

Prachanda-led Government-4: Expanding The Coalition Cabinet Siddhi B Ranjitkar

On August 26, 2016, Prime Minister Prachanda added 13 ministers representing the NC after 23 days of Prachanda himself taking office on August 3, 2016. The sluggish cabinet formation has caused the slow public service delivery, and hampered the progress of the development projects. The cabinet might be even larger. The new government is for having a meaningful dialogue with the Federal Democratic Alliance (Madheshi and ethnic) leaders and then amending the Constitution for paving the way to the elections to the various levels. The new government also is for regularizing the diplomatic relations with the neighbors. Two former prime minister left Kathmandu for medical checkups.

Twelve men and one woman representing the NC took the oath of office from the President Vidhya Bhandari at the president's official residence on August 26, 2016. The new Constitution has advocated the need for at least one-third if not fifty percent of the women's representation in every sector of the public life. Former prime minister cum current NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba's selection of a single woman for representing NC in the cabinet is not just the lack of regard for the women but it is also the disregard for the provision made in the Constitution.

Speaking to the anchor of the Radio Nepal's morning program called 'antar-sambad' on August 27, 2016, the newly appointed Foreign Minister Dr Prakash Sharan Mahat said that the dalit and ethnic people would have appropriate representation in the next expansion of the cabinet hinting at the further expansion of the cabinet that has already 31 members. The news on the private online media setopati.com has said that the cabinet of Prime Minister Prachanda might be of 61 members. However, the Nepalese media have developed the habit of highly exaggerating the news rather than keeping their credibility of informing the people correctly.

A picture of the newly appointed ministers taking the oath of office on August 26, 2016 posted on the setopati.com has the picture of a lady wearing a crown hanging on the wall of the president's residence. It would have been appropriate to hang the pictures of the president herself, or of the women activists such as Mangala Devi Singh, Sahana Pradhan, Sadhana Adhikari, and many more than hanging a picture of the woman wearing a crown means representing the past atrocities.

Prime Minister Prachanda in one of his recent statement said, "It has been possible to put the women in the positions of the president, and of the Speaker because of the ten-year people's war." Before that women like Mangala Devi Singh, Sahana Pradhan, and Sadhana Adhikari had fought for the women's rights even at the time of the Rana autocratic family rule when asking for any right was considered as a heinous crime.

NC President Deuba has complained that he has had hard time to convince his archrival Ram Chandra Poudel of the need for selecting the right persons for the ministerial jobs at a shortest possible time. No doubt that might be the reason why Deuba has taken exactly 23 days to second his party people in the Prachanda's cabinet causing the ministerial positions vacant, and even delaying the decisions on the development projects, and even the service delivery for about a month.

However, Poudel has not once but several times has complained about Deuba not consulting with him for selecting the right persons for the cabinet positions. Anyway Deuba and Poudel and might be another third person have carefully selected 13 people including the father-in-law Arjun Narshing KC and his son-in-law Gagan Kumar Thapa to represent the NC in the current coalition government. Both the father-in-law and son-in-law were the candidates for

the same position of the general secretary of the NC but they got nicely defeated in the election by a third person called Dr Sashank Koirala. Thus, both the father-in-law and son-in-law are going together sometimes, and against each other at other times.

Former Prime Minister KP Oli said, "Prachanda has not been able to form a full fledged cabinet for such a long time, what he will be able to do." Oli has been one hundred percent correct but NC is a democratic party, and it has to work democratically. So, it must have taken such a terribly long time to select fitting persons for the ministerial jobs. It is not so easy to make decisions in the democratic environment. The democratic system has even been curse for the fast implementation of the development projects but it is the only way of running the administration in the interest of all the people.

On the first day of taking office, Foreign Minister Dr Prakash Sharan Mahat received the congratulation from the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi. Minister Wang is for working together to strengthen further the China-Nepal cooperation and everlasting friendship, the RSS news posted on therisingnepal.org.np on August 27, 2016 stated. It indicates how China has given the importance to the newly appointed foreign minister but Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae has been going around the Manag and Mustang districts to see how the work of renovation and rebuilding of the Buddhist monasteries have been going on.

Immediately after taking office on August 3, 2016, Prime Minister Prachanda had sent his two deputies: one to the north and another to the south as the special envoys to put the diplomatic relations with the neighboring countries back on track. Deputy Prime Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara went to China with the invitations of the president and the prime minister to the Chinese counterparts to visit Nepal. Upon return to Kathmandu at the international airport, DPM Mahara has told the reporters that the Chinese dignitaries are willing to visit Nepal very much. Similarly, DPM Bimalendra Nidhi went to India with the invitations of the president and the prime minister to the Indian counterparts. The Indian leaders were not only willing to visit Nepal but also willing to receive the Nepalese president and prime minister in India.

However, the CPN-UML leaders including former Prime Minister KP Oli have been against the prime minister sending the two DPMs as the special envoys to the north and the south. They have even charged the DPM going to India that he carried the special letter of the prime minister with the content of how the Nepalese Constitution would be amended. However, neither the CPN-UML leaders have produced any hard evidences of the charges they have made nor the Baluwatar establishments have said anything about it except for saying it is a regular diplomatic letter from one prime minister to another.

Surely, Prime Minister Prachanda has sent his two special envoys to the north and the south as the damage-control measures to regularize the diplomatic relations with both the countries, and to balance the diplomatic relations former Prime Minister KP Oli has made unbalanced following the advices and activities of the former Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa that has done nothing to improve the relations with India but even pushed it to the further deterioration.

During the time of KP Oli as the prime minister of Nepal, the tip of the balance of the foreign relations has heavily tilted to the north making the unbalanced foreign relations. Oli has made a number of agreements including development projects, and even attempted to open up the entry routes to China, and via China to the third countries. However, Oli has naively ignored the fact that Nepal has twenty-two entry routes to India, and the border is widely opened up for the citizens of both the countries freely traveling and doing business in both countries but China and Nepal have only two routes currently opened up to do

business, and free travel between Nepalese and Chinese has been a dream only. Even the two currently working routes has been tightly controlled in view of Tibetans illegally traveling to Nepal and then to India to visit their spiritual leader the Dalai Lama.

Nepal buys more than 70% of its needs from India, and Nepal buys petroleum products entirely from India, and even electricity to offset the power deficit. The trade with China has been growing but it might take several decades before reaching to the equal level with India so that Nepal might not need to entirely depend on India for the petroleum products. If China is not willing to open up the border entry routes, as India has opened up, the trade with India will further increase as India develops the technology, and produces high tech products. Then, Nepal will find buying such products will be much more cheaper in India than any other country. It is not enough for Nepal just to have the former Prime Minister Oli's wishes for the enhanced trade and business with China but China needs to show the equal enthusiasm to do the same with Nepal.

Now, the cultural relations with both the countries, some people like to say that Nepalese have the age-old cultural ties with India forgetting having equally such old cultural ties with Tibet: now the China. Even today, if anybody goes to the north as currently Indian ambassador Rae is doing, s/he will find how close the cultural ties the northern Nepalese have with Tibet, too as the Nepalese in south have with India. So, cultural ties with both the north and the south has been on an equal footing.

Nepal had been the bridge between China and India in ancient time, and Nepalese traders, artisans and other skilled workers had been working in Tibet as recently as until the political uprising in Tibet and the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959. The then Chairman Mao Zedong closed the business of the Nepalese in Tibet, and sent them back to Nepal obviously to shield Tibet from the outside world. In ancient time, Tibetans going to the south for learning Buddhism stayed at Boudha in Kathmandu for several months for learning the basics of Buddhism and at the same time to acclimatize. Then they traveled to the south and learned Buddhism. On the way back home, they again stayed at Boudha for several months for acclimatization before going home.

The first Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur broke down the bridge Nepal had until the mid 19th century closing the trade routes linking Nepal with the then Tibet to the north and India to the south fearing the exposure of Nepalese to the outside world would be the threat to his administration. Thereafter, Nepalese had to use the route via Sikkim in India to do the business in Tibet. Unlike the popular belief that the then British Raj officials closed the Nepalese trade routes with Tibet, Jung closed them. Nepal needs to open up as many trade routes to the north and to the south as possible to make Nepal a bridge between China and India again.

Jung Bahadur had been depicted as a mythical hero even though he was the cause of the misery of Nepalese, then the Nepalese media also depicted former Prime Minister Oli as the nationalist and even as a hero for doing nothing to end the unofficial Indian blockade that lasted for more than five months even comparing with former King Mahendra that had given the Kalapani to India, as the NC central working committee member Dr Shekher Koirala said while speaking to the anchor of the Radio Nepal morning program called 'antar-sambad' on August 22, 2016. Former Ambassador to India Dr Bhekha Bahadur Thapa also has said that one of the Indian diplomats has told him at one of the diplomatic receptions that 'his excellence' of Nepal has given the Kalapani to India. The diplomat did not identify who was 'his excellence.' Who could dare to do such a thing anybody less than the then king?

Former Prime Minister Oli and his comrades have been saying that the coalition government of NC and the Maoist-Center has been the product of the foreign power, and it is for not

enforcing the Constitution and for not holding the elections. Immediately after the oath-taking ceremony given to the newly appointed ministers at the residence of the president on August 26, 2016, President of NC Deuba, and Prime Minister Prachanda sat with the Federal Democratic Alliance leaders at the Baluwatar residence of the prime minister and discussed the issues concerning the Constitution and then holding the local level elections. Prime Minister Prachanda also said that he would visit India only after submitting the constitution amendment proposal to the parliament. Both the NC and Maoist leaders have been saying that the new government is for amending the Constitution and then holding local level elections. Prachanda has been pushing the Election commission to prepare for the local level elections.

CPN-UML leaders including Oli have been saying that they are not for amending the Constitution. Oli said that he would not allow the amendment to the Constitution if it were to go against the national interest. That is correct and he needs to stand by it all the time. However, his comrade like Bamdev Gautam said that he would not allow changing even a comma or a period in the Constitution, according to the local media.

No doubt about that, NC and the Maoist-Center alone cannot amend the Constitution without the support of the CPN-UML. Without the amendment to the Constitution for satisfying the Madheshi and ethnic people, elections to the various levels would not be possible. Without elections, the enforcement of the Constitution would not be the reality.

At the meeting of the party cadres at Bardibas in Mahottari, senior leader of CPN-UML Jhalanath Khanal has said that the amendment to the new constitution will be justified depending only on the need of the nation and its relevance as the public perceives. Leader Khanal blamed some political parties for making fun of the new Constitution rather than taking pride in it. He also claimed that the three-point agreement reached between the NC, CPN-Maoist-Center and Federal Democratic Alliance was not for the amendment to the new Constitution but for the power sharing, the news posted on therisingnepal.org.np on August 26, 2016 stated.

In the past, NC leaders had been saying that the Oli government had not been serious about holding the elections to the local level, and then enforcing the Constitution, as it had not taken any measures to this end. The Oli government did not talk to the Madheshi and ethnic leaders except for saying for the mere publicity that Oli was open to talk to the Madheshi leaders. That was why the NC had to take steps to form a new NC and Maoist-Center alliance to form a new government for seriously talking to the Federal Democratic Alliance leaders and then amending the Constitution for meeting their just demands, the NC leaders said.

NC and Maoist leaders have had the serious dialogues with the Federal Democratic Alliance leaders. Madheshi and ethnic leaders have been hopeful that their demands will be met. They have been figuring out how many Articles of the Constitution have to be amended to make them acceptable to all. In other words, NC, Maoist-Center, and Madheshi and ethnical leaders have been on the right track to resolve the political issues Madheshi and ethnical leaders have taken up. That will bring the consensus on enforcing the Constitution if the CPN-UML is to agree on those issues.

On the morning, August 28, 2016, the anchor of the Radio Nepal morning program called 'antar-sambad' asked the guest to the program: former DPM Bhim Rawal, "What would you say about the former Prime Minister Oli telling the party cadres to be prepared for the violent movement?"

The reply of former DPM Rawal was that the former Prime Minister Oli had been concerned with the possibility of pushing back the Constitution that had been passed by the 90% of the people's representatives in the then Constituent Assembly for making the ethnic States, as some leaders had been trying to amend the Constitution to this end; that was the reason why the CPN-UML had to be alert.

Thus the CPN-UML leaders including its Chairman KP Oli had been against the ethnic including the Madheshi causes indicating Oli had been not for resolving the political issues the Federal Democratic Alliance had raised. The conclusion might be the Oli government would surely invite the political turmoil if it were to continue for some time.

After the oath-taking ceremony and the meeting with Madheshi and ethnic leaders, NC President Deuba with his spouse flew to Singapore for the health checkups. It was not clear whether the health checkups were of both the Deuba's or of Sher Bahadur the husband or of Arzoo the wife. One of them must have a serious health problem. They had been in India for the health checkups a few months ago. They must have gone to Singapore, as they needed more sophisticated health services than India could provide them with. However, the RSS news posted on therisingnepal.org.np stated on August 26, 2016 quoting the Deuba's personal secretary Bhanu Deuba that Deuba has gone to Singapore for the treatment of digestive problem and will return home on September 1, 2016.

Former Prime Minister KP Oli also flew to Bangkok for health checkups. He has to regularly undergo the health checkups.

The Nepalese have been against the political leaders going abroad for health checkups or treatment costing so many millions to the national treasury whereas millions of Nepalese living in rural areas particularly the remote areas have to die even for not having very cheap pills for simple health disorder. The media also question why the political leaders rush to foreign countries for health checkups when Nepal has developed the cutting edge health services, and the State-run teaching hospitals have allocated high-class health services for the political leaders and their spouses.

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(Source: setopati.com)