

Next Door Nepal: Governing is negotiating

The return of K P Oli, chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist, as prime minister was a foregone conclusion. On Thursday, President Bidhya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli. But the appointment was overshadowed by the refusal of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre, CPN-UML's pre-poll, to join the Oli cabinet.

The two communist parties had contested the election on a common manifesto and fielded common candidates. There were rigorous unity meetings between Oli and the CPN-Maoist Centre chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal, with both claiming that the merger of the parties would soon be formalised. The unity formula arrived at by the joint task force had the consent of the two leaders: It proposed that Dahal succeed Oli as prime minister after three years and the two leaders hold the post of co-chairperson in the united party. But less than a couple of hours after the UML and Maoist leaderships asked President Bhandari to invite Oli to form the government, the Maoists said there were still some ideological and structural issues that had to be sorted out and that they will wait for these issues to be resolved before joining the government.

Nepal's politics has been largely power-driven, marred with frequent reconfiguration of alliances. Power politics had relegated ideology to the backseat. But the fact that the two communist parties contested elections as allies on the pledge that they will merge to form a united left party provided hope that the quality and character of Nepal politics will change and that it will regain credibility and win public trust.

The magnitude of the problems that Oli faces does not diminish the significance of his ascent to office. The successful conduct of the poll under the new constitution is being seen as assurance that the document, despite all its inadequacies, can be successfully implemented without the country having to undertake another costly exercise. It has attracted a lot of interest in the neighbourhood, with India and China competing to enhance their clout in the strategically important Nepal.

China has reason to believe that Oli's rise to office is the best guarantee to further its ambitious and strategically important Belt and Road Initiative that Nepal is a signatory to. Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has tried to keep Oli in good humour and has made the right gestures to forgo past bitterness, especially the experience of the 2015 blockade period that made Oli accept Beijing's bear hug. But Modi and Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj have already congratulated Oli, at least thrice, for the successful conduct of the poll putting the constitution under effective implementation that somehow amounts to endorsing the Nepali constitution that the government of India initially took "note of" but did not welcome.

Modi called Oli from Tripura on Wednesday night and dispatched ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri to his residence a little before midnight with a congratulatory message and an invitation to visit New Delhi at the earliest. Oli knows his victory in the election is largely the outcome of how he dealt with India during the blockade. But he also needs to realise that blaming India for all things gone wrong could be counterproductive this time. Managing the federal affairs, conceding to the demands of the newly created provinces even if these seem unreasonable, putting the economy on track, freeing civil administration and the supreme court from corruption and partisan control, and stopping the plunder of state coffers are some major tasks cut out for Oli.

However, Oli, who technically heads a minority government, will need to appease the Maoists and the various factions in the UML to ensure a long lease of life in office. He will have to prove majority in the House within a month. If he fails, it will have a disastrous impact on the constitution. Oli has already annoyed senior UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal by upsetting the chief

ministerial ambition of standing committee member, Astalakshmi Shakya in Province 3. If the Maoists continue to stay out of the government, the planned left unity may not take place. No amount of goodwill or support from the country's neighbours can help him overcome these problems.

Internal problems within the Maoists are also aggravating the already fraught relations with the UML. There are at least five senior leaders — Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal, Janardan Sharma, Krishna Bahadur

Mahara, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi and Barshaman Pun — aspire to be deputy PMs should the party join the Oli government. The constitution caps the size of the council of ministers at 25 and the Maoists are not entitled for more than 30 per cent of the berths. Many aspirants will have to left out of the ministry.

The tussle within the Left alliance, lack of constructive cooperation among major political parties in parliament, ambiguities in the constitution and the tarnished and partisan image of the supreme court — all these may contribute to poor governance and fail the constitution. Oli's appointment as the prime minister, no doubt, honours the mandate of the people. However, there are enough reasons to be sceptical about the promise it holds.

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com