

Former Nepal Maoist Leader Bhattarai Forms New Party

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Nepal's ex-prime minister Baburam Bhattarai, who in a major jolt to Prachanda-led UCPN-Maoist had quit the party four months ago, today formed his political outfit comprising former Maoists and claimed it will emerge as an alternative force in the country hit by Madhesi protests.

Bhattarai, announced a 35-member Interim Central Council of the party named 'New Force Nepal' but said the council will eventually have 265 members. The Interim Council mostly includes former government officials and technocrats.

Prominent members include artiste Karishma Manandhar, political analyst Mumaram Khanal, former bureaucrat Rameshwor Khanal, senior Maoist leader Devendra Poudyal, Madhesi leaders Ramchandra Jha and Ramrijhan Yadav.

The 61-year-old former vice-chairman of the UCPN-Maoist claimed that his party will emerge as an alternative force that would rebuild Nepal and bring economic prosperity to the country.

Bhattarai, a veteran leader of the UCPN-Maoist and the senior-most leader after party chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal -- popularly known as Prachanda -- said New Force Nepal will emphasise on transparency, good conduct and good governance.

He severed ties with UCPN-Maoist in September last year over the new Constitution, alleging that the outfit has become obsolete and a new vision was needed to run Nepal in the 21st century.

The new party was not based on the Communist ideology and would follow peaceful means to transform the country hit by protests by Indian-origin Madhesis, he told reporters.

"Our party will build the foundation of national industrial capitalism and seek to set up prosperous and justifiable society," he said. [Color added here for emphasis. —BT ed.]

Bhattarai, who spent his years as a student at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University and is said to have close links with India, has been sympathetic to the Madhesi agitation over more rights and representation to the people residing in the southern plains of Nepal.

He termed the amendment in the new Constitution "a positive step" but urged major political parties to address all the demands raised by the Madhesi leaders.

"Our new force will be based on participative and inclusive democracy," he said.

The formation of the new party would undoubtedly give a big jolt to UCPN-Maoist, which waged a decade-long insurgency to topple monarchy, as more Maoist leaders are expected to join Bhattarai's outfit.

The Maoist party had joined the peace process and adopted multi-party democracy in 2006 after the success of the Peoples Movement that led to restoration of democratic rights and subsequently abolition of monarchy.

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