

Prachanda Interview: "We want new unity on a new basis with India"

Siddharth Varadarajan, The Hindu, 28 April 2008

In the first part of this interview Prachanda advises the CPI (Maoist) and other Maoists around the world to study the political views and experience of the CPN (Maoist).

'We want new unity on a new basis with India'

Ever since the Maoists won the Constituent Assembly elections in Nepal, the rush of visitors and well-wishers at Chairman Prachanda's residence and office has been relentless. Despite his punishing schedule, the man who is likely to be Nepal's next Prime Minister took the time to give The Hindu an exclusive, hour-long interview on April 24. In precise and even chaste Hindi, Mr. Prachanda spoke about the future of Nepal-India relations, his party's plans for the new Constitution and the difficulties that lie ahead.

It is widely acknowledged that India played a crucial role in helping the Maoists and parliamentary parties forge a common front and in ensuring the Constituent Assembly elections were held as scheduled on April 10. And yet, there has also been a residue of suspicion between New Delhi and you. What is your assessment of the role India has played in this entire process?

The positive approach of the Indian government was a major factor behind the 12-point understanding reached in Delhi between the parliamentary parties and us in 2005. That agreement wouldn't have been possible if the Indian government's support hadn't been forthcoming. It is from there that a new relationship between India and Nepal begins — and particularly the improvement in relations between the GOI and us. Before that, there was a lot of suspicion and contradiction. But from then to now, the attitude and help of the GOI is known to everyone. It is an open secret. India has consistently been in favour of elections. It had said all along that without having elections, a stable Nepal cannot be established, that elections should be held on time. Similarly, India's emphasis on taking the peace process forward is known to all. So through this, there has been a great improvement in relations.

At the same time, our party had lingering doubts before the elections, that India could do something ... For example, a statement came from Delhi that we cannot really trust the Maoists, that our [choice] is the Nepali Congress. We saw this statement and were a little concerned that this traditional mindset might have an effect on the elections. So I made a comment that a responsible official in India should not say these things on the eve of elections, that the implication of such statements is not good. Later there was an attempt to clarify things from Delhi. Still, there was a doubt in our mind. But after the results, we feel a basis has been prepared for relations with India to become even better and that whatever little suspicion and doubt existed has now ended.

It is also possible that as far as Delhi was concerned, there were doubts about whether we would go for elections or not, whether we would take part properly. But I think that through this election and its results, the doubts that were there in India's mind have also ended and a new basis has been prepared to have new unity and new cooperation. I feel the atmosphere now has changed dramatically. India is openly saying it has no problem in working with and unconditionally assisting any democratically elected government.

So are we now at a turning point in the bilateral relationship between India and Nepal?

This is my belief. Earlier the problem was India's two-pillar theory [of support for constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy]. You will recall in my first interview to you in 2006, I said the two-pillar theory is the biggest obstacle and that as long as India does not abandon it and come out in support of the Nepali people, there will always be difficulties. Fortunately, the 19-day andolan led the GOI to clarify it would respect the people's verdict, even if this was for a republic. That was historically a very big change in Delhi's policy. And the 12-point understanding represented an equally big change in the Maoists'

position and attitude. Thanks to these changes and other developments up to the elections, a historically new basis has been prepared.

I am very happy about this because of our cultural, historical and geographical relations with India and because India is a fast growing economy. Without cooperating with India, it is not possible to bring stability and prosperity in Nepal; indeed it is more or less impossible. Any practical leader, anyone who understands reality, cannot be confused about this — that without taking cooperation with India forward, we cannot do anything for Nepal. And I'm also happy that India's leaders and people also understand that only a stable, prosperous Nepal can be in India's interest. I think slowly people in India are realising that in order for Nepal to have peace, stability and prosperity, a new leadership and party like the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is needed. So I think we can go very far together.

Your party wants the 1950 treaty scrapped and there are many in India who agree this treaty is no longer relevant. But what sort of changes would you like to see in a bilateral treaty?

The 1950 treaty exists but based on the situation in the first decade of the 21st century, we feel it will be better for Nepal and India to have a new treaty. This is our clear and categorical belief. Our people have the feeling that somewhere along the line, the kind of benefit Nepal could get is not there, so the Nepali people's aspiration has been to change this. Second, we would like to review all the other treaties to see what revisions or further enhancements are necessary. What we want is new unity on a new basis with India. Far from wanting to damage our relations, we want to make them even better. That is why we speak of new unity on a new basis. This basis has been established by all that has happened from the 12-point understanding till the elections, so the two sides should sit together and review the relationship with an open mind and see how we can move it forward.

In your party's earlier 40-point programme (of 1996), you have spoken about the need to close the open border between India and Nepal. Won't this hurt the lakhs of Nepalis who come to India to work and live?

Our election commitment paper does not say our intention is to close the border. We are only speaking of regulating it better. India and Nepal should sit and discuss how to do this because criminal elements misuse this openness. We would like to talk about these things. We have no intention of closing the open border.

And the 1996 demand for a ban on Indian films?

There has been a change in the situation and we need to move ahead based on this change.

There has been some apprehension in India about the meaning of your statement that Nepal should be equidistant from India and China. What exactly did you mean?

In political terms, we will maintain equidistance because to have an alliance and go against anyone would violate the geopolitical conditions and needs of our country. This is what we mean by equidistance. But we need to look at the ground reality too: the historical, cultural and geographical relationship with India is very different from China and this has to be acknowledged and factored into how we define our relationship. So in this sense, there cannot be equidistance with India and China. There is no open border with China, so how can there be equidistance? But as far as the question of an "alliance" is concerned, of siding with one against the other, it is in that sense that there is equidistance.

Your manifesto talks of stopping the recruitment of Gorkha soldiers for the Indian and British armies. Will this be easy for you to implement?

We have always maintained that this recruitment for foreign armies should stop. This is our position. But given the circumstances and the process by which we have come here – ours will not be a single party government – we will have to talk to the other parties to see how this sensitive and delicate issue can be resolved.

In their response to the Maoist election victory, the BJP have warned you not to be anti-Hindu. If they return to power in India, do you think relations with Nepal might change for the worse?

As far as I can understand the spirit behind the BJP's latest statement compared to its earlier ones, there will not be any qualitative change in relations if they come back to power. I think their attitude is and will be to respect the decision the Nepali people have come to. Of course, religious fundamentalism could have an adverse impact. At the same time, I feel that if the BJP moves ahead on the basis of its latest statement, there will be no problem in talking to them or working with them should they be in government. As far as religion is concerned, it has been decided that the state will be secular. This does not mean Nepal will be anti-Hindu. It is nonsense to suggest this! Religious freedom will be maintained. State and religion should not be mixed.

The former chief of RAW, P.K. Hormis Tharakan has argued in an article that the victory of the Nepal Maoists is good for India since this will inspire the Indian Maoists to follow your example. Is this what you are advising the Indian Maoists?

What we are doing in Nepal is in keeping with the needs and sentiments of the Nepali people. So we are not going to tell anyone that you should also do what we are doing. We don't have the right to say such things and we don't wish to say such things either. But I do feel that what we are doing will send a strong message not only to Indian Maoists but Maoists worldwide — about how the Nepali Maoists have gone from bullet to ballot, how they have influenced and won the hearts and minds of the Nepali people, and how they have come to the position of leading the government and building a new constitution. This will be the subject of very big debate, and this will have a positive impact on Maoists everywhere because we have not betrayed our basic theory, we have developed it based on the changed situation in the world, and tried to move ahead on that basis. For example, even when the People's War was going on, we concluded that multiparty competition is a must even in socialism. Not only in the phase of democratic revolution but also in the phase of socialism, if multiparty competition is not there then a vibrant society will not be possible. This is the conclusion we have drawn from the great revolutions and counter-revolutions of the 20th century. And on the basis of those conclusions we are moving forward. So I feel that for the Indian Maoist party, its leaders and cadres, these efforts of ours provide some new material to study, to think about and go ahead in a new way. Our efforts provide a reference point.

What was your reaction to the election result? Were you surprised by the scale of Maoist victory?

No, we were not surprised. We knew the media and other parties were underestimating us but we were active amongst the people and knew we had great support. At the same time, we too underestimated how well Madhesi parties like the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum would do.

Despite your pre-election confidence, you actively sought alliances and seat adjustments with the UML (Unified Marxist-Leninists) and even Nepali Congress (NC). Some analysts saw that as a sign of weakness on the Maoists' part.

The media made the mistake of thinking this was our weakness but we always took the stand that this is an election for the Constituent Assembly (CA) where the first task is to abolish the monarchy and establish a republic. And since this was an agenda the Maoists, the NC and UML were committed to, we felt we should go to the election as a united group. When that proved impossible, we tried to build at least an understanding with the UML so that the Left vote could remain united. But the other parties were so sure of themselves that they were not interested in our proposals.

This was an election for the CA but your party's campaign slogan was to make Prachanda the first president of Nepal. What was the thinking behind this particular slogan?

Prachanda: There were two reasons. Of course this was an election for the CA and we were very clear about this. But we also wanted to show the people the Maoists are not just like any other old party and are different from them. And one way of doing this was to raise this issue of president. Similarly, we called

our manifesto our "commitment paper" to emphasise we were not simply making promises. The second reason was to show the people the nature of our unified and centralized leadership. This was also important. For example, after the 1991 elections, there was a bitter fight within the NC between Ganesh Man Singh and K.P. Bhattarai and G.P. Koirala over the Prime Ministership. We wanted to tell people that with our party there would be no such unseemly problem.

It is clear that when the CA meets, the executive power will be with the Prime Minister. So who will be the Maoist candidate? And which ministries will the Maoists want?

Our party's preference is for an executive president but if the CA does not agree to this immediately, then, because executive authority is vested in PM's post and we are the single biggest party, we have decided the Chairman of our party [i.e. Prachanda] should run the government. And since, in the outgoing government, the biggest party, NC, took not just the PM's post but also other ministries like defence, home and finance, we would like to retain these. But we want to form a coalition government and are prepared for responsible power sharing with all our partners.

Is your emphasis on a coalition government a tactical stand since you do not have a majority of your own?

No, this is not an issue of tactics. Even before the CA elections, [Prime Minister] G.P. Koirala, [UML leader] Madhav Nepal and myself had said we should all continue to work together after the elections. Girijababu even said the coalition should continue for at least ten years. So for us to say the government we will lead now should include all the parties is nothing new. We want the NC and UML to be part of the government. And Madhesi parties like the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) as well. We intend to carry everyone together. We believe this is what the people of Nepal want and this is what they voted for.

So what happens during the first meeting of the CA? Will the monarchy finally be abolished? After your meeting with [the Royalist politician] Kamal Thapa, analysts have begun speculating about what might happen.

There is no ambiguity at all. The people have spoken and the mandate for a republic is very clear. Keeping this in mind, we want the end of the monarchy to be done in an orderly, peaceful way. This was the reason for my meeting with Kamal Thapa. Since the verdict is clear, the people's sentiments are known and in the national interest this institution of monarchy is going to be dissolved, it is better that Gyanendra goes of his own accord. It will be better if he himself says that, that way, a good atmosphere will be created for him to continue to live in Nepal as a common citizen and for him to run his businesses. This way, the people of Nepal will forgive him. So I told Kamal Thapa the people's verdict has come and in the first sitting we are going to implement it. There is no room for any confusion about this. So since you have good relations with [Gyanendra], you should tell him it is better that he goes before this. That will send a good message, and will be better for him and his family. Thapa said he would convey my message but after that I never received any answer.

One of the issues the new government will have to tackle is the integration of the Peoples Liberation Army with the Nepal Army. What is the nature of the integration you envisage and the timeline for its implementation?

Our wish is for this question of integration to be resolved as quickly as possible. My expectation is that this process will go ahead in tandem with the process of writing the constitution. I think there is no need for the CA to take two years to write the constitution, I would prefer this process of writing should be completed in a year and integration too should be solved within a year. Secondly, the problem is not so difficult as it was earlier because when the government is formed with our leadership, the integration process will also be easier. Some people feel integration is a very complicated and sensitive question but in my view this is not so complicated as people outside think. Because the comprehensive peace agreement itself created the basis for integration and the way in which the interim constitution and other agreements speak of the PLA and Nepal Army (NA), this also creates a basis for integration. Also, there has been continuous dialogue in the JMCC [Joint Monitoring Coordination Committee] for the past one-

and-a- half years between the representatives of the NA and PLA, and this has also created an atmosphere. In our view, the Nepal Army needs to be democratized and the People Army needs to be professionalised, and in this way, only those who are professionally fit will be integrated and those who are unfit will go to other jobs. This is already clear. And the democratization process of the NA has already started – the Army says it will follow the orders of whichever elected government is formed. This is a positive statement that has come. So we feel that immediately after the new government is formed, we will set up a special committee for integration.

Under the CA or the Government?

Under the Government, and there will be comprehensive debate and discussion in that committee so that the process of integration is completed as soon as possible.

And members of other parties will be there?

Yes, of course.

In the past you have said Nepal does not need a large army. [PLA commander] Badal has spoken of 30,000 being the optimum size of the Nepal Army? Is there a final position on this?

There is no final position. We feel in a small country like Nepal, there is no need to have a large army where other branches of development are more important. This is our orientation – that the size of the Army should come down. Broadly speaking, we are thinking of a size of 30,000 to 50,000. This is our strategic thinking. But we are not speaking of an immediate reduction in the army's size. It will take 5 to 7 years to come to the right size. We don't wish to disturb the institution of the army too much. But on the basis of a plan, over 5 to 7 years, we would like to have a smaller army. For example, we have to plan for alternative jobs for those who will no longer be required.

If PLA soldiers, who are basically Maoist cadre, enter the Nepal Army, wouldn't the other parties be justified in worrying about the army getting politicized?

I don't think so. We are talking of democratizing the NA, and professionalizing the PLA, so in this process, this fear and suspicion will be dispelled. And then the whole army is to be downsized too. The process of professionalisation, democratisation and downsizing will reach a common point there this suspicion and worry will be ended.

Is there a need for the UN to supervise this process of integration, or are you confident the government and CA will manage by themselves?

I feel there is no role for the UN in integration. Now that we have a CA, and a basis has come into being for political stability, and the basis for integration is there too, I do not see such an important role for the UN.

So there is no need for the UNMIN mandate which ends in July to be extended?

I think when the CA meets, we will take a final view on this. In my mind too I have not taken a final view on whether the UN mandate should be extended or not, and I feel we should talk to the other parties on this, and the CA should be involved and take a decision on this. That way, it would be more democratic and effective and more beneficial.

The Rayamajhi commission set up to probe the use of force during the Janandolan of 2006 criticised the role of senior Army generals including Army chief Katuwal and called for action against them. Will your government implement these findings?

The Rayamajhi commission was not formed with the support or participation of our party. We were not a part of the interim government at the time, there was no comprehensive peace agreement. So our party's view is that we are not in favour of mechanically implementing whatever the Commission has

recommended. We will look at it critically, study it carefully, and where we feel action is needed, we will use its findings, but we cannot accept the commission's reports in its entirety because it was not formed with our consent or support, our side or view was not taken into account, and it did not address the situation in Nepal in its entirety. It only looked at the struggle between the parliamentary parties and the monarchy. It did not address what was happening to us. So we will study it but not blindly follow it.

The Young Communist League (YCL) has come in for a lot of criticism during the election campaign with the other parties accusing them of using strong-arm tactics. Why can't the YCL be converted into a development-oriented movement?

You are right, and we are debating this because we want its role to change. Given the fact that we are in a leadership position, we are thinking of the YCL being mobilized as a working force, a construction force, and we are debating this in the party and will take a decision in the Central Committee on this in a few days. This is not only for YCL but for all the youth of Nepal -- how to mobilise them for the building of new Nepal in constructive work . We are developing a plan for the state to mobilise the strength of youth, and so the YCL's role will not be as it was before, it should be creative, for construction of the new Nepal, and to work for mobilising the youth for this purpose.

What kind of political system do you envisage for Nepal?

In India, Britain or the U.S, people are dissatisfied with the purely formal nature of their democracy. Money power dominates and there is a disconnect between voting rights and actual empowerment. How can the CA avoid this trap and build a system that genuinely empowers the people?

I think this is a very important question. The system we are talking about – a federal system, of restructuring the whole state and having inclusiveness -- the thinking behind this is that we are fully aware of the problems with the theory of formal democracy and parliamentary system in which the majority is in government and the minority is in opposition. This tradition of formal democracy does not address the aspirations of the people and Nepal should not fall into the trap of this kind of formal democracy. So though we are committed to multiparty competition and democracy, this does not mean parliamentary democracy is the only system. We want the masses of the people to be involved and empowered to run the state, and our main concern is to do this within the context of multiparty competition -- how to bring women, Dalits, janajatis, Madhesis, workers and peasants forward and have an effective democracy for them.

So when we speak of restructuring and inclusiveness, one example we have tried to give –and we are proud that the other parties are slowly adopting our line on this – on federalism, inclusive democracy, it is a matter of pride also that 23 of our women cadres have won elections, and so many Dalits and women have been elected for first time in Nepal as well as Janajatis and Madhesis, and we want that there should now be effective empowerment from below.

Of course, there is a difference between our understanding of this and other parties. There is a formal democracy, in which parties spend money, there is corruption, and people are never empowered. We want Nepal to escape from this trap and have effective democracy. This is the change we want -- side by side with the struggle against feudalism, a real democracy which can address people's aspirations and build in the control, supervision and intervention of the masses over the state. We believe the CA election has seen one exercise of inclusiveness and democracy, but we have to now seriously look at what kind of democracy we are going to have – a formal, parliamentary system or an effective, empowering one. Multiparty does not mean it has to be parliamentary in the traditional way.

One of the challenges a government led by you will face is working with the Madhesi parties, particularly the Forum, given the bad blood between you and the experience of the Gaur massacre, where more than 30 of your cadres were killed. How do you plan to address this issue?

In the andolan of Madhesis earlier this year, I tried very hard on behalf of our party to address some of the issues, and in the process some relations with the Forum have been built. You are right that last year

there was a very bitter struggle and a very bitter experience was there, especially after the Gaur massacre, the bitterness had really increased, but we believe that where that incident happened, there should be action against the guilty according to the law, and wherever we have made mistakes, there should be (legal) action too.

In this way, we will solve this problem at the level of law and order, and at political level then, the Forum has emerged as a force and we will have political interaction with them, build a morcha with them and go forward. I see no problem in this. And it is not as if we do not know the Forum and its main leader, Upendra Yadav. He was for seven years in the district committee of our party. We know his chemistry and everything! And I do not think it will be difficult for me to talk with him and, in line with the needs of the country, working together in the writing of the constitution.

Have you spoken with Yadav him since the results came out?

No, but one of our comrades in the central committee has and I may also met him I the next few days.

And you want the Forum in the coalition government?

Yes. It is necessary to include them. We need their assistance to build the constitution. So if they are also in the government, only then can we unify the whole country and move forward.

But the Maoists' views on how the map of a federal Nepal should look is quite different from the Forum's. Would you be able to bridge that gap?

There is a little difference, not in theory but in terms of practically what they are saying. And this can be resolved through debate and discussion. I don't feel this not debatable. On autonomy, federalism, we have a common understanding. But there is a debate on what kind of autonomy. They say 'ek madhes, ek prades', that from west to east, there should be one Madhes province in the Tarai. Our party has said we are not against this. But the ground reality should also be seen. Those who don't see themselves as Madhesis, for examples the Tharus in the west and elsewhere do not see themselves as Madhesis.

So we cannot force them, we have to convince them. Pushing a policy from the top cannot solve the contradictions that exist in the people. We need to explain to them. If the Madhesi Forum can convince everyone, we have no objection. So even here I do not see a big difference. Through debate if there is consensus, we have no objection. But it seems to me that given the Tharus' historical background, they are not in that position, they want a separate autonomus province, and in Mithila, the Maithili speakers have their own tradition and culture and geography, and in Bhojpura and Awadh you have Bhojpuri and Awadhi speakers, and in the east you have Rajbanshis, so all these aspirations have to be addressed. You cannot impose anything.

Are you in favour of the CA working out not only the nature of federal relations but also the shape of the provinces to be created, or can the latter task be left to a States Reorganisation Committee to resolve later?

We would like the CA to form a committee to work on what kind of federalism Nepal should have and on a map. There will be serious study and discussion on this and after that, the CA will take a decision on this by the time the Constitution is finalized. Of course, we have placed a proposal before the country (points to Maoist map of a federal Nepal) but the CA will decide on this question.

So you are flexible about this map?

Yes we are. We are not saying this is final, that it cannot be changed.

One of the criticisms that can be made of the Maoist federal proposal is that it is based on ethnic federalism, and does not take into account the ecological realities of Nepal, the need for natural resources to be shared.

This is a correct point. Of course our federalism is not just ethnic but our emphasis has been on what we call the nationality basis, on language, culture, geography. But there is a little problem with this, as you are asking, and this is also a question we are asking and debating within ourselves, about how to have proper distribution of resources. We have to solve this, so we want to study and debate this further before coming to a final decision. That is why we have resolved to be flexible on this.

Though this election was about constitution writing, the people also have a lot of expectations from the government you will lead. How will the Maoists deal with this pressure?

There is a contradiction between people's expectation and the political reality we find ourselves in. So to address this, we will have to tell the people that this is our situation, we are going to write a constitution and we are committed and obliged to work together with all the parties. This has to be explained to the people – what we can do and what we cannot. And I think if we are open about this, given the political consciousness of the Nepali people – they will wait and see whether the government is sincerely working for them or not.

If they see that, then I think the Nepali people will be ready to make sacrifices, as far as I understand their feelings and psychology. What will provoke them and make them angry would be if they see the people in government are earning crores through corruption and their sons and daughters are studying in good schools abroad, and their buildings are coming up in Kathmandu, while ordinary people are mired in poverty. If this happens, they will get angry and come on to the streets. But if they see the government is working properly in their interest, but its resources are limited, then people will understand.

This is the way we will handle this problem. So I have started talking in the press that these are the constraints, there is an international food crisis, we will be affected by this and we have to deal with it, there is a rise in global prices of oil products, I have started saying these things, and I think people will understand this reality, and when we demonstrate that we are ready to fight against the old tradition of corruption, people will understand and we will transcend this problem.

What role do you envisage for Girija Prasad Koirala in the new Maoist-led government that is to be established?

I feel that historically, GPK has played a major role in taking the CA elections to completion. That mission has been fulfilled and I asked him recently -- keeping in mind his great age -- what his plans were. For his role, within or outside government, is important. I told him you have become a guardian, and until the new constitution is finalized, your guardianship role has to be there, and after that too. I said that we have a lot of respect for you – of course, in between there was confusion too – but seeing the way you fulfilled your commitment for the elections, our respect for you has grown even more. As far as the new government is concerned and his role in it, I feel insisting he be in government is not the way to respect him, taking into account his age and health, and his historical role, we have to find a different way and place to honor him. To involve him again in day to day politics would not be right. This is what I feel. And yet, if he wants, we can have an open discussion. We have an open mind. We have not closed anything. I have sent a message to him that we can have a talk about these things.

But I feel he has said it often, he doesn't want to be there after the election. So keeping in mind the need to respect his feelings, and now that a younger generation is here, giving him the tension that being in leadership would involve is not right. This is my belief.

Are you confident the NC and UML will eventually join the Maoist-led government?

I am fully confident. They will do tough bargaining of course. If they don't come, the loss will be theirs because the mandate from the 12 point understanding to the election results is for all of us to work together for drafting the constitution and taking the peace process to its logical end. In elections, you always have one party gaining or losing but this does not mean the mission we started has ended. If the NC and UML run away from this mission before it is completed, the Nepali people will not forgive them. It will not be an act of responsibility. From our side, we will spare no effort to ensure we all move forward

together, and power sharing is one of these things. So there can be no question of the NC and UML not joining the government.

It is widely acknowledged that India played a crucial role in helping the Maoists and parliamentary parties forge a common front and in ensuring the Constituent Assembly elections were held as scheduled on April 10. And yet, there has also been a residue of suspicion between New Delhi and you. What is your assessment of the role India has played in this entire process?

The positive approach of the Indian government was a major factor behind the 12-point understanding reached in Delhi between the parliamentary parties and us in 2005. That agreement wouldn't have been possible if the Indian Government's support hadn't been forthcoming. It is from there that a new relationship between India and Nepal begins -- and particularly the improvement in relations between the GOI and us. Before that, there was a lot of suspicion and contradiction. But from then to now, the attitude and help of the GOI is known to everyone. It is an open secret. India has consistently been in favour of elections. It had said all along that without having elections, a stable Nepal cannot be established, that elections should be held on time. Similarly, India's emphasis on taking the peace process forward is known to all. So through this, there has been a great improvement in relations.

At the same time, our party had lingering doubts before the elections, that India could do something ... For example, a statement came from Delhi that we cannot really trust the Maoists, that our [choice] is the Nepali Congress. We saw this statement and were a little concerned that this traditional mindset might have an effect on the elections. So I made a comment that a responsible official in India should not say these things on the eve of elections, that the implication of such statements is not good. Later there was an attempt to clarify things from Delhi. Still, there was a doubt in our mind. But after the results, we feel a basis has been prepared for relations with India to become even better and that whatever little suspicion and doubt existed has now ended.

It is also possible that as far as Delhi was concerned, there were doubts about whether we would go for elections or not, whether we would take part properly. But I think that through this election and its results, the doubts that were there in India's mind have also ended and a new basis has been prepared to have new unity and new cooperation. I feel the atmosphere now has changed dramatically. India is openly saying it has no problem in working with and unconditionally assisting any democratically elected government.

Your party is still on the U.S. terrorism list. Do you think India can play a role in advising the U.S. to take you off?

India can and should do this. And my expectation is that India is already making efforts in this direction. The U.S. needs to change its attitude and we too would like to have diplomatic relations with them. India can play a positive role in this.

<http://www.hindu.com/2008/04/28/stories/2008042851511100.htm> [Part I]

<http://www.hindu.com/2008/04/29/stories/2008042952060900.htm> [Part II]