

# Nepal: Parliament drags feet on abolishing monarchy

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Having been revived after four years on the back of a mass people's movement, on May 18 Nepal's parliament proclaimed a series of measures to downgrade the power of the country's king. However, the measures stopped short of abolishing the monarchy, as many participants in the movement had demanded. On May 24 there were already criticisms within parliament that the announced measures were being carried out in a half-hearted manner.

The measures look impressive on paper - they stripped the king of his supreme command over the army, removed his legal immunity and allowed the parliament to debate, and a court of law to challenge, his decisions. They allowed the king's private property and income to be taxed, and allowed the parliament to decide on the royal household's expenditure and security arrangements.

The proclamation also dissolved the king's advisory council and authorised the parliament to decide on the question of royal succession. Nepal's "Hindu state" status will go and it will become a secular state. "His Majesty's Government" will become the "Government of Nepal". Similarly, the Royal Nepal Army will become the Nepalese Army, with its chief being appointed by the parliament.

King Gyanendra unconstitutionally suspended Nepal's elected government in early 2002, but was forced by the mass democracy movement to reinstate it in April this year. The mobilisations were led by the "Seven-Party Alliance" - all of which have representation in parliament - in conjunction with Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which has been waging an armed struggle for the last 10 years. The SPA is headed by the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist).

It is clear that the SPA is fragile. In parliament on May 24, CPN(UML) MP Ishwar Pokharel questioned why, despite the May 18 proclamation, the king's chief secretary had been able to appoint cabinet members under the monarch's orders. He said that this was a "gross violation of [the House of Representatives'] proclamation".

Lilamani Pokharel, an MP from the Nepal's People's Front, which is also in the SPA, told parliament that Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala must reveal what occurred at a May 21 meeting between the PM and the king. He said that the meeting can't remain a "secret", according to May 25 report by Kantipuronline.com.

At the last election in 1999, the parties that make up the SPA won 194 out of 205 seats. The Nepali Congress won 113 seats, but lost 40 MPs when a group split away to form the Nepali Congress (Democratic) in May 2002 (the split group is also part of the SPA).

The CPN(UML) won 68 seats in the elections. The party was founded in January 1991 out of the 1990 people's movement, which forced King Birendra to allow the formation of a parliamentary government. In 1994 it briefly formed a minority government.

The other three members of the SPA are the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, the Nepal Goodwill

Party (Anadi Devi) and the United Left Front.

The ULF was formed in October 2002 out of five of Nepal's many splinters from the Communist Party of Nepal. Two mergers brought the ULF's component parties down to three - the CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist-Maoist), CPN (United Marxist) and CPN (Marxist-Leninist).

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which runs a parallel government in an estimated 80% of Nepal, expressed disappointment that the aspiration of the people's movement to abolish the monarchy hasn't been fulfilled.

A 12-point agreement made last November between the CPN(M) and the SPA had an anti-monarchy basis and, together with the Maoists' voluntary ceasefire at important conjunctures, is seen as crucial to having maximised the striking power of the people's movement.

The CPN(M) has extended its ceasefire since parliament reconvened, but in light of the parliament's half-hearted anti-monarchy measures has expressed second thoughts. "Now [the parliamentary parties] want to marginalise us, to bypass us", CPN(M) chairperson Prachanda was quoted as saying in the May 23-29 ML Update, an Indian publication.

Meanwhile, a key objective of the people's movement - the election of a constituent assembly to rewrite the 1990 constitution along anti-monarchy lines - has made little progress. A complicating factor is differences between the SPA and the CPN(M) on whether local government bodies should be revived. The SPA is inclined to reviving those bodies soon, however the CPN(M) has objected strongly.

Lekhraj Bhatta, a CPN(M) central-committee member, was quoted by the May 31 Himalayan Times as saying that "the Maoists have a hold over 80% of the country where we have our People's Government. So, there is no need for new local bodies and if local bodies are revived, it will only invite conflict ... when [peace] talks are taking place, and when people are waiting for the chance to take part in writing a new constitution, one should not show eagerness to revive small issues."

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