till the regular convention that will be held within one year from the formation of the party.

Dahal likened the merger of the two parties as that of the molecules of hydrogen and oxygen getting fused to form water and the implication is that water cannot once again be broken into oxygen and hydrogen molecules! He claimed that the "new force" will provide for stability, development and prosperity of the people.

The new party will have 174 MPs out of 275 in the Lower house and 39 out of 59 in the upper house. This does not include three members the government can nominate to the upper house.

While the new party will have a significant and comfortable majority to go along with their agenda they will still be short of two thirds majority to make any constitutional amendments. For this, the help of one of the Terain Groups will be necessary and it is heard that Upendra Yadav of SSFN is only too eager to join if he is given the post of Deputy Prime Ministership! That innocent lives were unnecessarily lost in the Terai during the agitation thanks to the Madhesi leaders has been forgotten!

Though there are smaller and insignificant leftist parties, the merger of the two main stream parties is historic and fulfills the dream of late Pushpalal- 69 years after the party was established in the same name in the country. This agreement comes almost 8 months after the initial agreement when the two parties jointly contested the elections.

The general expectation of the public is that the new party will be able to provided political stability to the country that was badly needed for economic development.

The reaction of the Nepali Congress was surprisingly sober and it said that the merger will strengthen democracy. The party is yet to come to terms with the debacle they had and the rise of the powerful leftist alliance which people expect to rule for the next five years. Deuba who should have quit after the debacle continues to call the shots. The Koirala clan is still alive and clicking and courted by the embassies. Ramachandra Paudel who has lost his relevance still believes that he has a great following wants to be heard on all issues! The younger crowd led by Gagan Thapa continues to be marginalised. Gagan who made a fine speech in the Parliament on the day Oli took over should have been nominated to call on Indian PM but was not and he continues to be ignored. Arjun Narsing KC who believes that the Party will have to unite to meet the challenge failed in his efforts to get the leaders together. The Nepali Congress needs to revamp itself against a formidable opponent in the new Communist Party of Nepal. But it is yet to show the urgency or the need!

On the new communist party itself, it is difficult to say how it will move along though it is the wish of all those interested in Nepal's stability that the new party succeeds. Nepal needs it. The problem is that the decisions on the merger have been handed over from the top to the cadres at the grass roots level and may not be acceptable. The convention which is scheduled to be had within one year will throw up more complications and discontentment as many of the leaders of the present may not have the same status or power.

It is to the credit of Oli that he went out of the way to ensure that Indian PM's visit was a success. Nepal needs the support of both India and China for its economic development and this is being understood in Nepal by all sections of people. This is a good sign!

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