



News Update from Nepal

1 July 2008

National Security

Nepal is facing the condition of statelessness. On June 22, over 200 Armed Police Force (APF) of Banke revolted to protest against poor ration quality and senior official's ill-treatment. They also beat up APF battalion chief and other senior officers. On June 23, the rebelling armed forces reached an agreement with the government and formed a nine-member team to listen their grievances and corruption done by senior officials. A similar event that took place in Parvat district, however, went unnoticed. On June 20, civil servants urged the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to take strong action against the Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation Matrika Yadav for locking up the Local Development Officer of Lalitpur, Dandu R. Ghimire, in a toilet for allegedly allowing illegal stone quarries at a community forest in Lalitpur.

Frequent robberies in the highways and the rise of extortion, kidnapping and killing by non-state armed actors have weakened the sense of public security. The public life in Birgunj has been paralyzed due to the killing of one government official by the cadres of Tarai Mukti Tigers. Similarly, in a confrontation between the police and Akhil Tarai Mukti Morcha (ATMM) in Bara four cadres of the latter were killed. A cloth trader was killed in Birgunj while two persons were killed in Butwal. On June 21, Bardibas bazaar remained closed due to the bombing of the petroleum pump by the cadres of Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (JTMM). JTMM killed a worker of Surya Nepal factory, the former mayor of Gularia municipality and even exchanged fire with the police in Rajbiraj. Madhesi Virus Killers Party detonated an improvised explosive (IED) device at Saptari while Tarai Army detonated a pipe bomb at Bara. The regime has thus failed to create public order.

Political Deadlock

The ruling Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) continues to face a deadlock over the distribution of key posts and has failed to form the new government following the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections of April 10. The CPN (Maoist) and Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF) opposed the Nepali Congress (NC) request to elect Premier G.P. Koirala as the first president of Nepal. The CPN-UML proposed the name of Madhav K. Nepal, the former secretary-general while CPN (Maoist) proposed Ram Raja Prasad Singh of Janabadi Morcha. Singh is also being supported by Madhesi parties. Recently, CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist) have reached an understanding to support each other's candidate for the position of president and prime minister respectively. On June 8, the top leaders of the three largest parties - CPN (Maoist), NC and CPN-UML - formed a six-member panel to prepare a draft for a constitutional amendment and suggest ways to implement past accords.

On June 20, CPN (Maoist) ministers withdrew from the government blaming Premier Koirala for the deadlock and threatened to wage a "people's struggle." The growing animosity between CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist) has angered NC as it believes that the left unity is spoiling an attempt to reach consensus and threatened to "stay in opposition."

On June 24, the SPA agreed to elect the prime minister, the president and vice-president through a simple majority of the CA, enforce all past accords on peace within 15 days and manage the Maoist weapons and combatants within six months through the formation of a special committee from the major parties but decided to leave the task of new power sharing in the hands of the CA. It also agreed to settle the issue of the composition of the National Security Council (NSC) through the CA, include the opposition representative in the Constitutional Council and NSC, table a bill at the CA on June 25 for a fifth amendment of the 17-month old Interim Constitution, ensure to make the Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League (YCL) quit occupied places in two weeks and change into a political body, ensure the Maoists return captured property within 15 days and request the UN to limit the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) to two specific issues-managements of weapons and integration of the combatants. Accordingly, the SPA signed a 21-point agreement on June 25 and all 428 members present in the CA unanimously passed a cabinet order issued on May 28 to remove the difficulties through a simple majority formula. The paradigm shift of politics from a consensual to a majoritarian one has, however, partially relaxed the deadlock.

On June 26, the government registered a bill in the CA, proposing the Fifth Amendment in the Interim Constitution incorporating all above provisions. The Premier is authorized to nominate three cabinet ministers from different parties in the NSC. It also stipulates to revive interim local government bodies through the selection of representatives of parties active in the concerned areas. Accordingly, on June 26, Premier Koirala announced his resignation at the CA to pave the way for the formation of a CPN (Maoist)-led government. But, he will submit a formal resignation only after the election of president.

Albatross in SPA's Neck

The CA session, however, could not proceed as members of Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF), Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party (TMLP) and Sadbhavana Party (SP) obstructed it opposing the fifth amendment of the constitution as it did not include the provision of agreement the government signed with United Madhesi Front on February 28 for a single Madhesh state. The left parties strongly opposed "One Madhesh, One Pradesh" and group entry of Madhesi in the Nepali Army (NA). CPN-UML, CPN-ML, People's Front Nepal and Nepal Workers and Peasants Party argued that recognition to a single Madhesh state comprising 20 districts in Tarai would undermine the rights of the indigenous population living in the region for centuries. Premier Koirala promised to introduce a supplementary bill to incorporate the concerns of the Madhesi parties. The CPN (Maoist) views that carving federal states is the task of the CA, not the current government. The Madhesi parties and three major parties - NC, CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist) - have agreed to hold a joint meeting to resolve the deadlock.

Nine political parties have recommended 26 CA members to be nominated by the Cabinet. Accordingly, CPN (Maoist) recommended the name of nine persons, Nepali Con-

gress five, CPN-UML five, MJAF two, TMLP one, CPN-Marxist Leninist one, People's Front Nepal one, Nepal Workers and Peasants Party one, Nepal Sadbhavana Party (A) one. Twenty small parties who won seats only through the proportional representation system decided to form a coalition to fight hegemony, dictatorship and discrimination of big parties. They asked the big parties to demonstrate a democratic political culture and involve them in the constitution drafting process rather than institutionalize the separation between 3, 7, 12 and 13 parties on the basis of power equation.

Republic

On June 11, ex-King Gyanendra Shah left Narayanhiti Palace after delivering an emotional speech to the Nepali people at a press conference. He denied all allegations leveled against him and his family during the last seven years and highlighted the contribution of the Shaha dynasty. He said, "I had no other interests except considerations for the sovereignty, independence, national pride, territorial integrity, peace and institutional development of democratic and overall progress of all the citizens." He also pledged to remain completely dedicated to the independence and territorial integrity of the nation. On June 15, Premier Koirala hoisted the national flag at Narayanhiti Palace, marking the celebration of the implementation of a republic. The government gave the ex-King Gyanendra Nagarjun palace and his family members with adequate security. The palace has already been converted into a museum.

Integration of Maoist Combatants

On June 13, Maoist leader Barsha Man Pun said that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) should be allowed to develop a separate national security force like other security mechanisms. He added, "We have read in history the consequence of the dissolution of liberation army by B.P. Koirala, the first elected Prime Minister of Nepal. There are four security wings, the PLA can become the fifth. NC and MJAF opposed the integration of PLA into NA. On June 12, Chief of the Army Staff R. Katawal said that the "purity, sanctity and integrity of the Nepali Army should not be compromised in the name of democratizing the institution. He added, "The army believes in objective civilian control that ensures depoliticization, neutrality and subordination as part of its professionalism and ethos. The essence of an objective civilian control is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism." All Madhesi parties opposed the integration of PLA in NA

Political unity

On June 8, Narayankaji Shrestha (Prakash), General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Center-Masal), has revealed that the Maoists are set to drop the 'Prachandapath' as their ideology. Prakash further added that the Maoists will also change their party's name after the unification with his party. He said that they will drop the brand 'Maoists' and will carry the name simply as the *Communist Party of Nepal*.

On June 13, Secretary-General of CPN-UML J.N. Khanal said it is in the interest of the CPN-Maoist to tie up with CPN-UML. He favored a government of left alliance. On June 23, Maoist and CPN-UML have reached an agreement to seek consensus with other political parties on an amendment to the constitution even without the NC.

Foreign Affairs

On June 13, influential sections of India's ruling United Progressive Alliance of India strongly backed the immediate formation of a CPN (Maoist) led government in Nepal. They expressed dissatisfaction at Premier Koirala for "staying in power against people's mandate." On June 16, NC condemned the remarks of Indian leaders. "Such statements that appeared in newspapers in the name of CPM leader Sitaram Yechuri, D.P. Tripathi and CPI leader D. Raja are interference in Nepal's sovereignty, national unity and independence. We request the leaders to be sensitive towards another independent country's internal affairs and respect the Nepali people's right to decide who should form a government and how, under the interim constitution."

On June 2, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Jaswant Singh expressed "The new government to be formed under the Maoist leadership in Nepal is against India's interest and poses a security threat to India." He preferred the unity of NC and Madhesi parties against Maoist. On June 4, Eduardo L. Jimenez, charge d' affairs of the Delegation of European Commission to Nepal said, "Sharing of power is important as no party had secured a comfortable majority in the CA." The EU has earmarked assistance worth Euro 120 million for the period of 2007-2013 to be spent in education, peace-building, trade facilitation and capacity building. On June 20, British Minister for International Development Shahid Malik during his three-day visit to Nepal asked the political parties to move forward to form a government. The UK has agreed to provide \$ 55 million over four years to help the government of Nepal to connect all of rural Nepal by roads.

On June 27, the police arrested over 50 Tibetan protestors in Kathmandu which was condemned by the European Union and the US. They were protesting against China's crackdown in Tibet. Issuing a joint statement, the diplomatic missions of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Norway, the UK, the US and France expressed concern about the recent detention without charge of three members of the Tibetan community in Nepal. "We understand and respect Nepal's national security concern and, certainly, the importance of protecting diplomatic premises. We urge you, however, to ensure the humane treatment of peaceful protesters."

Economy

On June 9, the government raised the price of aviation fuel by about 25 %. Transporters demanded a raise of 35 % while students demanded a 50 % discount which the former opposed. In the second half of June conflicting demands caused a series of general strike. After students won a 45 % discount on fare they ended their strike. The transporters also reached an agreement with the government on increasing fares by 7.5 % for Kathmandu valley and 3.5 % for long and medium routes over the rates set by the government.

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