

Why Kamal Thapa's Mission To India Failed? Siddhi B Ranjitkar

Eight members of the UCPN-Maoist boarded the KP Oli's new cabinet that Prachanda had launched on the auspicious days of the greatest Hindu festival called Dashain playing his trump card. Prime Minister Oli in turn played his trump sending the deputy prime minister Kamal Thapa to New Delhi but Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi playing the political game on behalf of the Madheshi refused to throw his card rather Modi wanted to give a fair trial to the Oli's leadership in Nepal. In his first attempt on the political game, Oli had probably lost a first few points while playing with Modi. China also had been holding its card but not playing actively so far.

I had not thought that Prime Minister Oli was a so naive politician but sending Kamal Thapa to India for lifting the undeclared embargo on Nepal proved so. None of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders would ready to trust Thapa after he joined the Oli government. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a hardened heart; he was determined to have an inclusive constitution for Nepal; that was in the interest of the Nepalese in general Modi thinks. However, we needed to wait and see which way the political course would take in Nepal, China and India. Kamal Thapa turned out to be a great patriot for Nepal but a turncoat for India.

Deputy Prime Minister with the portfolio of the foreign affairs Kamal Thapa went to New Delhi, India on October 17, 2015 obviously for easing the political tension between Nepal and India that had been the reason for the suppressed border entry points on the border with Nepal causing the tremendous shortage of supply of petroleum products in Nepal. The success of Thapa's mission to India would have opened the floodgates to the supplies trucks waiting at the border points to enter Nepal but it did not happened. It was not unanticipated.

First, India was not in a mood to let the hill tribe not to amend the new constitution in Nepal, and not to let the one tribe ride over another and Madheshis. Not amending the constitution for making it an inclusive had certainly hurt the belief of Modi that only the inclusive constitution could run Nepal smoothly and peacefully. Modi had been sure that Nepal would face turmoil without an inclusive constitution. In this case, Modi was not to give in to any Nepalese mission not to mention the mission of Thapa. Peace in Nepal was the interest of Modi, too as a neighbor. The turmoil in Nepal would certainly spill over to the Indian territories bordering Nepal that was what Modi correctly believed. Then, Modi must have thought why not caused turbulence now than waiting for it to happen.

Modi wanted to discipline the indisciplined Nepalese rulers. Modi's question to the Nepalese rulers had been what was wrong to enforce the agreement the then Prime Minister Girija Koirala reached with the Madheshi front called UDMF. It would have given the proportionate representation of Madheshis in the police, army and administration. Modi saw that currently, one or two tribes crowded the Nepalese army and the administration. Modi wanted to address this issue in the new constitution that was possible only by the quick amendment.

Second, certainly, the BJP leaders had taken the Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa as a traitor; he was a sellout to the secularists they believed. BJP leaders thought what the hell this Thapa was doing here in India begging for easing the tight control on the border entry points. He flourished on our money and his party had twenty-five seats in the parliament because of our campaign for a Hindu state, he could be the deputy prime minister because of those slots in the parliament. If we were not to conduct a campaign for making Nepal a Hindu state he would have been any political leader of a tiny party. Our dream was to make Nepal a Hindu state; at least we would have one Hindu state but this man betrayed us.

Now, even a single voice could not raise to say, "make Nepal a Hindu state". How could we trust such a man that had left our camp to be the deputy prime minister? That was the question the Hindu leaders had asked themselves.

Third, Prime Minister Modi wanted to demonstrate how he could buy the Nepalese politicians at a very cheap price. A few hundred million Indian rupees were enough to buy about one hundred votes in the Nepalese parliament to get elected Sushil Koirala. His calculation was that Kamal Thapa would cast a block of the 25 votes the Thapa's party had in favor of Koirala. He had made already an arrangement of Dr. Baburam Bhattarai pulling a block of 30 votes out of the UCPN-Maoist for Koirala, and the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu was to make sure that the Madheshi leaders voted for Koirala. The total votes would be 304 (NC +UDMF 249, Kamal Thapa 25, and Dr Bhattarai 30, altogether make 304 out of 599 votes in the parliament). Sushil Koirala was sure to get elected. That was great. That was how the game of politics of Modi went on.

Modi and his BJP leaders had counted heavily on Kamal Thapa for Koirala to get elected to a new prime minister. Thapa's block of 25 votes went against the constitution when the constituent assembly adopted a new constitution. However, Modi ignored the fact that Thapa and his colleagues did sign on the new constitution. Modi had not believed that Thapa could be a turncoat. His party BJP had invested heavily in the Thapa's campaign for making Nepal a Hindu state. So, Modi thought that Thapa would not stray out of his grip.

Kamal Thapa turned out to be a real patriot. He did not sell himself to the Indian buyers, as Sushil Koirala and UDMF leaders did. Thapa sacrificed his stand on making Nepal a Hindu state to save the country from the Indians behaving as if they were patrons. Once Thapa took the side of the patriotic politicians then Dr Baburam Bhattarai had no use to leave his party for Koirala. So, Dr. Bhattarai neither sold nor became a traitor but Thapa became a patriot for Nepal but a traitor for India. Dr Bhattarai stopped short of being a strong hand of Modi. His ambition of becoming a strong political force in Nepal was shattered.

UDMF leaders had cursed themselves for voting the unsuccessful candidate wasting their precious votes. They had boycotted the vote on adopting the new constitution. They refused to sign on it. However, participating in the parliamentary vote on electing a new prime minister, they had both accepted the new constitution, and signed on it. They had the assurances of making everything fine from the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu if they were to vote for Koirala in the parliament. Madheshi leaders were sure that everything would happen as the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu told them to happen. That was how Modi played the political game on behalf of the Madheshis.

However, the political game had not done, yet rather it had reached the critical point. Madheshi leaders had been playing the game at the cost of innocent young lives, and at the cost of making troubles to thirty million Nepalese, and certainly at the hands of the Indian players. If they were to win the game the people deprived of everything for over 240 years of the monarchical rule would ultimately get the justice but at the cost of Nepal being manipulated by the Indian players. If they were to lose the political game, Nepal could be proud of being free from any outside intervention but the underprivileged people would lose for some time the gains the people's movement had made.

Another question was why Sushil Koirala unexpectedly took a u-turn and accepted the Indian offer to be a new prime minister. Obviously, his sixty years of political life did not teach him how to analyze the political situation whether to listen to the distant leaders or to go along with the natives. How he could not think that even if he could be a next prime minister with money and muscle of the Indian leaders Nepalese would not accept him. Even his colleagues in his party would rebel against him that he could not think about. In fact,

some of his party members openly others in private came out against his candidacy for prime minister. He not only shamed himself but his party, too and his party members supporting him.

Kamal Thapa said that he went to India at the invitation of the Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj but Prime Minister Oli sent him to India to find out whether he could disentangled the complex knot of the political issues that had led to the uneasy border crossing of Nepalese supplies trucks. Oli must have thought that Thapa had been a favorite of the BJP leaders; they might have a soft corner for Thapa. So, he was the most appropriate person to deal with the current BJP government in India; that was the reason why Thapa got the portfolio of the foreign minister. The performances of Thapa as the special envoy of Oli to Delhi had been dismal and did not meet the expectation of Oli. So, Oli had gone wrong to his political thinking. He could not clearly read the minds of the Indian leaders, and he could not play a right card at the right place and time.

Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa had a good time in India. Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj received Thapa very well. Prime Minister Modi also received Thapa very fondly. Thapa also met with other BJP leaders and the foreign secretary of India. Thapa encountered the same question from every Indian leader that 'when Nepal would amend the constitution'. That had been the main concern of the Indian leaders whereas the concern of Thapa was just to ease the movement of the Nepalese supplies trucks from India to Nepal. The Indian leaders had spoken with Thapa in one language, as did the Nepalese leaders with the Indian foreign secretary when he visited Nepal just two days before the adoption of the new constitution on September 20, 2015.

In Nepal, Prime Minister Oli was not in any mood to give in to the demands of the Madheshi and ethnic people to make the constitution an inclusive one. He believed that he could do it meant he could run the administration no matter what the Madheshi and ethnic people wanted. He wanted to be a new ruler of the new Nepal not giving anything to the ruled people. He might be a neo-Jung Bahadur that once wrote a civil code in the mid nineteenth century for the Nepalese but he would not be able to repress the Nepalese as Jung Bahadur did in his time. Nepalese had been used to die for their rights. Now, the government had already killed more than 50 people in the ongoing Madheshi protest. We did not know how many people might need to die before getting the movement done. That would certainly depend on the actions of Oli.

Mr. Oli's dream of ruling the country with the iron fist might come true if the northern neighbor would help him. Help in the sense to provide Nepal with the petroleum products at least for a short period until the southern border entry points would become fully operational. Oli knew that India could not hold on to the chokehold for a long time, as the Indian business people had been losing business opportunities immensely. So, in one way, the current situation was the test of how much and for how long Nepalese could endure the shortage of supplies, whether China would come to help Nepal at the time of emergency, and how long India could continue the chokehold.

Now, the question of getting petroleum products from China that happened to be the northern neighbor after Tibet was successfully overran by Mao Zedong in 1948, had been discussed on the Nepalese media talks. If former Prime Minister Sushil Koirala's statement were to believe he had requested China for petroleum products but his request went unheeded. China had nothing to say to this. So, we believed Koirala. The question was why he did not make the same request to the Indian leaders. He said that he did but he opted to stand up to the border control not giving in to the Indians. He might need to amend the constitution to accommodate the Madheshi and the ethnic people's demands to make the Indian leaders accept his request. When the time for the election to a new prime minister

came, Koirala dared to give in to the Indian pressure and to the Madheshi demands for getting elected to a prime minister second time. That was the political immaturity of the man that presided over the government that oversaw the adoption of a new constitution by the constituent assembly on September 20, 2015. So, Nepalese politicians had not been for easing the supply of petroleum products but grabbing the power by any possible means.

Beijing was far away from Kathmandu; Delhi was nearer. Tibet had made us to be the neighbor of China. The Chinese leaders' concerns for the Nepalese were tied up to the Tibetan issues. So, Chinese leaders would listen to the Nepalese concerns if something were to go wrong in Lhasa otherwise Chinese leaders could sleep well no matter what happened to Nepal and Nepalese. That might be the reason for why Chinese leaders did not wake up to the request of Koirala for the petroleum products or Chinese leaders must have thought Koirala was a pet of India why they should take care of him; no matter what they would do to him he would be loyal to his master.

Why China should help Oli sending petroleum products to Nepal if China had not helped Koirala. Oli was not Koirala. However, first, the price of petroleum products would not be as favorable as of the Indian. We could assume any way China would bear certain cost only to help Oli but at what cost of the relation with India. We did not know why China ignored Koirala; it might be just to please Modi. If it were to be so China would do the same to Oli, too. What would happen if the Nepalese State officials including the minister for supplies dealing the petroleum products were not to receive the unseen benefits from the Chinese as of from the Indian? The Nepalese State officials had been so smart that they would not do any business with the Chinese on the petroleum products without the invisible benefits. The Nepalese media reports had it that the foreign ministry had officially requested China for the petroleum products. So far, no news of China responding to the request was available. A few days if not a few weeks would tell us what China would do.

We had seen that China had ignored Nepal while signing off an agreement with Modi to run a trade via Lipulekh: the Nepalese territory occupied by the Indian army so far. India was a big fish for China to catch whereas Nepal had been not even a fish but a bottomless bucket that never filled out no matter how many resources was poured in. Okay, China had one interest in Nepal. That was the Tibetan issue. China had been ready to spend any amount on preventing any protest of Tibetan exiles in Nepal. China had closed the office of the representative of Dalai Lama in Kathmandu, and the office of Tibetans dealing with the Tibetan exiles residing in Nepal. Mr. Oli might use it as a card to play with but whether it would be wise to do so not clear, yet.

So, Mr. Oli was really wedged between the issues he himself had created. He had been deadly against the demands of the Madheshis and ethnic people. That demands had been the strong push Indians had made against him from the southern end, the northern push might be Chinese simply holding on to watching what would be the destiny of the quixotic and unpredictable Oli. His mood might change to anything at any time to suit his immediate interest. That made him a prime minister today.

Some of the Nepalese political analysts believed that Indian Prime Minister Modi was determined to make Nepalese prime minister no matter whether s/he was an Oli or Koirala submit to him. Modi had repeatedly said that peaceful Nepal was in the interest of Nepal and India but the Nepalese leaders having the freak two-thirds majority provoked the Madheshi and ethnic people to protest. Modi believed that he did not ask the reservation for the Madheshi and ethnic people but for meeting their demands for the enforcement of the agreements reached with the previous prime minister, and making them sovereign Nepalese having every kinds of rights every Nepalese enjoyed.

The current trend of the Indian policy indicated Indian leaders must have thought that the Nepalese political leaders had taken everything easily. Nepalese leaders had even mocked Indian Hindu leaders sending Kamal Thapa that had been the black sheep of the Hindu family to talk to them for petroleum products but neither for a Hindu state nor for the Madheshis' demands. So many resources Hindu leaders had spend on the campaign for making Nepal a Hindu state, and nurturing Kamal Thapa to that end had gone totally astray. Would Oli accept such a man as an envoy if he were to be on the shoes of Modi? Certainly not, he would have slammed the door at the face of such a man or a woman but Indians had been so courteous to Kamal Thapa to demonstrate their respect for the Nepalese in general. They did not want to disgrace all Nepalese insulting Thapa.

The best thing for Oli to do was to enforce the agreement Girija had reached with the UDMF, and amend the constitution to accommodate the just demands of the Madheshis and the ethnic people. That would lift Oli to the stature of a tremendously high figure. He would be an iconic milestone in the history of Nepal. Meeting the demands of the Madheshis and the ethnic people and enforcing the previous agreements would surely not mean that Oli was bowing down to the Indian leaders. He would be doing the justice to all people. If he were not to do so somebody after him might have to do it, and make Nepal a peaceful and beautiful country. Anybody doing so would be remembered as the great man of the century. Oli could take it or leave it. He could be fallen to disgrace as Girija and Sushil Koiralas did or remembered as Oli the great. Choice was his. Nepalese would need to suffer from the political, economical and social instability and shortage of supplies for some time to come if Oli were to be adamant that he was not submitting to anybody for anything.

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