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**COLUMNISTS**
**ABE'S MASSIVE WIN STAMPS HIS AUTHORITY IN JAPAN**

 Saturday, 28 October 2017 | [Adarsha Verma](#) | [in Oped](#)

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In September 2017, Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe approved the dissolution of the Lower House of the Parliament (National Diet) and set the stage for snap elections one year ahead of the schedule. The elections were held on October 22, 2017, and the ruling coalition secured a landslide victory by winning 313 seats of the 465-member Lower House. This mandate by the Japanese people restores confidence in Shinzo Abe's forward policies and gives an impetus to continuation of policies since 2012, which include maintaining close ties with

Washington, Australia and India, taking a tough stance on North Korean security threat, overhauling Japan's pacifist image, a return to nuclear power and a global outreach to ensure a "pro-active contribution to peace" by Japan.

The call for elections in Japan by the ruling LDP in October 2017 was strategically timed. Article 7 of the Japanese Constitution allows for the dissolution of the House of Representatives and proclamation of general elections of Diet members by the Emperor, based on the advice and approval of the Cabinet, without pre-conditions. Drawing strength from this Article, Abe decided to call for snap elections at a time which coincided with a resurgence of his popularity in the face of an increasing North Korean security threat. It caught the Opposition Democratic Party (DP), which was in a state of disarray, off-guard. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, who convincingly defeated the LDP in the local Tokyo municipal polls in July 2017, too failed to present a viable Opposition with her newly formed Kibo no To (Party of Hope) and ended up further fragmenting the Opposition votes.

The LDP, however, officially declared that the call for elections was to renew the mandate to cope with a "national crisis" amid nuclear tensions with North Korea. It also sought public support to hike consumption tax from 8 per cent to 10 per cent and use the available additional budget for education and childcare.

This win paves the way for Shinzo Abe to seek a third term as LDP leader in September 2018, which is almost a certainty, thus making him the longest serving Prime Minister in post-war Japan. The two-thirds majority (super majority) for the ruling coalition in both Houses of the National Diet facilitates the numbers required to seek an amendment to the Constitution in order to validate the existence of Japan's military, also called the Self-Defence Forces (SDF), which has been a long standing desire of the LDP Government. Presently, Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation and forbids the maintenance of land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential. Incidentally, the Japanese post-war pacifist Constitution has not been amended till date.

The strong mandate of the Japanese people also places a major responsibility on the Government to provide a focussed pro-growth and pro-business environment in order to jump-start the economy. The economic policies of Abenomics advocated by the Prime Minister since 2012 are based upon "three arrows" of monetary easing, fiscal stimulus and structural reforms. Effects of this much-touted policy is yet to display tangible results as structural reforms still need to be followed up with vigour. The elections of 2017 have provided the ruling party with the much needed time and space to speed up reforms.

For India, the election results have brought good tidings. India-Japan relations have seen an upswing since 2000s which has gained momentum with Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi at the helm of affairs. Abe's win guarantees the continuation of strong India-Japan relations facilitated by the good chemistry between Prime Ministers of both countries. Presently, India-Japan relations share a "special strategic and global partnership" and are complementing their relationships in large number of areas, prominent among them being in the fields of security, energy, technology and infrastructure. Despite its sensitivities, India is the only non-NPT signatory with whom Japan has a civil nuclear deal. India is also the largest recipient of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the tune of 1.75 trillion yen for five years from 2015-16 onwards. Both countries are actively working towards convergence of Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and India's "Act East" policy and also partnering in various projects such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), joint development of ports in the Indian Ocean region and security of Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs). The electoral verdict, therefore, assures that India-Japan relations are poised for an upward trajectory.

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Correctly identifying his priorities post the elections, Abe has said that he will use all diplomatic power at his disposal to address the North Korean security threat and ensure that the Japanese people can live in peace. With regards to the Constitutional amendment, he has expressed a desire to evolve a consensus with all parties and enhance understanding of the Japanese public on the issue, without setting a date for initiating the process of Constitutional amendment.

Incidentally, the declaration of Japanese election results has coincided with the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. East Asia is thus witnessing a simultaneous resurgence of strong leaders like Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe, who have the mandate of their people to act in their national interests as well as in the regional interests of security, peace and stability. Relations between Japan and China are thus poised for renewed cooperation and competition in future. It needs to be seen as to how the ruling coalition carries forward the mandate of the people from here to ensure economic revitalisation and security as well as a proactive contribution of Japan in global affairs.

(The writer is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi)



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