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## **Abe's Resounding Victory**

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Japanese voters have a keen sense of democracy and they are extremely matured as the country is the oldest democracy in Asia. Parliamentary democracy was introduced in Japan by 1868 and it worked during wars too. More or less, Japanese voters made crucial decisions for changing internal politics and their region in different circumstances.

Japan's snap elections were held on 22 October. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of the President of Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP) made the landslide victory in the elections for the third-term by a two-thirds majority, securing 313 seats in the 465-member lower House of Representatives along with their coalition party, Komeito.

Abe is in office since 2012 and he completed five years in power, bringing political stability in Japanese politics. He completed a relatively unsuccessful term in 2006-

2007. He won two terms through snap elections and returned both times with exemplary might. Public polls and surveys by independent organisations lowered down Abe's popularity to 40 percent but he will remain in power by 2021 by winning 313 seats along with his combined coalition. Abe's political charisma is on the making. He would become the longest serving Prime Minister in the post-war era after Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida who served during 1946-1954.

Abe faces daunting challenges at home and abroad. He has to put the house in order. He will work more for his economic reforms, known as "Abenomics" on macro and micro level to unleash growth, to revise Japan's pacifist constitution, to control aging-population, to play a bigger role in the Asia-Pacific, to respond to security challenges posed by North Korea, to improve ties with South Korea, to enhance strategic cooperation with Australia and India, to sustain alliance with the United States, resolve northern territories' (Kuril Islands) issue with Russia, and to improve political and economic ties with China.

Amendment in Japan's pacifist constitution is a challenge for Abe. He is trying to amend the Article 9 of the constitution assigning a "normal" role to Japan's Self Defence Forces (SDF) but not with much success in the past four years of his tenure. Constraints are many in the internal and external environment.

Pacifist constitution is a "blessing" (making Japan economically strong) or an "insult" (restricting its SDF) imposed by America in 1946, is a living debate in Japan even after 71 years. The task looks cumbersome and invites massive criticism and it would be not easy to introduce legislative amendments and muster huge public support in the referendum, requires when a major constitutional change is introduced.

Abe's policy on North Korea also attracted voters because of Government's response to a series of nuclear and missile tests conducted by Pyongyang in recent months as security risks mounted high on Japan. The current polls also revolves around controlling China bashing and improving ties with it, fractured since 2010 on Senkaku / Diaoyu Island in the South China Sea. Abe's deep nationalistic thinking may adjust the China issue in his coming policies. He may put the country in the right direction addressing above challenges.

Abe would negotiate with President Xi Jinping after a new team is formulated as the national congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) that was ended on 24 October. After the re-shuffling of the CPC Politburo and President Xi's securing of the second term in office, Japan indicated that it will seek better ties with China, says Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary, Yoshihide Suga. Both the nations need to continue on the road to peace. It is hoped Abe's third term and Xi's second term would fully normalize ties between the two nations. However, all issues just cannot be solved under Abe's third-term but he may introduce some changes that may result in resolution in the days to come in the right directions between Japan and China.

On the domestic political front, the popularity of the LDP is on the rise and it has defeated several political parties and coalition forces. Since 2012, Japan's other political parties, such as the Democratic Party of Japan (DJP), Japan Socialist Party (JSP), Japan Communist Party (JCP), Democratic Innovation Party (DIP), Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), and Party of Hope (PH) are not performing well in challenging LDP and Abe's policies, giving more room to him to head the lead.

The DPJ of Japan has not performed well after sweeping 308 seats in 2009 elections. The party could not handle the question of the U.S. military base in Okinawa, the tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear meltdown and replaced three Prime Ministers (Yokio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan, and Yoshihiko Noda) one after the other virtually with no success and making room for the LDP to come back. Opposition parties especially CDP and PH need a major overhauling and realignment to cope the challenges posed by the LDP to them.

Japanese politics has much stabilised since the elections that were held in 2012. Abe is emerging as a great leader. Abe still wants to bank on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), which President Trump scrapped in January. Abe intends to fill the gap of the TPP leadership and one has to see how he manages regional consensus for trade, while at the same time, improving ties with China and responding to North Korean threats.

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