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# DEFENCE & SECURITY ALERT

JANUARY 2021 | VOLUME 12 | ISSUE 04 | ₹150

The First and Only ISO 9001:2015 Certified Defence and Security Magazine in India  
The Only Magazine Available On The Intranet Of Indian Air Force

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## ARMY SPECIAL : 1962-2020 PREPAREDNESS & ROAD TO THEATERISATION



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# NEPAL: ROOTING FOR HINDUISM AND MONARCHY

While there is a strong groundswell of feeling for the Hindu state, people's opinion is divided over the return of monarchy. Deposed King Gyanendra and his temperamental son Paras evoke little sympathy from the masses.

**S**tudded in the Himalayas, Nepal has a geo-strategic significance both for India and China. Since early eighties, its political timeline has been a period of many upheavals. Nepal's 240-year old monarchy would have been reigning supreme, had it not been upstaged in 2008 by the political forces. Post-monarchy era has not been stable either. Political uncertainty, corruption, economic slowdown and inability to check Covid pandemic have added to the existing woes of the Nepali people. There has been little progress in implementing the recently adopted Constitution.

The infighting came to pass, when on 20 December, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and his cabinet, in an unprecedented move, recommended dissolution of the House of Representatives, where his party Nepal Communist Party (NCP) had an absolute majority.

The Oli government did not complete its term which was due to expire in 2022.

## Chinese Pawn

The government of the day is under the sway of China and is trying to sever relations from India in every possible way to please its northern neighbour. The political alchemy with China is even more vigorous due to the communists being in power in Nepal. China has ensnared Nepal in its debt trap by offering various infrastructure projects in the name of freeing Nepal from dependence on India. It has been stoking anti-India sentiments through diplomatic machinations. Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi has



*The Coat of Arms of Nepal (1946).*

charmed her way in the corridors of power in Kathmandu and been successful in weaning Nepal away from India. The NCP government, under KP Sharma Oli, had caused a diplomatic consternation of sorts by claiming Indian territories of

It came as a **major embarrassment to Oli** when the **media broke** the news of China having **encroached up on Nepal's Territory**

Limpiadhura, Lipulek and Kalapani in western Nepal. In June 2020, the House of Representatives cleared a Constitution amendment bill unanimously that endorsed the country's new map incorporating the Indian Territory. In a short time, Nepal has catapulted itself to the point of no return as far as its ties with India were concerned.

**Perfidy**

While the people in Kathmandu streets were celebrating inclusion of the Indian territories, China was busy 'salami slicing' the Nepal's border areas. It came as a major embarrassment to Oli when the media broke the news of China having encroached up on Nepal's Territory. A sizeable section of population has begun to realise

that the dragon's generosity comes for a price and India was a better neighbour to deal with.

Internally, some decisions taken during the euphoria of abolishing the monarchy have come back to haunt the political masters. In 2007, Nepal adopted its interim constitution, which declared it as a secular state erasing its 'Hindu State' identity. The current Constitution, promulgated in 2015 describes Nepal as an 'independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive democratic, socialism-oriented federal democratic republican state'.

Over the years, Hinduism and monarchy have had a role in the unification of Nepal. Hinduism is



**COL UTKARSH S RATHORE (RETD)**

The author was commissioned into MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY in 1980. Colonel was an instructor at the Army War College. He is a defence and security expert and risk and threat analyst.



*Prime Minister of Nepal KP Sharma Oli and Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanqi.*





Three chairpersons of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party during their merger announcement function in Kathmandu, on 11 March 2020.

imbued in the cultural and social fabric of Nepal, whose over 80 per cent of the population identifies themselves as Hindus. Nepali people are extremely religious and rooted to their traditions. A look at the country's coat of arms since 1935 and prior to May 2008 would explain the importance of religion in the affairs of the state.

Pashupatinath – the presiding deity of Nepal and the footprints (paduka) of Gorakhnath – a revered saint for the Gurkhas of Nepal and India were emblazoned on the national emblems. Gorkha, a district in Gandaki Pradesh of Nepal takes its name from saint Gorakhnath.

The Nepal flag – the only non-quadrilateral flag in the world too had the images of moon and sun as Gods with human face as believed in Hindu mythology. It was altered in 1962, by the images of moon and sun as celestial bodies.

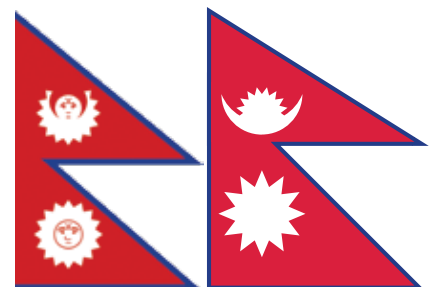
For centuries, the people of Nepal have treated their kings as the Lord Vishnu incarnate. Shah dynasty had played an important role in unification of the country. It is a different thing that the follies of the kings and the royal family contributed towards their downfall in 2008, but the Nepalis still have soft corner for the monarchy, especially when the successive governments have failed to deliver.

Sporadic demands for restoration of monarchy and Hindu state identity have been taking place in Nepal since the interim constitution had abolished the both in 2008. The demand has picked up momentum since November this year, when almost all major cities have witnessed demonstrations in favour of monarchy and the Hindu state. The demonstrations are led by Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and other pro-monarchy groups. The RPP had just one seat

in the last House of Representatives and equally sparse presence in the provincial assemblies. Buoyed by these events, deposed King Gyanendra who has been maintaining a low profile till now is spotted in public places often.

**Hindu State Yes**

Not just the RPP, even the Nepali Congress (NC) has many leaders and workers who support the reinstatement of Hindu state. This sentiment came to fore during the NC's Mahasamiti in December



Nepal Flag before 1962 (L) and the current one (R).

2018, where the members demanded to table a motion in support of the Hindu state. The NC under the pressure from its cadres and voters may support reinstating the Hindu state, but not the restoration of monarchy as it has suffered the most at the hands of monarchy since late fifties.

The other national and regional parties may well weigh their options before going to polls in April-May 2021. The stand of NCP or its earlier factions Communist Party of Nepal – Unified Marxist Leninist and Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist Centre (as the split appears imminent now) over monarchy or Hindu state is going to be rigid.

Drawing ire from all quarters, the dissolution of the House of Representatives by Prime Minister Oli has been viewed as unconstitutional. This may go against the NCP in the upcoming elections, scheduled for April-May 2021. A split in the NCP would further damage its prospects at the hustings. To avert a vertical split in the NCP, China went into overdrive; pushed its ambassador Hou Yanqi to engage the warring factions within the NCP and despatched a high-level delegation for damage control. China is worried about losing its influence over Nepal and massive investments it has made there. There is a window of opportunity for India to regain its lost ground and goodwill in Nepal.

Indians will be eager to see Nepal reverting back to monarchy and Hindu state. With the NCP government gone, the Bharatiya Janata Party government which espouses the cause of Hindutva may avail the opportunity to marshal support of the political parties of Nepal to work towards this cause.



*Protesters wave national flags during the pro-monarchy demonstrations in Nepal.*

## Observers feel, a **constitutional monarchy** has a good chance of **return in Nepal** if the political parties are taken into confidence

### **Monarchy No?**

While there is a strong groundswell of feeling for the Hindu state, people's opinion is divided over the return of monarchy. Deposed King Gyanendra and his temperamental son Paras evoke little sympathy from the masses. "Had it been for King Birendra, things would have been entirely different", observes a Nepal watcher. Still the deposed King Gyanendra is trying to garner support in his favour and as some say, is gaining ground.

Present political void created by wilful dissolution of his government by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli would only augment the case for the return of monarchy. Observers feel, a constitutional monarchy has a good chance of return in Nepal if the political parties are taken into confidence.

### **Christian / Muslim Factor**

Much to the chagrin of majority Hindu population there is growing influence of evangelists in Nepal's politics. Almost all major political parties have been accused of accepting support (read funds) from the missionaries and overlooking their proselytisation. The Christian population which was just 458 in 1961 has swelled to over three million in 2020. Similarly, Muslim population in the Terai region of the country is on the rise and so is their influence. These demographic nibblings are sure to unnerve the Hindu majority.

Nepal mainly suffers from political dysfunction and all associated ills that an unbridled power brings in. Restoration of Hindu state and monarchy may not be a panacea to the problems, but it will surely correct the historic wrong. **DSA**