



Nepalese Parliament in swan-song: interim House with Maoist members

Dipayan Mazumdar & Associates, January 27, 2007

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On January 15, 2007, the Parliament of Nepal dissolved themselves after a marathon day-long debate which accorded approval to the Interim Constitution finalized in accordance with the agreement of Nov. 8, 2006.

PR9.NET January 27, 2007 - Kathmandu, Nepal: At 8.25 p.m. on Jan. 15, 2007, the Parliament of Nepal consisting of the Pratinidhi Sabha elected in May 1999 and the dormant Rashtriya Sabha (National Assembly), the lower and upper houses of Parliament of Nepal, respectively, dissolved themselves after a marathon day-long debate which accorded approval to the Interim Constitution finalized in accordance with the agreement of Nov. 8, 2006.

Half an hour later, at 9 p. m. the interim parliament met at the same venue, but this time with a new composition, the main feature of which was the presence of 83 members of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) who are supposed to have abandoned the gun in favour of Parliamentary democracy.

Nepal thus commenced its penultimate march towards a probable republican polity, a giant leap forward from the days of militancy launched by the Maoists since Feb. 13 1996, which had seen the death of 13,000 young men and women of Nepal in a no-holds-barred orgy of violence aimed at establishing a people's democracy a la the Peoples Republic of China. The guns are silent now and according to the "peace agreement" between the seven-party alliance in power at the moment and the Maoists on Nov. 22, 2006, these arms are to be surrendered to United Nations-supervised agencies. This process is expected to be completed by the end of January, and then the Maoists who had been "eliminating" class enemies will sit along with them and occupy ministerial offices, abiding by the law of the land and no longer wielding the guns.

The new 330-member House, which includes those who were earlier members of the Pratinidhi Sabha and the Rashtriya Sabha, plus the un-elected Maoists, plus 48 other un-elected members distributed among the eight parties (including the Maoists), has been charged with the task of holding elections for the Constituent Assembly which will draft the ultimate Constitution, Nepal's seventh since 1948.

This election is scheduled to be held by the end of May this year, just before the monsoon sets in, and that House will draft Nepal's new Constitution. That House will have 425 members. However, before taking up the task of getting the Constitution drafted, the first session of the Constituent Assembly, will decide on the fate of the monarchy.

The House sat up to 11 in the night on Jan. 15 to meet again on January 17, after observing a day's holiday on Jan. 16, but even before it adjourned, the Maoists managed to create problems by demanding that the office of the Speaker should be awarded to them. This was not agreed upon and one might see some fireworks on this issue on Jan. 17.

However, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, addressing outgoing House in the evening of Jan. 15, had asserted that he would continue to fight for democracy till the last, a task to which he had devoted sixty years of his life (since the struggle against Ranas was launched about the time India had become Independent). Whether this was a warning to the Maoists or rivals in other political parties it was not clear from reports on the internet, but it is a fact that "Girija Babu", while ready for compromise, had never succumbed to the pressure exerted by the Maoists since May 2006 when he had been appointed the Prime Minister on conclusion of the Jana Andolan (People's Movement II of April 2006).

However, even then, according to Article 45(3) of this Constitution the life of the Pratinidhi Sabha had expired five years after it was constituted on or about May 15, 2004. How come this "dead House" could be revived? But then, as Prime Minister Koirala had told Supreme Court Advocates who had raised this issue, the "Jana Andolan" had a bigger force than laws enacted earlier, and had asked the agitated lawyers to lie low.

Even as legal formalities appear to have been taken care of, the new government's main task will be to ensure that the country prospers economically. The abject poverty of the masses, avenues of employed largely confined to migration to Indian cities and industrial units, and the very real division between the "Madhesis" and the "Pahadis" which has manifested now with violence being resorted to for the first time by the "meek Teraiwallas" are major problems for the new government to be tackled.

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About Dipayan Mazumdar & Associates

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