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Nepal: Removal of Defence Minister is not to Placate India:

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PM Oli in his usual style and on his own made a small reshuffle in his cabinet, with Ishwor Pokhrel the Defence Minister being relieved of his Defence portfolio and made minister for the PMO . Ishwor Pokhrel was once thought to be close to Oli has now been relegated to a post of a Minister without Portfolio.

More importantly Oli appointed the General Secretary of the NCP Bishnu Paudel as the new Finance Minister. Oli is said to have taken the decision on his own and did not consult either the other co chairman Dahal or his senior leaders of the Party like Madhav Nepal. The Party leaders in the NCP are therefore understandably furious. But Oli having the support of the Chinese could not care less.

Bishnu Paudel though not a senior happens to be the main rival of Pokhrel in the Party as the latter had earlier shown his unhappiness when Paudel was made the General Secretary of the Ruling Party.

The Indian media interpreted the removal of Pokhrel as a gesture towards India as Pokhrel was said to be anti Indian. Pokhrel was also removed on the eve of the visit of Indian Army Chief to Nepal and this is considered to be another gesture of Oli's eagerness to make up with India. Some analysts in the media have even jumped to the conclusion that Oli is looking to reset and restore Nepal's relations with India after all the insults and humiliation he had heaped on India personally by him in the last few months!

This interpretation that Oli by his gestures wants to reset his relations with India goes totally against the character of Oli who is now out to destroy what little good relations India has had with Nepal over a period of time. The Cabinet Reshuffle was long in the planning and Oli did it once he made sure that there was no danger of his being forced out of the post of the PM by other leaders of the Party. This had nothing to do with the visit of the Indian Army Chief.

The visit of the Indian Army Chief is a regular and routine one when a new Chief in the Indian Army takes over. This is a tradition that has been going on for years irrespective of the relations between the two countries. The Indian Chief is given the honorary rank of a General in the Nepal Army in a big "investiture function" and is reciprocated by the Indian side too.

It appears that Ishwor Pokhrel the former Defence Minister was not getting along too well with the Nepal Army Chief Purna Chandra Thapa. The Army Chief was not particularly happy with the way Army was involved in the procurement of medical items over which someone down the line made money.

Secondly Ishwor Pokhrel who was made the Coordinator of the management of spread of Covid 19 (Wuhan Virus) had failed to handle it efficiently. He is also facing corruption charges on the procurement of medical equipment from China.

As of date a total of 126137 people have found to be affected by the Wuhan Virus of whom 715 have died. What is worrisome is that the Virus is slowly creeping into the valley in a big way. Daily incidence of cases is getting proportionately high in Kathmandu. Yesterday, of the 1454 cases reported, 696 cases were from the valley.

It is commonly said and it is true also, that the political leaders in Nepal take notice of any incident only when it happens in the valley. Now the people in Kathmandu are agitated with the spread of the Virus in the Valley. Prime Minister Oli with his other comorbid ailments is himself vulnerable.

Gagan Thapa the young and popular leader of the Nepali Congress said that the "core problem of the people which they are facing currently has not touched Prime Minister Oli. He has done nothing except holding meetings with Dahal to resolve internal party dispute, to problems in Lumbini (on the question of location of capital) and Karnali Provinces and reshuffling of Ministers in the Cabinet." But Gagan should make his own leader Sher Bahadur Deuba more active. Instead we notice that Deuba is more keen to corner as many Constitutional posts as possible for his own people and is not seen to be concerned over the spread of the Virus in the country!

Oli has perhaps no time to take care of the pandemic which is reaching dangerous proportions. His pungent witticisms and jokes are no longer liked. Even his suggested home remedies for the Virus have not worked.. What is surprising is that he is getting away with all his incompetence.

Achyut Wagle, a Management Professor in the Kathmandu School of Management poses the question “Does Nepal await another popular revolt?” He continues that there seems to be a dearth of a clear organised public anger against the federal Government’s failure.

How can one depend on a leader who himself is flouting all protocol Covid 19 norms and guidelines? This is a question being asked by many Analysts.

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