

Towards stability in Nepal

A month after the Left Alliance secured a decisive victory in Nepal's parliamentary elections, a government is yet to be formed in Kathmandu. The Alliance was forged just before the elections between the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). The transfer of power from the Nepali Congress to the UML-led coalition was delayed initially due to procedural issues. The Upper House, or the National Assembly, needed to be indirectly elected by the provincial assemblies. The parties had disagreed on the means of this indirect election, with the NC advocating a proportional representation-single transferable vote system, and the UML seeking a majority vote. After President Bidhya Devi Bhandari ratified a long-pending ordinance that allowed elections based on the single transferable vote in late December 2017, this issue appeared to have been resolved. But there are other procedural issues to be sorted out. In consultation with the Left Alliance, the caretaker government has to first appoint governors to the seven provinces. Then, the process of choosing their capitals, in order to convene the Assemblies, can be completed. Tentative proposals on new capitals had given rise to protests in several towns, and the main political parties are unwilling to take a clear position on the issue. The caretaker NC government does not seem to be particularly keen on resolving this, and a proposal has been floated to allow the provincial assemblies to convene in Kathmandu first. In the absence of a consensus, this may be best.

The clear and decisive choice by the electorate in the polls has put the responsibility of operationalising the intricate provincial model on the Left Alliance. Once the process of nominations to the National Assembly is complete — with 33% of the overall representation in Parliament reserved for women — the election of the Prime Minister will follow. It is a foregone conclusion that UML leader K.P. Oli will be elected: the party got close to the majority mark on its own in the first-past-the-post seats. Ten years since the end of the civil war and the convening of the Constituent Assembly, the promise of economic development has been belied. This is one of the reasons behind agitations called by democratic and republican forces seeking a new CA. Nepal's economy continues to be highly dependent on remittances from Nepali migrants as the agrarian sector and industrial growth, especially in the hydro-energy sector, have stagnated. For too long, political posturing and the game of thrones involving the major parties, the UML, the NC and the Maoists, in Kathmandu have become pursuits in themselves. With the Left Alliance promising a greater degree of cohesion and winning a clear victory, the sooner the process of election of a new Prime Minister is accomplished, the faster Nepal can get on with the business of governance.

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