

Prachanda Interview with *Yomiuri Shimbun*

Kazuo Nagata / *Yomiuri Shimbun* Correspondent, June 3, 2008

KATMANDU--The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) won the largest number of seats for a constitution-drafting assembly after its success in the country's April election. Following is the text of a *Yomiuri Shimbun* interview with party leader Prachanda, 53, conducted at his residence in Katmandu on Friday.

The *Yomiuri Shimbun*: What happens to the [deposed] King? How soon does he have to evacuate the palace? Is he welcome to stay in Nepal?

Prachanda: The whole situation is quite clear. It seems that he has already agreed with the decision of the Constitutional Assembly. If you respect the will of the people, I think he should stay here. He should not go into exile. He should do his business and help his country. We prefer him to be here. He can form a party and he can contest in the election. There's not any barrier.

Do you intend to become prime minister or president?

Before the election we clearly mentioned in our manifesto we will be the first president of the new republican system. People gave us votes in favor of our position. But intensive debate is going on between the political parties and it has not been settled. Because we don't have a majority, and in that situation it is important to have a consensus. Ultimately we should have consensus and we decide who will be the president. Within one week it will be clear.

A new government in a week?

I think so.

What happens to the current prime minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, in the event his Nepali Congress [Party] becomes part of the coalition with the Maoists?

Just after the election we asked major political parties to form a coalition. Not just the Nepali Congress. As far as role of Koirala is concerned, we have put a proposal he should become the alliance chief. Like Sonia Gandhi [of India's ruling coalition].

How important is relationship with Japan for Nepal?

The relationship with Japan has been important in the whole history of modern Nepal. The cooperation and help of the Japanese people and government have been very strategic and important. Right now we are focusing our attention on economic rebuilding, reconstruction of this country. Japan can play a vital role in reconstruction of this country mainly in economic terms.

Political revolution is more or less completed after this election of the Constitutional Assembly and establishment of a federal republic. Now we want to focus on economic revolution and it is very difficult to have sustainable peace without quick development. Peace and development are interrelated. Japan will be our very important partner.

The Japanese and Nepali royal families were very close, but now one of them is gone. Do you think there will be an impact on the bilateral relationship? Do you intend to visit Japan any time soon?

I prefer to visit Japan. After the war Japan has done a miraculous development. I want to learn particularly from Japan's economic development. It is one of our models and inspirations for the reconstruction of our country. I don't think the relationship between Japan and Nepal is a question of the two royal families, but it's a question of the governments and peoples. In coming days the relationship will be closer and cooperation will be more.

It's impressive you are talking about economic development only a few years after hiding underground to fight a guerrilla war. It's also impressive you shifted your focus from military to political means during your struggle with the monarchy. Where does such flexibility come from?

Yeah [laughs]. We are not traditional type of insurgents or thinkers. We are not communists of the sectarian, dogmatic, totalitarian [type], something like that. Eight years ago we decided, unanimously, in the development of democracy in 21st century, and that even in socialism, there should be multiparty competition. This is something new in international communist movement. In a negative way, [King Gyanendra] contributed to the establishment of the democratic republic. If he hadn't taken stupid measures against the people...

Maoists have suspended, but not formally abandoned, military struggle as a means of achieving the party's goals. Are you ready to do so now?

In our guess, after this election, it has been decided by the people for peace and change. I don't think it is necessary to have army struggle again. I don't think there will be any kind of necessity to use arms again. But it doesn't mean nobody should take arms to resist oppression of the government or something like that. I can't predict that.

Do you think the United States will remove the Maoists from its list of terrorist groups soon?

Just recently I had a discussion with the U.S. [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Evan Feigenbaum] in this room. I think the U.S. is going to change its attitude and policy. They are trying to understand the real dynamics of our country. Slowly, gradually, they are taking more pragmatic steps. In my discussion with the U.S. deputy assistant secretary, I smelled that they were going to take a more flexible attitude. He categorically said. "We'll cooperate with your government." This is something encouraging. We want to have diplomatic relationship with the United States.

Chairman Mao is of course from China and you are also Maoists. What's the relationship between the two Maoists?

I think we all have our own particular type of political and ideological lines, working styles, understandings. Although all Maoists have minimum common features, some of the basic philosophical and ideological points, in strategy and tactics they are all independent. Implementing Marxism and Leninism in a concrete way according to concrete situation is something common. But how to apply it in concrete situation is different from country to country.