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Babuddin Khan
Third Concept,
LB - 39, Prakash Deep Building,
7, Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi-110 001.
Ph : 23711092, 23712249, Fax No: 23711092.
E-mail : third.concept@rediffmail.com
Website: www.thirdconceptjournal.com

Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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Tossing Turns in Democracies

June 9, 2024 elections for the 720-member European Parliament shook the continent's politics. Elections of European Union (EU) consisting of 27 member states coincided with elections of some other member-states. Anti-EU right-wing populist parties registered major gains. Countries like Finland, Belarus, Portugal, Slovakia, Lithuania, Belgium and Iceland have also faced elections with noticeable results, notable change in government as well as change in policy direction.

Far-right National Rally (NR) had unprecedented success to its keg as it won more than double the votes of Macron's centrist alliance. Consequently, President Emmanuel Macron forced snap parliamentary elections in France two years before the scheduled time. NR of Marine Le Pen got 143 deputies elected in the 577-member National Assembly, marking an improvement over 2022 results when her party had bagged 89 seats, and in 2017 just six seats. New Popular Front (NPF), a broad alliance of left-wing parties secured 188 seats, and Ensemble, the centrist coalition of Macron, came second with 161 seats. None could muster majority (289 Seats) to form the government. Hence, electoral results have delivered a hung parliament, making it difficult to form alliance, to form government.

British elections on July 4, 2024 delivered crystal clear majority to Labour Party (center-left party) catapulting Keir Starmer, its leader to the office of Britain's Prime Minister. He won 412 seats of the 650 seats of the House of Commons, the lower house of Britain's parliament. Conservative Party (Tories) of the out-going Prime Minister Rishi Sunak suffered massive setback winning just 121 seats. He was riding on strong anti-incumbency factor, for his party was in power for almost last 14 years. This was not a surprise win for one of the most vibrant democracy on earth. It was, indeed an exception among existing democracies.

In Asia, on July 15th, 2024, Nepal appointed its 14th Prime Minister in the last 16 years. Oli secured 157 of the 268 MPs present. He became the 30th Prime Minister since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1990. Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, leader of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPN-MC) was voted out of Prime Minister's office as he secured only 63 votes on the floor of the House. Political instability has proved to be the only constant for Nepal in the aftermath of November 2022 elections to 275-member House of Representatives (HoR). Nepali Congress (the largest party in parliament of Sher Bahadur Deuba) has 89 seats; K.P. Sharma Oli's Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) has 78 seats; and together they formed alliance on power sharing formula as they had more than majority (138 seats) required to form government. Thus, intermittent alliances, counter-alliances, reversals, betrayals, and hunger for power alone, among the political leaders of the tiny Himalayan nation-states are writ large.

Major issues that were doing the rounds were migration, the war in Ukraine, future of the European Union, Israel's offensive on Gaza, and climate change, to name a few. Political fragmentation remained a key trend in these elections. It is becoming increasingly difficult for governments to muster stable working majority. Coalitions hammered out through multiparty agreements are becoming new normal. Minority governments in these democracies are being found constrained on policymaking; witnessing in-fighting for power; realignment among coalition partners and other political forces. Democracy has thus started taking a tossing turn in most countries on the globe.

Trump v. Biden (now Trump v. Harris) in USA is still in the making though most electoral pundits are predicting for Trump to be in White House. Meanwhile the judicial pronouncement of *Trump v. the United States* will continue to have considerable impact on rule of law in USA as well as on foreign policy of America. Once again raising complex questions before democracy.

— BK



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