

Old Guards Attack

Monarchy is gone. Long live the monarchs. The cliché is resoundingly true : an action is better than a thousand words. The Maoists of Nepal cannot get back what they have already lost—ideological superiority. Nor can they reorganise their armed squads after joining the mainstream of parliamentary politics through a negotiated peace deal. That's politically dangerous for Nepalese Maoists, who now run the risk of doing too little rather than too much in shaping Nepal's republican destiny. The much publicised euphoria over unprecedented Maoist victory in parliamentary elections while heading a coalition government with ideological adversaries for a short period is over. Prime Minister Mr Pushpa Kamal Dahal, better known as Prachanda, resigned while pleading helplessness in a situation over which he and his party had virtually no control. Those who had all along opposed the Maoist liberation movement, never really reconciled themselves with the post-monarchy reality, despite the Maoists' mellowed stance in the changed context. While it is undoubtedly true that some liberals in the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) underestimated the dangers posed to their political identity and Maoist mass organisations by their political opponents it is no less true and perhaps more significant that all—including the most alarmist monarch-haters downplayed the latent challenges thrown by the old order and its institutions.

Prime Minister Prachanda sacked the army chief but the latter refused to step down because of support he received from the President and forces representing old order, leading to the present constitutional crisis. In his televised address to the nation, a day after President Ram Baran Yadav overruled the prime ministerial order by asking the army chief General Rukmangad Katwal to continue in his post Prachanda failed to define their precarious existence. The Maoist plan of turning the old royal army into a people's liberation army didn't take off. In truth it back-fired. After all Nepal in the post-monarch transitional phase was not pre-liberation China. Nor did they succeed in absorbing their guerilla fighters into the regular army. One question that was put off during the euphoria was how much even the reformed and mellowed Maoists could realistically expect of non-Maoists. But Prachanda blamed it on India, though mildly, for the present impasse and turmoil in Nepal.

That India treats Nepal as its backyard is a fact of life. Also, different ethnic groups inhabiting Indo-Nepal border regions, or both sides of the fence are culturally and emotionally more close to India than Nepal.

India is viewed by almost all its neighbours, not to speak of Nepal alone, as a threat to their sovereignty and integrity. The land-locked Nepalese economy is totally dependent on India as Indian big business has traditionally been a decisive force in deciding the economic policy orientation of this country for long. New Delhi's foreign policy makers never really accepted in principle the ensuing radical change in Nepal. They would like to see the Nepali Congress, their client, as the ultimate authority as it has mostly been the case, in running the Nepalese democratic show.

If the Maoists continue to resolve the present constitutional crisis by dancing to the tune of parliamentary musical chair as it is today, they are likely to marginalise themselves further, both politically and strategically. For New Delhi's ruling circles it is a nice way to bypass the Nepalese imbroglio as its internal affairs. True, the current crisis in Nepal is its internal matter. But India has allegedly been interfering in Nepal's internal affairs secretly for long, ignoring anti-Indian sentiments of the vast majority of the Nepalese population.

Because of India's big brotherly attitude and veiled aggressive postures South Asian Area Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been the weakest regional formation right from the beginning. It has no future despite periodic summits and high-level diplomatic exercises.

Not that the Maoist government of Nepal was in favour of radical policy change in the sphere of economy. They had their own limitations because of coalition they formed with diverse political elements. Nor did they show any sign of defying the dictates of international financial institutions controlled by America. After assuming power the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was tending to become more like CPM of India, sending message to the vested interests, domestic and foreign, that their revolution was all about removing the monarchy and not against dismantling the privileges of the privileged. And yet the advocates of status quo-ism were least interested in allowing the Maoist dominance for long because they saw in the growing Maoist influence a changed social order other than what they can think of. Class society, in Nepal with its numerous stratification, and with much agitated awareness of it, at the top, the bottom and in between, is unlikely to give way to a more egalitarian mass society the Maoists dreamt of when they were voted to power. □□□