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Nepal: Explosions in Kathmandu By Chand Group: Not to be taken Lightly

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On 26th May, a day prior to their declared hartal, a series of blasts by the Chand group in Kathmandu and its environs should be an eye opener to the Oli administration that soft options have not worked despite a sympathetic approach by some of his erstwhile Maoist colleagues.

In all, there were three major explosions resulting in four deaths and injuries to seven of whom three are in a very critical condition. Of the eleven casualties- surprisingly the four killed and six of the seven injured belong to the Chand faction of the CPN.

It was after a bomb explosion near Nakhu in Kathmandu on March 12th, that Oli despite objections from his own senior colleagues like Dahal banned the Chand Outfit who were once part of the CPN Maoists during the civil war days.

The first explosion was in a house near Ghattekhula at 4.30 in the evening on the 26th that killed one person who was later identified as Prajjawal Shahi, a leader of the CPN aligned student wing in the Council of Technical Education and Vocational training. He was reportedly making a bomb to be connected to a gas cylinder when it accidentally went off killing him instantaneously. His room-mate Rabin KC also a leader of the student wing of the CPN also sustained severe head injuries and is said to be in a critical condition. He is from Rukum.

According to Police sources say that both Shahi and Rabin were making the bomb to be planted in a public place the next day during the bandh declared by the Chand Group. Leaflets relating to the bandh were also found in the room of the accident. It is interesting to note that the place where the incident took place was hardly a hundred metres from the Singha Durbar- the seat of the Federal Government!

Later in the night, the Police found a pressure cooker bomb (a standard type used to be made by the Maoists during the civil war days) in the same house!

Another pressure cooker bomb went off in a barber's shop at Sokedhara, at another place in Kathmandu killing three persons and injuring four others. One died on the spot, while two others died while undergoing treatment at the Hospital. Their identities have since been established as that of cadres of CPN of Chand Group.

In yet another incident, two persons were injured when a bomb they were carrying on a motorcycle exploded in Nagdhunga of Chandragiri Municipality. They have been identified as CPN cadres Akash Lama and Buddha Lama. Police said they were receiving treatment at National Trauma Centre under security surveillance. The Police have also arrested seven CPN cadres with four ready-to-plant pressure cooker bombs from Koteshwor. A huge cache of CPN literature was also found.

A bomb disposal squad of Nepali Army defused the IEDs planted in Lagankhel Bus Park and Gwarko of Lalitpur.

Media reports indicate that the Police had prior information of likelihood of such untoward incidents. The hartal on the 27th was a near success and Kathmandu came to a near stand-still. It does not mean that the Chand group is popular in the valley but it people were generally reluctant to come out into the streets fearing violence.

We had earlier in our paper 6509 dated 15th March suggested that Prime Minister Oli should take strong action against the Chand Group despite opposition from within. Former General Basynet who writes on security issues had also mentioned that Oli has only two options- either deal with them politically or deal sternly militarily.

To me it looked that the Government had not taken the threat posed by the Chand group seriously until the Nakhu incident. Even here, while Oli promptly banned the outfit, other senior leaders in his party like the Co chairman Dahal were unhappy not because of the tough measures taken but the fact that it was done unilaterally without consulting them!

There are too many ex Maoists who are very unhappy and who feel that they have been given a raw deal. They feel that while they have been left high and dry, the leaders have been found to be enjoying power and luxury! They need to be talked to. While military action should continue, the leaders will have to talk to the misguided cadres as also other leaders who have joined the Chand group. Nepal cannot afford to have another round of a civil war! The situation if allowed to grow will get more serious and it is not known how many in the ruling party are really serious about it.

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