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Nepal: High Political Drama Continues amidst Wuhan Pandemic:

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In our last paper we had mentioned about the political drama being played out by PM Oli and his colleagues in his party, when two undemocratic Ordinances were introduced by Oli and hurriedly withdrawn within five days by 20th April when he found that he had no majority in the Party Secretariat and his ouster was therefore imminent.

Subsequently, Oli tried to patch up with the Co. Chairman Dahal of the erstwhile Maoist Party as also with Madhav Nepal, former Prime Minister and Senior Leader of the former UML and both, when the Party Secretariat met on Wednesday 29th April, Oli's group consisting of Ishwar Pokkhrel, Bishnu Paudel, Ram Bahadur Thapa besides himself was in a minority. Only the previous day, both Dahal and Madhav Nepal had insisted that Oli should quit.

Strange it may seem- the Chinese embassy with its new Ambassador Hou Yangqi openly interfered with the developments and perhaps wanted to make sure that a communist Government does not collapse. It was not a coincidence that President Xi telephoned his counterpart in Nepal expressing his happiness on the return of Oli after the Kidney transplant. and also of China's support to fight the endemic. He perhaps sought Nepal's support internationally amidst the accusations made by more and more countries on China's culpability in dealing with the Wuhan Virus,

At the Secretariat meeting on 29th (Wednesday), Oli dropped a bombshell. He said that he was willing to hand over Prime Ministership to Bam Dev Gautam who on many earlier occasions had made his desire known to everybody. But people had repeatedly rejected him in the parliamentary elections. His bid to get a seat through the National Assembly was also earlier rejected outright by PM Oli.

Oli also made an offer to make Madhav Nepal as the third Co Chairman of the combined Party (NCP). Madhav Nepal did not fall for this proposal and he is said to have told his aide that the proposal was brought by Oli to disgrace him and show to the whole country that

Madhav Nepal is only after power!

Oli knew that the Gautham cannot become the Prime Minister through the National Assembly route as there is no provision in the Constitution of a National Assembly member to be elected as the Prime Minister. It was known to everyone that Oli does not have the required majority either to make any constitutional amendment. The other route- through the Parliament is time consuming and cannot happen overnight. But Gautham is said to have been pleased by the suggestion and in fact had made enquiries from legal luminaries soon after.

At this juncture, the Chinese embassy also got active. The Chinese Ambassador called on Oli on Thursday 30th April. She also met Dahal the co. chairman of the NCP as well as Madhav Nepal. It is said the Ambassador had three points to discuss. 1. The ongoing crisis in the ruling party 2. Chinese assistance to fight the pandemic in Nepal. 3. Seek Nepal's support against international politicization of the pandemic.

It is also reported that Sung Tao the Head of the International Liaison of the Communist Party of China had a video chat with Madhav Nepal.

It was at this juncture, the Secretariat of the Ruling Party consisting of nine members met on Saturday, the 2nd of May. Now Oli had a majority with Bam Dev Gautham joining him to make it five out of nine. Oli suggested that at an appropriate time, he would find a suitable slot in a bye election, letting one of the MPs to resign and Bamdev could contest the elections. This route is not going to be easy either, as Oli has to find a suitable NCP stronghold, make the MP of that constituency resign and then let Gautham stand for elections. There is no guarantee either that even with all the precautions, the electorate would still vote for Gautham!

But Oli has succeeded in buying time to continue and he has been very clever in outsmarting his other colleagues in the party including the sly and undependable Dahal the Head of the former Maoist Party.

Oli can be accused of being autocratic and arrogant - but certainly he is more competent than the other former Prime Ministers of his party who are now bent upon ousting him. One Columnist in the issue of Republica Nepal of 30th April described Oli as the most incompetent, most inept and most regressive leader the country has ever had in its history. He has perhaps run out of more epithets, but surely Oli is not that bad as is being made out to be.

What is surprising is that when the country is going through a very difficult phase in combating the economic fallout, the political leaders are at loggerheads to discredit each other and grab power with no intention of seriously looking into the problems faced by the people in combating the Wuhan Virus epidemic.

There have been only 59 confirmed cases so far in Nepal of which in 16 cases the patients have recovered. There have been no deaths

either. Of the 59, three or four were the returnees of the Tablighi Jamaat from Delhi, and three more of Indians who had visited. But very tests were conducted. The country does not have enough masks, hand gloves or even sanitizers. It is said that over 760 Security Posts have no toilets either.

There are over a million Nepali migrants in India and many want to return to Nepal. Many of the migrants running into thousands have been allowed to cross the border and proceed further on their promise that they will “quarantine themselves” on reaching their homes. Thousands more are stranded in the border.

Migrant returnees from India and from other countries are said to have gathered in Jumla and Doti- the hubs for moving towards the hill districts. Many migrants from the Gulf particularly from Qatar are waiting to return.

Due to lock down, the supply chain is disrupted and there is a looming food crisis. The Foreign currency inflow from remittances and from the tourists has dwindled.

With all the above problems, when the party and the Government should work unitedly, we find the strange spectacle of the political leaders indulging in the toppling game. Sad indeed!

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