

Nepali Maoists to lay down arms and enter the government

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After waging an armed guerrilla struggle for more than a decade, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) last month signed a 10-point agreement to lay down its weapons and join an interim coalition government. The deal, known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), is the result of months of negotiation after the broad outlines were agreed in June.

All the major powers, including the US and neighbouring India, have praised the CPA as a means for stabilising the country following mass protests in Kathmandu in April against the autocratic rule of King Gyanendra. For its part, the Maoist leadership has seized the opportunity to join Nepal's political establishment, explicitly declaring that it has no intention of trying to establish socialism.

Many Nepalese publicly celebrated the end of the country's decade-long civil war as well as the absolute monarchy. However, the entry of the Maoists into the cabinet will do nothing to end the country's deep economic and social crisis and is directed at suppressing any political opposition to the government and its policies. Far from opposing capitalist rule, the Maoists are propping it up.

After signing the agreement on November 21, Prime Minister G.P. Koirala boasted to the media that "a new era had begun" in Nepal. "Nepalis have sent a message to the international community and ... terrorists across the globe that a solution can be found through dialogue rather than through bullets."

Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dhal, also known as Prachanda, described the deal as "the first great world experiment of the 21st century". The agreement was a "victory for the Nepalis who have dreamt of creating a new Nepal and a defeat for the entire forces and principles of regression".

In fact, the Maoists in Nepal are simply the latest in a long line of nationalist guerrilla movements, which in the

1990s abandoned their anti-imperialist rhetoric and, under the auspices of the major powers, cut a deal to enter mainstream capitalist politics. Prachanda is now joining hands with the very parties that over the past decade helped prosecute the war against his guerrilla army.

The Maoists signed a broad agreement with the current seven-party ruling alliance in New Delhi in November 2005 with the tacit support of the Indian government. But it was not until after the mass protests in the capital in April that efforts were made to concretise a power-sharing deal. For days, tens of thousands demonstrated against the monarchy despite a vicious crackdown by the police and army, which resulted in the deaths of at least 21 people.

Faced with the prospect of the protests spiralling out of control, King Gyanendra was compelled to back down, reinstitute parliament and hand power to seven opposition parties. However, the seven-party alliance was compromised in the eyes of ordinary working people by the parties' participation in governments that were widely detested for their failure to alleviate widespread poverty or provide basic democratic rights. As a result, Prime Minister Koirala immediately turned to the Maoists to help shore up the new regime.

The mass protests also proved a shock to the Maoists, who were largely sidelined in the countryside as workers, young people and layers of the middle class took to the streets of Kathmandu. According to a recent *Asia Times* article, "Prachanda's deputy, Baburam Bhattarai, conceded... that the Maoists have realised the contemporary trends and events in and around Nepal would not permit them to grab power through the insurgency they were leading."

A potential major stumbling block was the opposition of the Bush administration, which had branded the CPN-M as a "terrorist" organisation and helped strengthen the Nepalese army. Even though the ruling coalition and the Maoists reached an agreement in June to end the war and

form a joint interim administration government, the deal was not finalised. The major powers, the US in particular, insisted that the Maoists had to give up their arms before entering any government.

Under the final agreement, Maoists fighters will be confined to seven cantonments where their weapons have been collected by the UN and locked away. The government has agreed to provide rations and to assist in the “rehabilitation and integration” of the former guerrillas, who number around 35,000. The available funds are limited, however, to just 70 million Nepali rupees, or less than \$US1 million, and are likely to run out quickly.

The CPN-M has also agreed to end its “revolutionary government” in rural areas it previously controlled.

The Maoists have been allocated 73 seats in the interim parliament—the same number as the rival Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninists), but fewer than Koirala’s Nepali Congress which has 85 seats. The remaining 99 seats will be distributed among the small coalition parties. The CPN-M will also take posts in the cabinet.

Elections for a constituent assembly are due to be held in June 2007. At its first meeting, the assembly will take a decision by a simple majority on whether to abolish the monarchy, and, if it is retained, to decide on the constitutional role of the king. Previously the Maoists had insisted on the end of the monarchy as the precondition of any agreement. Koirala and his Nepali Congress want to retain the king—who previously had sweeping powers—in a limited, constitutional role.

In an interview last month with the British-based *Telegraph*, Prachanda offered a guarantee to international investors that their capital would be safe in Nepal. “We are not fighting for socialism,” he bluntly stated. “We are just fighting against feudalism. We are fighting for the capitalistic mode of production. We are trying to give more profits to capitalists and industrialists.”

Prachanda’s comments are the direct consequence of the Stalinist two-stage theory, which is the core component of the nationalist ideology of Maoism. The Maoists have always subordinated the interests of the working class and peasantry to “progressive” sections of the capitalist class and relegated socialism to the distant future. In one country after another, the results have been a disaster as the ruling class has invariably turned on the masses.

Despite its economic and social backwardness, Nepal is a capitalist, not a feudal, country. Even King Gyanendra

is known for his business dealings. The program of the Maoists does not represent the interests of ordinary working people, but sections of the business elite that are keen to reap the benefits of opening up Nepal to foreign investors and regard the monarchy as an impediment. Senior CPN-M official Dev Bahadur Gurung emphasised in a recent seminar that the party was not against “globalisation or economic liberation or free market economy.”

Significantly, the Maoists have agreed to help suppress strikes and industrial action. Point 7 of the agreement declares: “Both sides believe in the fact that the industrial climate in the country should not be disturbed and production should be given continuity and that the right of collective bargaining and social security should be respected.” Any disputes with employers should be solved “in a peaceful manner”.

Along with other Nepali leaders, Prachanda has written to former US President Jimmy Carter calling on him to send international monitors to observe next year’s poll. “I value your commitment to conducting the CA (constituent assembly) elections in a conducive environment,” he wrote. The letter is clearly addressed not just to Carter but is aimed at establishing closer relations with the US ruling elite.

The Bush administration has only reluctantly supported the agreement with the Maoists. Up until April, Washington had backed the king and his autocratic methods of rule as a means of building US influence in the country. Its stance in Nepal is part of a broader US strategy aimed at containing China by establishing close relations with China’s neighbours, including in South Asia.

India, which confronts armed Maoist guerrillas of its own, played a major role in promoting the agreement between the CPN-M and the seven-party alliance. New Delhi views the deal as a means for encouraging Maoist groups in India to follow the same path. Significantly, Prachanda visited India before finally signing the 10-point agreement last month. He used a press conference to once again promise that his party would never carry out “an event like the [Russian] October revolution in Nepal”.



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