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IDSA COMMENT

Revolution in Nepal: Bolshevik-style?

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Thabang is a small village cloistered on the mid-western hills of Nepal, but it began to steal the limelight after the Maoists declared their Protracted People’s War in the spring of 1996 in an apparent bid to establish a communist regime in the Himalayan kingdom. This remote village in Rolpa district, which is home to some 300 households, most of them from the ethnic Kham Magar community indoctrinated in the radical communist ideology, became the nerve centre of the Maoist insurgency, and a hideout for the rebel leaders during the bloody war that claimed the lives of over 15,000 people before it formally came to an end in 2006. Thabang is regarded as the Mecca for radical communists and a source of inspiration for them.

And this explains why Ram Bahadur Thapa “Badal”, the general secretary of the breakaway Maoist party CPN-M led by Mohan Baidya “Kiran”, visited Thabang on February 13, 2013 to celebrate the 18th anniversary of the People’s War and reiterated his party’s commitment to “revolution”, even though, according to him, Pushpa Kamal Dahal “Prachanda”, chairman of the mother party UCPN (Maoist), and Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, vice-chairman and Maoist ideologue, “betrayed” the causes of the revolution. After all, it was Badal, one of the key military strategists of the People’s War, who had played a major role in laying the foundation of the Maoist insurgency in the mid-western hills through the so-called “rural class struggle” even before the insurgency began in 1996.

The political document initiated by Baidya, which was endorsed by the party’s recently held general convention, stresses the need for ‘state capture’ to liberate the “dispossessed and oppressed” in Nepal. But while the party’s tactical line, as mentioned in the document presented by Kiran in the general convention, is vague at best, the leaders close to him state that the party is preparing for an “urban insurrection” using the achievements of the People’s War as a springboard and floating the issue of “national sovereignty” as its main agenda to garner the support of the *hoi polloi*. These leaders allege that former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, who stepped down recently, is “pro-India” and that India had upped its ante in Nepal ever since his election to the helm some 18 months ago.

There is also widespread perception in Kathmandu that the formation of the current election government led by Chief Justice Khilaraj Regmi was an “Indian design”, and Baidya believes that the Nepalis, who are “too sensitive” on the issue of nationalism, will join hands with him and take to the streets to overthrow the government. Not surprisingly, then, Baidya, backed by 21 other fringe parties and members of civil society, held protest programmes on the day Regmi was

sworn in by President Ram Baran Yadav, saying Regmi is heading the election government as per the “design of the external powers”. The party has also stated that the principal contradiction today is between the common Nepali people and the “domestic comprador-bourgeoisie and feudal lords protected and mobilized by India.”

Then, what are the strategies of the radical party for state capture?

The Baidya-driven radicals want to adopt the party line of the Second National Conference in 2001 when they had decided to supplement their Chinese model of revolution (protracted people’s war) with the Russian model (armed urban insurrection). In 2010, the Maoists had even bussed in thousands of people from across the country to Kathmandu for “an insurrection”, but failed to achieve their goal due mainly to the strong opposition from the Kathmandu middle class and the state mechanism that has remained intact. The Baidya faction however thinks that the plan failed mainly due to the reluctance of Prachanda and Bhattarai. While the objective condition for a communist revolution, Baidya has argued, is already there, the revolutionaries are not yet mentally prepared to effect such a revolution. Baidya argues that it is high time that they prepared for a revolution mentally, though many commentators, given his organizational strength and mass support, doubt his to ability to lead an insurrection.

The Maoist radicals compare the 2006 mass movement with the February 1917 movement in Russia that overthrew the Tsar and now they want to simulate the October Revolution when Lenin had capitalized on the contradictions and widespread chaos in Russia to capture the state by mobilizing the militia.

The radicals make six points to justify why an insurrection in Nepal is imminent. First, the Nepali state has long been in serious political crisis and no solution seems to be on the horizon. Second, people are disillusioned with the political system and want to overhaul it. Thirdly, the people from the lower strata of society are having a hard time due to the soaring prices of consumer goods, unaffordable fees for their children’s education in private schools, and expensive healthcare system, among other things. Fourth, there is a “nationalist” section in the Nepal Army and other security apparatuses that is against “foreign interferences” in Nepal and will be ready to forge an alliance with them. Fifth, a militant wing called National People’s Volunteers Bureau is being formed to take charge of the situation. Finally, a “strong revolutionary party with honest and committed cadres” has been formed to seize state power by capitalizing on the protracted political and constitutional crisis.

Now the radicals are focusing on urban-centric demonstrations and strikes. They are mobilizing trade unions, students, slum dwellers, hawkers, and peasants and ethnic people from the outskirts of Kathmandu and the surrounding districts. Firstly, workers from the trade union of the UCPN (M) are defecting to the CPN-M mainly because UCPN (M)-led unionists have allegedly been sold out to the owners of the business houses, and can no longer protect and promote the interests of the workers.

For example, around 200 workers from the UCPN (M) joined the Baidya faction accusing the leaders of corruption. The UCPN (M) has also antagonized the slum dwellers which used to be the party’s constituency. It came as a shock to many leftists in Kathmandu when the UCPN (M)-

led government demolished around 250 huts along the banks of the Bagmati River for occupying public land illegally. Baidya is also cashing in on that move of the UCPN (M). He is also supposed to have a good support base among the ethnic groups. Many prominent Maoist leaders from various ethnic groups are with his faction. While Baidya prioritizes class over ethnicity, he has clearly stated that his party is ready to address the issue of inclusion and identity.

The role of students in Nepal's politics has always been very significant and, as per the expectation of the Baidya group, many young students are likely to join them because of their "revolutionary zeal and leftist adventurism." They have always been instrumental in effecting general strikes and played very active roles in the 1990 and 2006 mass movements.

And finally, chances are high that the party may join forces with the rightists and royalists whom his party calls "nationalist" forces. And, the possibility of the Hindu fundamentalists, who want Nepal to become a Hindu state, joining forces with Baidya to derail the whole political process cannot be ruled out.

But the radical party is likely to get into crisis if the election takes place as per the plans of the Maoist-led government. Various reports state that only around 30 percent of the cadres joined the new CPN-M when it split from the UCPN (Maoist) in June 2012. The party has committed cadres, but it lacks popular support across the country and its chances of performing well in the elections are slim. The Baidya faction will then have no time to organise and marshal its forces for either participating in the elections or sabotaging the process. It may instead lead to intra-party disputes over whether the party should participate in the election or not, which could even lead to yet another split in the Baidya faction of the Maoist party with one of the factions again holding on to the ultra-radical Maoist ideology and opting for a violent path to seize state power. The left wing political parties of Nepal are infamous for factionalism and splits. The Bolshevik style intervention by the Baidya faction threatens to take Nepal back to yet another round of social and political turmoil.

Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India

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