Newfound Stability in Nepal and India's Options

What is the issue?

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- A stable government has emerged in Nepal after decades of uncertainty, with the lefist coalition raising to power with a clear majority.
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- As the new dispensation takes charge of Nepal's progress, India needs to work on rectifying its equation with Nepal, which is currently strained.
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What precipitated the strain in the Indo-Nepal relations?

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- Considering the shared culture, social and economic linkages across the open border, Indo-Nepal friendship and mutual cooperation is only natural.
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- But, New Delhi seems to have constantly under-estimated Kathmandu's fierce sense of self, partly due to its global preoccupations.
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- Conseqently, various Indian efforts to influence Nepal's politics saw severe backlashes in the recent years, to the extent of generating mutual animosity.
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- **Indian Interventionism -** India became progressively intrusive in Nepal, as internal crisis intensified there during and after the Maoist insurgency.
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- Also, the hill-plain polarisation escalated during the constitution-writing, with plains based Madeshi groups becoming more vocal due to tacit Indian backing.
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- India seemed to treat Nepal as a mere extension of its own territory, with a sense of entitlement, exceptionalism and a big brotherly arrogance.
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- Notably, along with the multiple domestic factors, a key reason for prolonged

political instability in Nepal has been India's overt and covert actions.
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- **Chinese Foray -** India is understandably apprehensive as the Chinese geo-economic juggernaut has been trying to infiltrate into Nepal.
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- Notably, Qinghai-Tibet Railway is expected to reach Nepal's northern border by 2020, and is expected to be a game-changer for the region.
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How is the Mr. Oli's regime positioned vis-a-vis India?

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- As PM K.P.Sharma Oli's government has a comfortable majority in the parliament, the regime is expected to last its full term unlike previous regimes.
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- This provides for the opening of a new chapeter in the Indo-Nepal ties, although the regime has largely shared a bad equation with India previously.
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- Notably, the bitterness was mainly on the account of the prolonged blockade of the southern border, when Mr.Oli was PM the previous time.
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- The perception that India was tacitly supporting the blockaders, saw Mr. Oli resorting to China for esnsuring essential supplies.
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- Hence, it needs to be recognized there is a need for India to course correct and restrain from coercive intrusive actions to overcome the past bitterness.
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- Mr. Oli has been exhibiting pragmatic political traits, which provides for ample avenues for India to rebuild lost love, by promising a hands-free aproach.
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- In this context, the Modi government has been a swift mover and Foreign Minister Susma Swaraj has already visited the new dispensation.
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- Notably, economies progress of the eastern UP and northern Bihar which consititute some of the poorest parts in India are directly tied to Nepal.
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What are the priority issues for Nepal's new government?

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- **Constitutional Issues -** Singular majority of Mr. Oli will facilitate the easy implementing the Constitution, which has been partly contentious.
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- Hence, the uncertainty of the last two decades seems to be approaching its end, as Nepal's becomes a federal and secular republic, with a 3 tier setup.
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- But there is confusion on the powers of various tiers, and that of the Supreme Court, which needs to be sorted out going ahead.
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- The transitional years, has left the police, bureaucracy and judiciary politicised, and reversing this will be a challenge.
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- The central socio-political task would be to establish inclusive governance by giving Madhesi and Janajathi people a sense of state ownership.
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- **Economy -** Private sector cartels that control the economy to corruption that has seeped to the village terraces are other aspects that needs rectification.
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- Raising employment through tourism, industry, agroforestry and agriculture, ensuring energy self-sufficiency through hydro projects are economically vital.
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- Winning investor confidence by ensuring rule of law in Nepal is also a primary challenge to rebuild businesses locally.
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- **Other Issues -** The ongoing truth and reconciliation process has been touted by some as a sham exercise to pardon wartime (maoist) atrocities.
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- With Nepal having been recently elected to the UN Human Rights Council, there is opportunity to raise Nepal's international profile.
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- Considering the constitutional safeguards and that the hardliners representing Hindutva ideology have been completely routed is a positive in this regard.
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- Post-earthquake reconstruction, has become increasingly scandalous due to allegations of corruption, which needs to be rectified.
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- On the foreign policy front, balancing India and China would be crucial.

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What are the other internal political considerations?

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- Mr. Oli’s primary preoccupation will be managing the government’s relationship with the opposition Nationalist Congress and the Madesh parties.
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- Notably, a number of statues under the framework of the new constitution remains to be drafted, which will certainly require a larger consensus.
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- Also, Mr Oli’s alliance partner Mr. Prachanda is another constraint in the larger scheme of things whose unwavering support is not a granted one.
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- Despite being a junior partner, Mr. Prachanda has been nurturing Prime Ministerial ambitions which might derail the stable mandate.
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- While the two parties are indeed preparing a permanent unification document currently, it is important to ensure that parallel power centers don’t arise.
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Source: The Hindu

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