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Nepal: Constitution Amendment Bill on New Map Passed- An Unwise Move:

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On Saturday, 13th of June, Nepal's Parliament passed the Constitution Amendment Bill in approving the New map that included the disputed areas of Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani by 258 votes in a house of 275. It is said that one lone member from former RJP, Sarita Giri tried to oppose the bill but was forced to withdraw by her party leaders.

By rushing ahead with the bill, Oli has more or less fore closed all chances of a quick solution or even a dialogue with India.

The Indian response was quick and to the point. It said "this artificial enlargement of claims is not tenable since it is not based on historical facts or evidence" and is also violative of the current understanding to hold talks on outstanding boundary issues.

Earlier, soon after the Cabinet decision, Oli's Government formed a nine-member team to collect historical facts and evidence to be used in negotiating with India.

Acclaimed Cartographer and former Director General of Survey Buddhi Narayan Shrestha wondered why the Government was giving a mandate to a team of Experts to collect historical facts and evidence when the map has already been released.

Dinesh Bhattarai, a former Ambassador said that the formation of a panel after the cabinet decision was like "putting the horse before the cart." He was of the view that such a panel could weaken Nepal's position while negotiating with India.

Much later, the Foreign Minister Gyawali sheepishly declared that the objective of the team is provide support and give inputs to the Government for talks with India on boundary issues rather than collecting evidence and historical facts. The Foreign Minister is under a

delusion that with the display of its serious intent on the boundary dispute on the Lipulekh area by hurriedly passing the Constitution Amendment Bill, India would be rushing with its experts to Kathmandu to discuss the border issue!

Soon after the Parliament vote, Gyawali the Foreign Minister declared -“We are for starting dialogue soon. The problem will be solved through diplomacy. Why then, did he rush through the Constitution Amendment Bill?

It should be conceded that Oli by ratcheting up Nationalist rhetoric on the border issue has silenced his opponents within the Party and has virtually turned the tables on them. In fact no one would seriously criticise Oli in an environment where Nationalism has overshadowed Governance. Jhalanath Khanal a former Prime Minister and senior a colleague of the NCP said “there is no party- there is only Oli.”

The opposition Nepali Congress declared that while People are dying of hunger, traders and Business people are looking for a stimulus package and the economy in need of a recovery, the Government has turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to all these problems.

Meantime, the protests that started before PM’s residence at Baluwater that were dispersed by force is now spreading all over the country and could soon develop into a crisis and even Cartographic nationalism may not help.

More than 1000 people in Kathmandu and hundreds across the country demonstrated again the following day demanding financial transparency and better management of the Wuhan Virus from the Government.

The crowd that gathered at Balbhateni was peaceful and keep the social distancing. They demanded again for improving the Quarantine conditions, make wider use of the PCR and make full disclosure of the expenditure of the money spent to meet the spread of the Virus.

The participants were mostly young people and not affiliated to any political party. They had contacted each other through social media and had gathered at appointed places.. The protests spread to other places like Pokhara, Biratnagar, Chitwan, Hetauda and Birgunj. All the protests were peaceful.

This time, a larger number had gathered before the PM’s Baluwater residence and were again pushed and treated with tear gas and water canons though the protestors were armed only with placards and had followed “social distancing.”

Interestingly, some foreigners had also participated in the demonstrations at Maitighar Mandal. Seven Foreigners were taken into custody by the Police and these included people from China, USA, France, Canada and Australia!

The first group of migrants returned to Nepal from Kuwait on the 11th. A large number of flights will be needed to get all those from the Gulf and Malaysia.

The Government has imposed an odd and even rule for vehicles plying in Kathmandu. Two wheelers have been allowed but without the pillion riders. Due to public pressure the Government is planning to ease the lock down further.

The Government has accounted under a broad outline the expenditure of 8.39 Billion Rupees among the Centre, Provinces and local bodies. Pasupathinath temple continues to be closed and it is said to be losing one million a day that used to come as temple offerings. Remittances from abroad have also come down drastically.

The Government has also disbanded the High Level Coordination Committee set up for the prevention and Control of the Covid 19 (Wuhan) Virus and the Crisis Management Centre set up for the same purpose will be taking over the duties. The High level Committee had nothing so far.

The time for Nationalist Rhetoric is over for Oli and unless India helps to boost his ego, he will have to come to grips with many critical problems the country is facing. His incompetence is well known. Mark Murphy has said that real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance and Oli is not aware of his own shortcomings.

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