

Indian Election: A Turning Point for Tibet and Its People?

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The recent outcome of the 2024 Indian general elections, which reinstated the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for its third consecutive term, holds significant implications for Tibet and the Tibetan community residing in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's return to office for a historic third term, a feat achieved only by Jawaharlal Nehru besides him, has been given the mandate by the people.

Observing the recent oath-taking ceremony of the India Prime Minister and his cabinet on 9th June, notable Tibetan figures such as former deputy speaker of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, Acharya Yeshe Phunstok la, and Khensur Jangchup Choeden la, General Secretary of the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), were in attendance, indicating continued engagement between the Tibetan community and the Indian government, though there were no current officials of the Tibetan Government in Exile (officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration) in attendance unlike 2014.

Many have reached and enquired me as to what impact will the results of the Indian Elections have upon Tibet and the Tibetan people as India till date continues to host the largest Tibetan diasporic community with it also simultaneously being the home of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile (officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration).

My humble views based on my meagre knowledge (as I personally am of the opinion that I still have a lot to learn) are the following key considerations regarding the impact of the election results on Tibet and its people:

1. **Parliamentary Engagement:** Unlike previous governments where a single party majority facilitated the passage of bills, the current coalition government necessitates engagement across party lines. And since that avenue has not led to anything concrete from the Indian parliament on Tibet with the only silver lining being the 2014 Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy which itself was passed from the Centre. This presents an opportunity for the Tibetan diaspora to advocate for their interests, as support for Tibet has been always been bipartisan in India and we should continue to work along such lines.

2. **Government Outreach:** Continued engagement with all political parties, including those within the NDA coalition, such as parties led by Nitesh Kumar, who has a history of meeting and engaging closely with the Dalai Lama, remains crucial. This outreach extends beyond parliamentary discourse to engage with the broader Indian government. With in person meetings between Nitesh Kumar and the Dalai Lama and officials of the Tibetan Government in Exile likely on the cards.

3. **Foreign Policy Continuity:** While the reappointment of the incumbent Minister of External Affairs Dr. S.Jaishankar signals continuity in India's foreign policy, particularly regarding Tibet-China relations, recent developments such as India's response to China's territorial claims by renaming locations in Tibet indicate the persistent relevance of the Tibet in bilateral dynamics.



4. **Regional Dynamics:** The outcome of simultaneous state elections, notably in Sikkim, where promises were made regarding the return of the 17th Karmapa to Tibet, underscores the intertwined nature of regional and national politics. Collaborative efforts between the central and state governments in Sikkim may influence the fulfillment of such commitments. An act which Tibetans worldwide wish to be realised as the Gyalwang Karmapa continues to remain a central figure in the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism with his recent 40th birthday celebrated worldwide.

5. **Role of States with Tibetan Settlements:** States like Karnataka, home to the largest Tibetan settlement in India, play a pivotal role in the rehabilitation and resettlement of Tibetans. The current Indian Cabinet has a strong contingent from this state including former Karnataka CM HD Kumaraswamy. Leveraging their expertise in rehabilitation and resettlement of Tibetans in India, that was led by the late S. Nijalingappa will be crucial, especially at a time when Tibetan like the rest of the Indian population are migrating in flocks.

In conclusion, while the foreign policy landscape may see little change, the domestic policy shift resulting from the election underscores a clear changes till the next elections. The Tibetan Government in Exile and the Tibetan diaspora must adapt and position themselves strategically for long-term sustainability in times of such shifting sands. This requires vigilance and proactive engagement with both central and regional authorities, leveraging bipartisan support to Tibet and its people. The current 16th Kashag (cabinet of the Tibetan Government in Exile) and the Tibetan Parliament in Exile have rightly come out with vision and strategic papers that seek in achieving long term and sustainable goals for the Tibetan people.



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