



View Point

Deepening Political Crisis in Nepal

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Trust Deficit and the Dream of the ‘New Nepal’

In the history of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, May 28, 2008 is a historic day. This is so because on this day, the members of the Constituent Assembly (CA) of Nepal had decided to draft a constitution for a ‘New Nepal’. The general election of 2008 and the mutual agreement among all political parties to draft a new constitution was seen as an opportunity to end the civil war and an effort to rebuild the multi-party democracy. The mandate to draft the constitution was for two years. However, after the expiry of the mandate, the CA has been not been able to draft a constitution for Nepal due to disagreements over several contentious issues among the major political parties of the country. There is a belief that the failure of the CA to frame the new constitution has the potential to jeopardize the 2006 peace deal between the major political parties of Nepal. Further, the people of Nepal are disappointed over unresolved differences among political parties, widespread corruption, and indefinite general strikes. The root of the problem lies in the ‘trust deficit’ among the key parties, which poses a serious threat to peace in Nepal apart from being a major obstacle in drafting the constitution.

The New Accord

The three big players of the Nepali politics i.e. the Nepali Congress (NC) led by the acting President Sushil Koirala, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)-CPN (UML) under Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal,

and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)-UCPN (Maoist) under Pushpa Kumar Dahal 'Prachand' have agreed in haste on the three-point accord to save the CA at the last moment. The three parties agreed to bring a logical end to the peace process and accomplish the historical goal of drafting the new constitution by extending the tenure of the CA by one year, till May 28 2011, as also to form a national unity government in consensus. This arrangement has ensured that the Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, who heads the coalition government, can survive for a shortwhile to prevent political chaos.

Root Causes of the 'Disagreements'

The political parties are in disagreement over several issues including the return of the seized property during the Jan Andolan II (1996-2006) to its rightful owners, abide by the past political agreements and understandings, and scrapping the structure of the Young Communist League (YCL). It is important to note that YCL is a fusion of the UCPN (Maoist) Party's military and political wing and comprises of People's Liberation Army (PLA) members who have interest in politics. Most of the YCL members are reported to be combatants whom the CPN-Maoist did not want confined in the barracks under the regulation of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). Some of the members who have the experience in fighting during the insurgency era (1996-2006) were trained by the CPN-Maoist.

But, the most important part of the political deal is the plan to send PLA into the Nepal Army. Also, there is a proposal to send some PLA members to the Forest Security Force, where they would work with army units, presumably to combat poaching of wildlife. The remaining PLA men and women would be given a 'rehabilitation' package that includes education and job training. But, Nepal Army's recent move to announce new recruitment for its infantry has invited reactions from the UCPN (Maoist) who during their meetings concluded that the recruitment drive undermines the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006.

Reaction by Civil Society

The people of Nepal are disappointed over the present political stalemate in Nepal. Most of the people feel that all political parties are motivated by usurping political power rather than drafting the constitution. Also, there is a sense of fear and

apprehension that the country might again plunge into political turmoil. The donor community (including UN, US, UK etc) which has significantly funded the state agencies and non-government sectors for the initiatives on constitution writing, too, is concerned about the delay in the drafting of the constitution. The Maoists' method of obstruction and confrontation also undermines the basic democratic mechanisms. Overall, the general public believes that political parties must redress the existing 'trust deficit' among themselves in order to move forward on the drafting of the constitution.

India's Role in the making of 'Peaceful Nepal'

At this crucial juncture of drafting of constitution and nation-building in Nepal, India should extend its support wholeheartedly for a national consensus in Nepal and to facilitate the writing of a new constitution during the next one year of the CA. As an important neighbor, India should reach out to all political parties in Nepal and express its willingness to support for the success of peace process. However, it is important that India should assure the people of Nepal that it is not interfering in their internal affairs. A stable and prosperous Nepal is critical for maintaining political, economic and social ties between the two neighbours and also for South Asia.

Perhaps, the most important issue for India, is not which party, leader or coalition rules Nepal in the name of 'national government' for the extended one year term of the CA, but the issue is 'will Nepal get its much desired peace and stability'? There is an earnest desire among the peoples of Nepal that their political leaders should come to a consensus and take the peace process forward and not squander this historic opportunity. It would be pertinent to mention that Nepal is not heading towards a new nation-wide conflict, although a state of continual disorder remains. There is no alternate to consensus, conciliation and cooperation among the three main political parties to draft the constitution.

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