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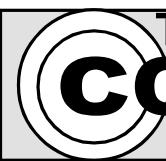
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Editorial

Democracies in Doldrums

Three democracies went down in India's neighbourhood in less than three years. First it was in Sri Lanka in May 2022 when the then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajpakshe resigned from his post and his brother the President, Gotabaya Rajpakshe fled from the country on 13 July 2022. Youth of the country led to the ouster of the most members of the government, and they reached to President's bed room and were seen dancing on his bed. Secondly, in Bangladesh on 5th August 2024, the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had to resign and flee to India seeking political asylum amidst massive protest by youth of the country. Thirdly, history repeated itself in Nepal when Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli had to resign and seek refuge in an Army barrack on 9th September 2025. Oli resigned amidst a massive and violent protest waged by Gen-z or the young population of Nepal. Thus, democratically elected governments were ousted by protestors in all the three countries one after the other as stated above.

Nepal is said to have mismanaged the corruption charges which got triggered once the government legally blocked the social media platforms which was turning out to be the most pro-active about the corruption within political system. Social media ban, though catalyzed the protests, but the public frustration was more on account of the widely prevalent unpopularity of the government and the political leaders. Aloof and alienated political class as well as the citizenry added fuel to the fire. It was in line with the sequence of events that had been happening in Nepal over the last couple of years. Nepal's 56 percent of the population (according to the last census in 2021) is under 30 years of age. Hence, social media apps are ubiquitous, and nearly half the country (48.1%) uses them in one way or the other. Young population also makes some earning through content creation in an era when finding regular job in Nepal is hard. 2000 Nepalese leave the country for job on daily basis. Hence, banning the social media was a double blow: blocking potential source of income; and shuttering platforms where young people could give vent to their grievances against the system.

Development in all these three democracies is indeed a cause of concern for India; as it amounts to serious democracy deficit in the region, where world's largest democracy exists. All these three democracies went down owing to protests raised by young population of these countries. It raises many questions about the strength of democracy and its vulnerabilities in smaller countries. This is turning out to be black letter day for democracies in the region. The events did not only shake the democracies at its foundations; rather it burnt alive many of its symbols and institutions.

Common thread among all the three democracies have been that the protest was led by the young citizens of these countries themselves; though later the ousted government smacked of some foreign hands like Hasina made explicit of the American hand in it; and Oli has been arguing for an Indian hand in it. However, the most important question that remains is of introspection; as to what made their own citizens turn against their regime and rise in protest?

Obviously, it is the miss-performance and 'crisis of legitimacy' on part of political leadership in power continued to be the main cause behind the eruption. The political leaders failed to talk to their own people and enter into any constructive dialogue to address their demands. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It was crystal clear that power reached to head of these leaders which earned the wrath of their own citizens. Moreover, to hide and mitigate their own miscalculations and mishandling; they passed the buck on foreign hands. Hence, the most urgent need was to introspect and talk to their own citizens which would not have belittled them in any way.

Democracy means the political leaders are servant of the people. Hence, they must not count themselves as their masters. Electoral politics is all about serving the people and not only calculating their political fortunes and power-politics. Struggle for power has reached to a stage and scale that the real need of the masses stands ignored turning them into potent force of rebellion and consequent revolution. Leadership across the region as well as world requires understanding the imperative of democracy. Sooner the better; else democracies are sitting on powder-keg, and blast at any moment is in the making. Leaders must put their own house in order first; rather than blaming it on foreign hands.

— BK