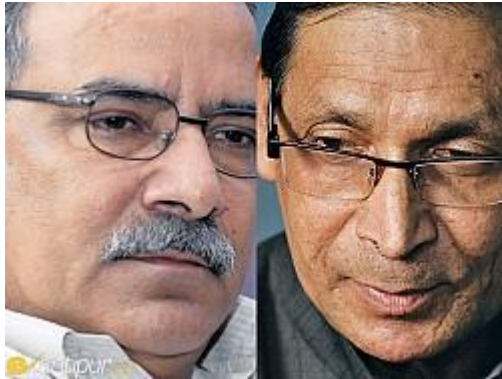


Marginalised, two Maoist parties looking for merger



Pushpa Kamal Dahal (left) and Mohan Baidya

By Kamal Dev Bhattarai

KATHMANDU, MAR 13 [2014] - Despite deep ideological differences, two Maoist parties are trying to find a common ground in their desperate bid to consolidate the political position they lost after the November 19 election.

Talks between the UCPN-M and the CPN-M are underway at different levels to discuss the possibility of unification. Leaders from both parties do not know exactly when the unification will take place but they say "unification is a must for our survival."

The two Maoist parties are passing through a great ideological dilemma. As both the parties are working to revise their ideology, the leaders say unification is possible if a new ideology is formulated, which will be acceptable to both.

CPN-Maoist, a breakaway party, was formed in 2012 due to serious differences on the interpretation of the ongoing peace process and constitution writing.

Pressure is mounting on the UCPN (Maoist) to define the party's current ideology and the CPN-M is facing a similar challenge. Having been relegated to third place in the CA, many UCPN (Maoist) leaders believe that there is a serious problem in its ideology.

After the November 19 election, UCPN (M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal is publicly saying that party split was a major reason behind the poor show in the November 19 polls, calling on the breakaway party to come under a single banner.

In private meetings, CPN-Maoist leaders are requesting the UCPN (M) to abandon the line of promulgating a new constitution from the CA.

The UCPN (M) leaders are of the view that they can not immediately give up the path of 'peace and constitution', as there is some hope that the CA would draft a "progressive constitution".

Dahal is believed to have told the CPN-Maoist leaders that their lawmakers will resign en masse if the CA fails to be inclusive and makes a departure from some fundamental issues that the Maoist party stood for in the first CA.

Such a condition will create a political atmosphere for the unification of two parties. "If a new constitution is not drafted within a year, we have to take a different path and ideology," said Maoist leader Haribol Gajurel without elaborating what that would be.

A Dahal faction leader said they are 'seriously working' to unite with the CPN-M as the party's senior leader Baburam Bhattarai is threatening to leave the party owing to the differences with Dahal. Many in the Dahal camp believe that 'Bhattarai factor,' who strongly espoused 'peace and constitution' line, was one reason for the party split in 2012.

The situation inside the CPN-M is no different. The CPN-M, despite being in existence for two years, has not yet set off its political line. CPN-M's official policy is to launch a revolt on the foundation of 'people's war' but there seems to be little appetite for a revolution in the party rank and file.

Second-rung CPN-M leaders like Netra Bikram Chand, Khadka Prasad Biswokarma and Kul Prasad KC, among others, are dissatisfied with the veterans like Mohan Baidya, Ram Bahadur Thapa and CP Gajurel. "There are some serious problems inside the party and we are preparing to move ahead in a new way," said Biswokarma. "Unification is possible with the UCPN (M) if it corrects its current political line."

Leaders from both the parties have lately confessed that split was a blunder saying that they should have remained in the same party despite the 'ideological differences'. There have been some high-level meetings between the top leaders of the two parties in recent weeks.

"The current ideology of both parties could be taken as a property and new ideology could be formulated through a mutual discussion which can pave the way for unification of two parties," Dahal recently told his close associates. But it is not only a matter of ideology; it is the leadership which takes a prominent space during unification.

The Baidya party has said that they would not accept Dahal's leadership saying that he failed to steer the party in a proper direction. But it is not clear about where it wants to go. Its leaders say their desired "revolt" seems impossible under the current national and international circumstances.

Bhattarai presses Dahal for restructuring

UCPN (Maoist) leader Baburam Bhattarai has suggested Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal for party restructuring.

In a meeting at Dahal's residence on Wednesday, Bhattarai told the party supremo that there would emerge a new force if the party functions in status quo. "The party cannot function in this manner as the agitation has reached a new level," a source quoted Bhattarai as saying. "There is no alternative to changing the party into new structure, new ideology and new power."

Urging Dahal to initiate changes in the party, Bhattarai said, "If you do not have the courage to transform the party into a new force in the changed political situation, people themselves will make such a force."

Bhattarai has been expressing dissatisfaction, saying that Chairman Dahal has not changed his modus operandi even after the party faced unexpected defeat in the second CA election.

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