

# Dispute grows in Nepali Maoists as China and India struggle for influence

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The political crisis in the Nepali Maoists continues as the question of the fate of the guerrilla army divides the leadership. Rajesh Thapa reports

The split talk in the Maoist party has increased. The party's senior vice-chairman Mohan Baidya (Kiran) has strongly opposed nearly all the decisions taken by the Party Chairman Puspa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and the government led by his own party's vice-chairman Bhattarai. The division is now noticeable throughout the Maoist party's rank and file.

The chairman has declared that the internal feud has reached its peak. But, he has been blamed for making the split a fact by totally sidelining the opposition. The opposing faction has taken its views to the masses and has warned of grave consequences. It is likely that some of the top leaders and frustrated members will quit the party if the row continues.

Their disputes over the fate of the former guerillas have brought things to a climax. The Baidya faction claims that the Seven Point Agreement among the political parties will make the People's Liberation Army (PLA) merely a part of history and also discredit them. The agreement which promises to integrate 6,500 out of almost 20,000 combatants into the Nepal Army (NA) has, according to him, surrendered the PLA to the state. He already has serious differences regarding the party's handover of the keys of weapons containers to the state, as well as over a number of other topics. The PLA, which once fought against the state structure, is now being systematically incorporated into that structure itself.

In a smart move the government has also made the voluntary retirement package and the 'rehabilitation package' more attractive than the 'integration package'. But the rehabilitation one has little attraction has been since many fear that their fate may be as dreadful as that of the nearly 4,000 cadres who were considered unqualified and then discharged. The Baidya faction has given clear signs that the seven-point agreement is unacceptable to them and should rather be scrapped.

The rift in the Maoist Party in the recent period has its root in the Central Committee meeting of June 22 that decided to follow the line of 'peace and constitution' instead of 'peace and revolt'.

The rival faction headed by comrade Kiran has registered a number of notes of dissent and agitated since then. In one of his latest series of protests vice-chairman Kiran has challenged the party leadership's decision to return the property seized from the landlords during the armed struggle, according to the divisive seven-point agreement, by disrupting the process. He has demanded that the returning of more than 250 hectares of seized land be halted instantly; mainly on the grounds that it does not address the rights of the landless people. Cadres close to him have warned of tough retaliation if the process is taken forward by the means of force.

While the row inside each of the main parties deepens, the fourth extension of the Constituent Assembly (CA) deadline has failed to give us a new constitution. Dozens of unsolved issues and very sensitive issues such as the restructuring of the country into federal states may not only prove fatal in regards to internal stability if they are not addressed but also sweep away such political achievements as there have been since the anti-monarchy revolution.

Now the parties are trying to expand the deadline for six months longer. Surely, this has raised a lot of questions among the public in regards to the work and morality of the CA members and the ministers since the state has been spending millions of rupees every month to maintain them. On top of that, the Supreme Court has said that the deadline for constitution drafting can be extended but for the last time. It implies that if constitution is not promulgated within the next extended deadline, the Assembly will automatically dissolve. It is very probable that the agents of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism will intensify their efforts towards plotting to bring this dissolution about.

### **Growing Indian and Chinese concern over Nepal**

The increase in activities, meetings and investment within this tiny nation caught between two rising but rival continental and world powers, India and China, are likely to tear it apart. The heads of both states are expected to make separate visits to Nepal soon as each competes with the other for influence.

The main concern of China has been the rising movement of Tibetan exiles in Nepal. The whole of Nepal's northern border is adjacent to Tibet. Nearly a thousand Tibetans enter Nepal every year. There are already more than twenty thousand exiled Tibetans here. Beijing also fears the increasing migration and residence of exiled Tibetan refugees from India to Nepal. It has been bullying the Nepal government to check the activities of 'Free Tibet' supporters.

On the other hand, India and the United States have shown 'extraordinary generosity' towards the Tibetans helping them in different ways as if they support their cause out of the sheer goodness of their hearts. But the underlying reason for their help has been their foreign policy towards (more appropriately - 'against'-) China. If this is not the case, we would like to know why the more pressing plight faced by thousands of Bhutanese refugees has not been dealt with equally urgently. Therefore, China is eager to strengthen its position in Nepal to counteract the very strong Indian presence.

Similarly, India fears the rapid construction of complex railway network southwards by China closer to Nepal and also towards the disputed Sino-Indian frontiers. Nevertheless she is not doing the opposite either. This Chinese move seems aimed less against India than at consolidating its hold on Tibet through policies such as bringing in more Han population, more military and more investment. India is also suspicious about the Nepal-China ambition of linking Lhasa to the Nepalese capital Kathmandu.

Nepal has been heavily reliant on Indian imports for many decades. Almost 50 per cent of its trade is with India and imports from India are six times the amount of export from Nepal. This trade deficit has a tremendous impact. India also enjoys more influence over Nepal because of Nepal's similarity and closeness with India in terms of culture, language, lifestyle, religion and ideology, etc. For a long time India has hungrily eyed the hydroelectric potential of Nepal, supposed to be able to produce 84,000 mega watts, and that of Bhutan also. Already there have been treaties and agreements between India and Nepal in India's favour over rivers flowing south towards India

### **The spectre of poverty**

According to recent government statistics almost twenty-six percent of the population earn less than a dollar a day. Because of weak project management, corrupt politicians and bureaucracy, and frequent changes of government there has not been any significant development over the last six decades despite

huge foreign aid.

The problem of unemployment is unchecked for decades now. The dollar has gained sharply against the Indian currency and thus the Nepali rupee which is tied strongly to the Indian rupee is badly hit. This has added further to the problem of inflation and loan repayments.

The fundamental inequalities of Nepalese society and their underlying causes have not been addressed. A constitution which does deal with the issues raised by the Nepalese class struggle and historic underdevelopment will be a mere code of conduct for government those who directly work against the vital interests of the majority of the already oppressed and brutalized people. A constitution based on a socialist society is the only alternative. We need to work together and fight ourselves for our freedom! Workers, Peasants and all oppressed class unite!

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