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It looks that after many hiccups and doubts of conducting the poll as recently as a fortnight ago, elections to the Constituent Assembly II will take place on November 19.

It is said that many voters in the interior are still confused -whether the elections are for a government under a new constitution or whether the elections are for another constituent Assembly for finalising the constitution that could not be completed by the previous Assembly that began its work in 2008.

Again, it was claimed by previous governments that 80 percent of the work in drafting the constitution has been completed and that the present one to be elected will be able to complete the draft "very soon." Khil Raj Regmi, the present chief executive of the interim government has claimed in a recent interview that the upcoming Constituent Assembly will be able to resolve many contentious issues that have been defying a solution within one year!

This hope is not shared by many others who have watched how the former CA and now dissolved wasted full five years and failed to produce a constitution that was acceptable to all. One wonders how the former CA I members who are again standing for elections could face their voters and explain why they failed to produce even an outline of a constitution in more than five years giving themselves in the process repeated and in a sense unconstitutional extensions!

Except for accepting in principle federalism, the contentious issues of configuration of the states on ethnicity or geography have not been resolved and it is not going to be easy either now with an assembly that is likely to be more fragmented than the previous one. Too late in

the day the UCPN (M) of Dahal is toying with the idea of an executive president even now.

Preparations for the elections are almost over. There was a difficulty in reaching and distributing voter identity cards to far off places and the added uncertainty was the ten-day transport banda (closure of activities) by the Baidya group of CPN M. This has been resolved by authorising the local election commission representatives to distribute the cards in the remote regions.

The biggest surprise and a welcome sign of the changed times was that Baidya group's ten day "banda" fizzled out though the group committed terrorist acts in many places. Vehicles were torched in places like Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Sarlahi, Sindhuli and Sunsari. Petrol bombs were thrown and IEDs were planted at many places. The Army and the Police were able to diffuse a large number of bombs and many were arrested. In one unfortunate incident, a petrol bomb was thrown at a mini bus at Leghankhel, injuring a minor.

There was also a report of one vehicle being fired at in Dadeldhura but luckily the occupants were not injured. There would have been many more incidents that are yet to be reported from remote regions of the country.

In Kathmandu itself, the impact of the banda was minimal and by the evening there were counter marches by concerned citizens against the banda!

It is quite sad to see that some people in Nepal still think that the Baidya group should have been accommodated for an inclusive election! They have not understood then what the Baidya group stood for. If throwing bombs, planting IEDs and opening fire on innocent people are supposed to be peaceful, one can imagine what they would do, if they were to come to power or even share with others. There are suggestions that the new administration from the present upcoming elections should engage with them and accommodate their point of view. The violent ideology of the Baidya group has no place and they should be treated as terrorists and dealt with. Baidya's group did not spare even their former chief Dahal who escaped unhurt in a bombing incident near the venue at Kanchanpur where he was to address an election rally!

As before, this election will be attended by many international entities. The European Union is sending a big team and an advance team is already in position in the remote regions. The Carter center is also joining. Over fifty domestic organisations have been permitted by the Election Commission to observe the election.

Unlike the last election, the Army is being deployed with over 62000 personnel stationed across the country. The Army Chief, Gen Gaurav SJB Rana said that security is strong and the environment is encouraging. The patrolling of highways is being done by the Army this time. These precautions were necessary in the light of the open threat of using violence to disrupt the elections by the Baidya group.

One noticeable feature will be the low percentage of women candidates in the coming elections. What is more- many of the women

contestants will be facing political heavy weights against whom they have no chance of winning. In the last assembly there were 197 women representatives in an assembly of 601, making a percentage of 32.8. This time it looks that they it will be much less. Concerned over the weak representation of women, the Supreme Court has summoned the Chairman of the interim govt. , and minister of law and justice besides election commission to see how this can be rectified. It is too late now any way.

It is unfortunate, but as expected- the Madhesi votes will be fragmented. For a while, the leaders of TMDP Mahant Thakur, RMSS of Sharad Bhandari, Sadbhavana parishad of Rrajendra Mahato and Bijay Gachhadhar of Madhesi People's forum=democratic toyed with the idea of putting up common candidates. This was given up subsequently as the leaders were unwilling to sink their egos for the common good. Upendra Yadav of the other faction of People's forum had decided to go it alone from the beginning and did not even try to form a common front. Gacchhadhar appears to be tying up with the Maoists (UCPN-M of Dahal), while other major parties like the Nepali Congress and the UML have not been able to tie up with the Madhesi Groups.

It is too difficult -rather it will be foolish to predict the results this time as the political dynamics has changed. The leading group- the Maoists of Dahal is split. The UML is also having problems with the janajathi leaders leaving the party in droves. The Nepali Congress appears to be satisfied with its core following and has made no effort to attract the Madhesis or others.

All one can say is that no one group is likely to get a clear majority and the party that had the largest number- in fact more than the Nepali Congress and the UML put together- the UCPN of Dahal may not have same number though they could still be the largest. The Nepali Congress is expected to have a better showing.

Since no party or alliance is likely to get two thirds majority, framing the new constitution is going to be all the more difficult in the coming months and years!

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