

HOPE OF REVITALISATION

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Prime Minister of Nepal Sher Bahadur Deuba. File Photo | Photo Credit: [Reuters](#)

The 14th General Convention of the Nepali Congress (NC) was markedly different from the previous conventions. The NC is seen as a party that maintains the status quo, but the election results held for filling its office-bearers after five and a half years have rekindled hopes of revitalisation. Although [Sher Bahadur Deuba, who heads both the party and the government](#), will continue as president of the NC for another term, the votes gained by Shekhar Koirala, Mr. Deuba's competitor, are indicative of change. Dynastic politics has often tried to influence the psyche of NC party members. But this time, the votes seem to be in favour of merit and popularity rather than for the ascribed status of some leaders.

The Koirala family was divided in supporting Shekhar Koirala. He is not heir apparent unlike Shashank Koirala (B.P. Koirala's son) or Prakash Man Singh and Bimalendra Nidhi. It is to be noted that the credentials of the latter two are not determined only by the legacies of their fathers; they also have their own trajectory as leaders. Yet, Mr. Singh and Mr. Nidhi could not assert their leadership; on the contrary, in the second round, they did a U-turn by lending support to Mr. Deuba against whom they had stood as candidates for presidentship. Presumably, they didn't want to see the emergence of Mr. Shekhar Koirala as party leader who is junior to them in politics and experience.

Nevertheless, in politics, seniority alone does not matter; popular support, charisma, sense of direction, vision and boldness are all ingredients of leadership. The votes polled by Mr. Singh and Mr. Nidhi were too low compared to those polled by Mr. Deuba and Mr. Shekhar Koirala, who, despite being deserted by his own family members, secured over 35% of the total votes. And so, Mr. Shekhar Koirala has now emerged as a leader next to Mr. Deuba. How far he can energise the party with his vision and mobilising capacity needs to be seen, however.

The results also indicate that the era of dynastic trends is over in Nepali politics. Neither Mr. Deuba nor the two general secretaries — Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma — are from dynastic backgrounds.

The Left's appeal is steadily declining as it has little direction and is torn by divisions. What remains is the empty slogan of Maoism, Leninism, and 'nationalism', which is a euphemism for anti-Indianism and anti-imperialism. In contrast to the various communist groups, the NC is looked upon as a reliable, moderate force for democracy. Thus, what it needs is to do is shoulder the role of democratising society and the polity by transforming itself into a reliable and dynamic democratic party.

In any polity, the role of the leadership is crucial for transformation, especially since policies and programmes for transformation need to be executed by the leadership. We have seen how the builders of modern India laid the foundation of democracy. We have also seen how leaders like Donald Trump can shake the established democratic order with their authoritarian proclivities. So, Mr. Deuba and other leaders elected on the basis of their popularity should work in tandem to make the party people-centric and worthy of winning elections.

The NC has faced many challenges over the years: it had to struggle first against the 'Ranarchy', then against monarchy and also for its own existence. Determined to eliminate the existence of the NC, King Mahendra declared his regime "party-less" but failed to fulfil his

mission. Instead, the coup he staged against the first ever-elected NC government in 1960 proved to be fatal for his regime after decades and eventually for monarchy itself. Now the NC is facing the challenge of pseudo-communists, whose political identity is blurred and who still claim to be thoroughbred democrats. Can the NC with its new agenda of transformation stand up to the communists or will it continue as a status quo-party?

The new agenda set by the Young Turks indicates a departure from the previous style of running the party. Since the NC is a mass based-party, its renewal can only be possible if it is in regular touch with the people and their concerns and aspirations. The new leaders who have been able to transcend polarisation within the party should be projected as the faces for the coming national, provincial and local elections. They can create a positive public impression as they were elected on the basis of popularity and merit. Mr. Deuba can revamp the image of the party if he prepares to set the new agenda of the party with the cooperation of young energetic leaders who are rearing to take the NC to new heights.

Lok Raj Baral is Professor of Political Science and former ambassador of Nepal to India

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There are questions that need to be raised and allegations that must be countered about the vaccine strategy

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