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Nepal: Oli Should Take stern Action Against Chand Group despite opposition from Within:

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Kathmandu witnessed another major explosion again by the Chand Group on 12th March and the Oli Government which was dilly dallying in taking any decisive action was forced to act. The same day, Prime Minister Oli in one of his meetings declared that the Government considers the Nepal Communist Party led by Netra Bikram Chand as a criminal group and that all its activities will be banned.

This announcement as expected was opposed not by the Opposition Party but by the senior party leaders within the Ruling Party led by the Co-Chairman Dahal.

Soon after the decision, Oli took time to brief the two senior political leaders Dahal, the Co-Chairman of his party and the leader of opposition Deuba. In fact, Oli sought the support of both the leaders to take strong measures against the Chand Group, an action that was long over due.

Dahal openly criticized Prime Minister's action and said that the Party should have been consulted before making important and big decisions. He also had an informal meeting with other top leaders of the Party, Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jalanath Khanal, Bamdev Gautam all belonging to erstwhile UML and chief rivals to Oli and his own deputy Narayan Kaji Shrestha. All these leaders ganged up against Oli to criticize the action of the Government in banning the Chand outfit. Although they were not for taking strong action against Chand Group, they tried to make it appear as if Oli had acted unilaterally without consulting them and hence their stand against the Government.

Madhav Nepal, former Prime Minister who is known for his moderate views unlike his other colleague Jhalanath Khanal, made a surprising statement that the party cannot back that decision.

What triggered the Government's move was not only the explosion that had taken place a few days before the next investment summit where foreign investors were due to arrive but the captured documents of Chand's party that revealed that the group had planned to spread violence in the future.

It was made known that the Government took the decision only after repeated attempts to invite Chand and his party leaders for a meeting to discuss their grievances had failed.

Deuba-the NCP leader said that the Chand group had been terrorizing the people and that their friends were targeted and attacked by the group. Again, the surprise was that even some progressive leaders like Gagan Thapa of his party criticized the move!

The Chand Group had been repeatedly indulging in violence and the Government had so far been very lenient without realizing that such inaction would only encourage the group to spread more violence. It may be recalled that the Chand Group had attacked the Arun III project site earlier and had warned that it will not allow the upper Karnali Hydro Electric Project being constructed by an Indian private firm to move forward.

Following a major explosion in Kathmandu and simultaneous destruction of N Cell towers in twelve districts I had in my paper 6502 dated 1st March said that the incidents should not be taken lightly and strict action should follow. But nothing was done until another major explosion took place on 12th of March.

I had said and I quote- "It is hoped that the Oli Government at least Prime Minister Oli would recall the old days and does not allow history to repeat itself. The erstwhile Maoists may be soft for other reasons, but Oli cannot take it lightly and should take all measures to prevent the Chand Group from spreading its brand of revolution again and play with the lives of the innocents."

The problem is with Dahal himself who is aware of the shrinking political space he has now within the merged Nepal Communist Party with Oli continuing to call the shots. He is also fast losing popularity with his own erstwhile cadres who appear to admire those leaders who left him including Netra Bikram Chand who appears to be more popular. His call for a dialogue with the Chand group is a feeble attempt to maintain his relevance in the political landscape of Nepal and to rebuild his image. He was also seen to be ingratiating himself with the Indian establishment to project himself as the alternate leader. It is hoped that transitional justice will not leave him alone and he should be made accountable for the loss of over 16000 lives in the civil war that was started by him.

On good recent development has been a eleven point deal Oli made with the separatist Terain leader C.K. Raut on 8th March who had just

been released the previous day on the orders of the Supreme Court. Raut who had been in jail frequently for his call for independence of Terai, has now agreed to join the mainstream politics and embrace the principle of sovereignty, territorial integrity and dignity of the country as per the spirit of the Constitution. It is not clear as to what Raut obtained from Oli as a quid pro quo, but the credit certainly goes to Oli for closing one sordid chapter and a major irritant from Terai.

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