

# Nepal: Maoist rebels and government sign peace pact

Wednesday 5 July 2006, by [CHENG Eva](#) (Date first published: 5 July 2006).

**On June 16, Nepal's governing Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the rebel Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which has been waging an anti-monarchy, anti-landlord guerrilla war since 1996, reached agreement to form an interim government that would include the CPN(M), and to declare soon the date for the election of a constituent assembly to discuss and draft a new constitution.**

As part of the deal, the CPN(M) has agreed to dissolve the rural "people's governments" that it leads and through which it controls some 80% of the Himalayan kingdom of 27 million people, which is one of the poorest countries in the world. According to the World Bank, about 40% of Nepal's population live below the poverty line. Agriculture accounts for 40% of Nepal's GDP and provides a livelihood for 80% of its people.

According to the 2001 census, 25% of Nepal's 4.32 million families are landless peasants, who cultivate other families' land in the hope that they will gain "tenancy rights" to this land.

Two-thirds of the farmers have less than one hectare of land, and they own only 30% of the total farm area. On the other hand, 1.5% of the holdings in the more than five-hectare holding class possess 14% of the total farm area.

The parties that make up the SPA won 194 out of 205 seats in Nepal's last parliamentary election, held in 1999. The SPA's main components are the liberal monarchist Nepali Congress party and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist). Up until May 2002, the Nepali Congress held 113 seats, but lost 40 MPs when a group split away to form the Nepali Congress (Democratic), which is also part of the SPA.

The CPN(UML), which was formed in 1991 out of the 1990 urban-based mass movement that forced King Birendra to allow the formation of a parliamentary government, won 68 seats in the 1999 elections.

Election of a constituent assembly was a major demand of the April mass movement that forced King Gyanendra to abandon 14 months of dictatorial rule and to allow the SPA to form a government. But election's timing and preparatory steps are still under intense contention, with differences among the major political forces in the democracy movement that were set aside earlier re-emerging.

One key issue of contention is whether the monarchy will be completely abolished or kept in a ceremonial capacity. The other is to what extent the CPN(M)-led forces should disarm before leaders of the party can be accepted as part of the new government.

Last November, the SPA entered into a loose alliance with the CPN(M), based on a 12-point agreement - facilitated by a CPN(M) ceasefire - that contributed significantly to the mobilising power and success of the April anti-monarchist movement. However, considerable tension has built up since the SPA-dominated parliament reconvened on April 24, with the CPN(M) repeatedly

complaining of being sidelined.

In an apparent bid to display its independent mobilising power, on June 2 the peasant-based CPN(M) organised a rally of hundreds of thousands of people in the capital Kathmandu that demanded the disbanding of any parliament that doesn't carry out the "people's aspirations".

This set the scene for the far-reaching eight-point understanding on June 16.

On June 24-25, the CPN(M)'s two key leaders - Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai - travelled to Kathmandu to have meetings with at least two of the constituent parties of the SPA - the CPN(UML) and the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party - to "address suspicions and differences".

The next day, a six-member interim constitution drafting committee was formed, tasked to present a draft of a new interim constitution not later than within 15 days.

The June 26 edition of South Korea's Ohmy News website quoted Nepali home minister Krishna Prasad Sitoula, who is also the SPA's chief negotiator with the CPN(M), as saying "the Maoists will join the government as soon as the UN starts monitoring the weapons of the Nepal Army and the Maoists". Sitoula added the date of the constituent assembly election would only be announced after the interim government ensures that "people will not have to feel insecure from either" the Nepalese Army or the Maoist guerrillas during the election.

According to the state-run daily Rising Nepal, Prachanda told journalists in western Nepal on June 23 that "the Maoist army and the Nepali Army could be merged before constituent assembly elections after the formation of the interim government through an interim constitution". But UN assistant secretary general Kul Chandra Gautam "strongly opposed" the idea of the two armies merging, Ohmy News reported on June 26.

According to the June 25 Qatar-based Gulf Times, while the CPN(M) is not prepared to disarm, it said on June 22 that it is willing to put its army and its weapons under the supervision of UN monitors to create a stable environment for the constituent assembly elections.

---

**P.S.**

\* From Green Left Weekly, July 5, 2006.