

An interview with Prachanda, Chairman of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)

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Following is the transcript of an interview of Prachanda, Chairman of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

Q: There has been a sudden stop in the political process of the country which was witnessed after 12 point agreement of November 2005 till announcement of republic. Confusion has gripped both the countries, Nepal and India and it appears that the process of development has been caught in a bind. Who is responsible for it and what is the road to come out of it?

A: Thanks. You have asked important question. The main aim of the 12 point agreement was to establish a new democratic constitution through constituent assembly. At that time the main aim of the people's movement was to have a joint struggle against the autocratic monarchy. This is clear that monarchy was abolished and democracy could be brought in. We succeeded in our immediate task. The election to the constituent assembly was accomplished and the Maoists emerged as the single largest party. The government was also formed under the leadership of the Maoists. But while we were moving forward to take the peace process to a logical conclusion and working with an all round strategy to write the constitution, a debate on the issue of the supremacy of the military and the people erupted. Whatever orders I issued on behalf of the government, the army general repeatedly violated those instructions of an elected government. He refused to accept them. He challenged them. This created a piquant situation for me. If the army refused to accept the supremacy of an elected government, the supremacy of the peoples, and does not come under the people's government then a major problem would crop up. And for this reason I decided to remove the army general. Other people meaning the Nepali Congress and UML supported the army's supremacy. As a result the situation acquired a complicated shape. This is the reason that a debate is still going on: should it be civilian supremacy or military supremacy? We have been consistently telling the parties which claim to uphold the supremacy of parliamentary system that since you talk of parliamentary supremacy then on the issue of army general and the unconstitutional steps taken by the President in this connection should be debated in the parliament. But they are not ready for this. They are completely going against the democracy, peace process and drafting of constitution. Obviously those persons who favour the army general and oppose the people's government are responsible for this situation.

Q: Yesterday I talked to prime minister, Mr Madhav Nepal and sought to know his views on this issue. He told that there was no provision in the constitution under which the parliament could debate the steps taken by the President. Is it so?

A: Certainly not. This is not a monarchy where in the decision of the king could not be debated in parliament. During the days of monarchy no debate in parliament could be permitted on any

step of king. There is no such provision now in the constitution. We can debate about President. There is no problem. These people are intentionally pursuing dogmatism.

Q: The prime minister, Mr Madhav Nepal has assured you people that he would rectify the unconstitutional decision of the President and for this he had sought one month's time so that you should allow the parliament to function. What the government so far has done in this direction?

A: We talked to him with responsibility and he in the parliament told that he would evolve a consensus on this issue after talking to various political parties within a month and try to solve the problem. This was the assurance of the prime minister and it was our expectation too that it would be solved within a month. But so far he did nothing. After five days were left I told him emphatically that it is imperative to talk or else the problem would continue to exist. However one talk was held with the leaders of Nepali Congress and UML but the prime minister does not appear to be keen to solve this. Today is the last day of the time frame. Since nothing substantial has emerged we would now be raising this issue in parliament and on streets. We are raising this issue in a peaceful and democratic manner. But these people are not showing any seriousness.

Q: I have been witnessing since the days of Raja Tribhuvan that the politics of Nepal has been to a major extent India centric. Whoever has been in power while taking a decision looked towards India. This was for the first time that you refused to accept the dictate of India. The disappointment of India could be understood but other political parties did not support you either. Do you think that the politics of Nepal being India centric has been the prime reason for most of the problems?

A: Your question is of strategic importance. Not only from the days of King Tribhuvan instead this situation has been prevailing when British ruled India. You will recall that a war took place between British India and Nepal and following that in 1815 the Sugauli Treaty was signed. After that the influence of ruling elite of India continued to increase here. Nepal is an independent country but the fact is after the Sugauli treaty it turned like a semi colony of India. When the people's movement was going on against Ranas (Ranashahi) at that time King Tribhuvan took shelter in India and with the help of India through the "Delhi agreement" the rule of Rana was abolished. This helped strengthen the rule of Shah dynasty. India played a major role. After that in the move for bringing democracy, which started in Nepal, the Nepali Congress often adopted a stance of compromise, understanding and surrender towards India. In this backdrop democracy was installed but its functioning continued to follow the old pattern. The moment the main leader of the Nepali Congress Mr B P Koirala started talking of little freedom he was ousted. India encouraged the autocratic move of the King. The autocratic panchayati system, independent authoritarian establishment could keep its identity in Nepal only due to the support extended by India. Due to the struggle of CPN (Maoist) the process of major transformation of Nepal's economic, social and political condition has emerged. Now when the Maoists emerged as the major political party in the constituent assembly elections to address this process of transformation then again problem has cropped up. On my tour to India I had in specific words told that there was imperative need to address this transformation. Nepal has undergone a major political change and with this there is need for some change in our historical relation with India. I had told in clear words that people of Nepal are not happy with the 1950 friendship treaty. They

view it as unequal treaty. This needs to be changed as it is not based on equality. We don't want any bitterness with India instead we long for good relation. But keeping in view the revolutionary change that is going on in Nepal the relation between the two countries should be changed, should be developed accordingly. Only then we can improve the relations between the two countries. Our special economic, political, geographical, cultural and historical relations should be rearranged according to the prevailing time. But unfortunately this is not happening. Delhi has a psychology that Nepal has to obey what India dictates. No change has taken place in the psyche though a number of changes have taken place in India. End of the British rule and strengthening of India through sustained economic growth did not have desired impact on the mindset of the ruling class of India. The amount of change which should have taken place has not occurred. Nepal has witnessed a major political change but India is not serious to understand this and also to reshape the relation between the two countries in the perspective of the changed scenario. This is the reason problems keep on emerging. I wish the India Nepal relation should be redefined in the background of the recent political and socio-economic changes. This should be developed further.

Q: After you formed the government in August 2008 it appeared that the government of India has accepted the situation and its attitude towards your government was quite cordial and cooperative. But its displeasure on the Katwal issue came out openly. What mistake did you commit during your rule that changed the approach of India? Were you careless while dealing with China that made India unhappy?

A: I don't think so. My party and I too seriously thought over this. But the more I think, the more I am clear that neither my party nor me committed any mistake. When my government was installed, in the neighbouring country China Olympic games were on. On the inaugural day my government was formed. The President of Nepal was invited to participate at the inauguration but he could not go. Before the Olympic concluded my government was formed and I was invited to participate at the closing ceremony. I thought it would not look nice if being the neighbouring country I would not had participated at the event where American President, Mr Bush, Ms. Sonia Gandhi and her family from India, the Prime Minister of UK and rulers of many other countries would be present. What mattered most was being the leader of the party, which had brought about such a change in Nepal it was proper to go there for interacting and meeting with more people. Nepal has a tradition that after swearing in of the government the Prime Ministers undertake their first visit to India. I did not give so much of credence to that tradition. I felt this was not a good tradition. But it did not imply that I have first visited China. Any visit should be in conformity to the necessity. According to need we can go to India first and even to China. I felt the Olympics closing ceremony was being held for which I have been invited and so I should go there. In fact some people had put pressure on me that I should not go to China, it would break the tradition, India will feel bad etc. But I sought to know why the relation with India sour? If Mr Bush and Ms. Gandhi could go why cannot I? China is our neighbouring country and I decided to go and went. When I turn back and look at the event I have the feeling that this had some psychological impact on India. In my perception what happened was a natural development but the ruling elite of India did not like it.

Besides this before formation of my government one major incident had taken place in Tibet. Some incidents of vandalism had taken place. Some people had died in Lhasa. Chinese

government nursed the impression that people active in creating disturbances in Tibet were using the land of Nepal. I feel that in view of that incident some intellectuals and officials of China started frequently visiting Nepal. They wanted to know that the political changes that were taking place in Nepal whether would benefit China. China from the beginning has been supporting monarchy as it felt stability in Nepal could be possible through monarchy. From the days of Mao Tse Tung China maintained a cordial relation with monarchy. Now we have uprooted monarchy and created a new political set up. However India felt that since Maoists have come to power in Nepal the flow of the Chinese visitors to Nepal had increased and Maoists were tilting towards China. But these were mere coincidences: end of monarchy, vandalism in Tibet and Maoists coming to power in Nepal. And even if the Chinese have been frequently coming to Nepal to understand the changes that took place it should not have been enough to become suspicious. According to me it is wrong. Because this was happening not due to us, but due to them. I repeatedly made it clear that I would strive to maintain the good relations between the two countries. Besides I did not want to do anything in haste. I was firmly committed to address the aspirations of the people. I was gradually and steadily moving in the direction of giving a concrete shape to the people's aspiration of change. People wanted a reform in security sector. Keeping this in view I brought about certain changes in the police department and armed constabulary department. Naturally in this background the issue of Katwal cropped up before me. People were aware of the fact that Katwal was not in favour of change, he was not in favour of integration of army, he was not in favour of constitution, he was not in favour of democracy and was regularly challenging the government. Obviously some action has to be taken against him. May be some of my friend did not like it. I don't think that I ever took any action which should have been the factor for straining the relations with India. I tried to develop the relations with China and India keeping in view the needs of the Nepali people and Nepali nation.

Q: Do you think that you adopted liberal stance in the matter of Katwal? Did you agree that just after becoming prime minister if you had acted on the Raymajhi Commission report and removed Katwal then in that case you would had received massive public support? What was the reason?

A: Girija Babu's government was in power when the Raymajhi Commission report came. I had raised this question but Girija Babu was not ready to take action. Of course people ask me why I did not take action soon after I came to power. My endeavour was to evolve a consensus among the coalition partners before taking any action. I tried but other parties did not agree. I held with other parties giving consent the task would be easier; particularly with giving consent by the UML. I was having talks with the UML. They told me to wait till their Congress. After the Congress concluded a serious talk was held with their president Jhalnath Khanal, vice president Bamdeu Gautam and general secretary Ishwar Pokhrel and all of them gave their consent. They told me to take action against Katwal and assured me of their help. Once UML supported, the Madhesi forum also agreed. After this Sadbhavana Party and others also consented and then only I took action. Had I known that they would succumbed to the internal and external pressures and retreat from their positions then in that case I would have taken action within a month of my becoming the prime minister. Even children of Nepal know from where the pressure was coming.

Q: Yesterday I had asked prime minister Madhav Nepal that your party president had given his consent for removal of Katwal and I had also read a statement purporting to it. But he refused and said that his party president never gave consent for it.

A: He is misleading. Now it is clear to the parliament also.

Q: On the issue of integration of both the armies nearly one month back I had read the statement of Indian ambassador, Mr Rakesh Sood in which he said that there is no reference to integration of two armies in the peace accord and integration meant integration of the PLA soldiers in the Nepali society. Recently Mr Girija Prasad Koirala also repeated the same line. In this background are you apprehensive of peace process getting derailed?

A: This is the reason that I have been repeatedly saying that the unconstitutional step taken by the President was not his own instead it is a part of the well thought out strategy against the peace process and also against the process for creation of constituent assembly. That is why I have been consistently saying that till the issue of civilian supremacy is not resolved, till the wrong step taken by a ceremonial president, who has been pretending to work as the functional president is not rectified, this issue could not be resolved. I am saying this only for the reason that this action was against democracy and also against the democratic traditions. But these people are not ready to take any corrective measure. They intend that the issue of army integration should be completely dropped as in the detailed peace agreement it is specifically mentioned that the army integration and rehabilitation would take place. Army integration meant unification of both armies. This is clearly written in the agreement. But when people like Rakesh Sood, Girija Prasad Koirala speak one language, speak against the peace accord and resort to distorted arguments on the issue of integration of army as the integration of soldiers in the society and try to create confusion in the world then it obviously implied that we are left with no other option but to resort to movement. Which is why we have decided to go for movement; inside the parliament and also outside. If they go against the peace accord and oppose the interim government, democratic values and supremacy of the people then we are left with no option but to start movement and we are actually doing that from today. But side by side we would keep on talking to other parties. We would continuously strive to evolve a national consensus on this issue. Our stand is there is only one solution to this issue: we should be allowed to place our views in the Parliament. A formal atmosphere should be created inside the house to debate our issue. We are saying only this much but they are not agreeing to this proposal. It simply meant that they want confrontation. They don't want peace. They don't want democracy. Instead they want autocracy.

Q: The central committee of your party had decided for national government of general consensus which would be led by the Maoists. How is it possible in the present situation?

A: The central committee of our party debated various aspects of this issue and we reached at the conclusion that we should firmly stand in the favour of the peace process and in the creation of constituent assembly and form a national government with general consensus under the leadership of Maoists. We feel this is possible. The first thing is the question does not arise to form the government with any party which justifies the unconstitutional action of the President. If they don't agree to rectify the presidential action then in that case we will not take in the new

government. They have to change their old stand on the issue of army general. In spite of this we visualize the possibility of the government as majority of the members of parliament of UML are opposed to the President's step. They [don't] want to debate the issue in the Parliament as they are aware that the majority would be in the favour of the Maoists. We believe even if they are not agreeable for a debate we can protest the step of President with the help of the MPs of UML and other parties. The Madhesh parties will also join us and by then we will come into the position of forming the government. We have majority in parliament.

Q: Does it imply that the issue of civilian supremacy is the biggest issue for you?

A: Certainly. Civilian supremacy in comparison to the military supremacy is the biggest issue.

Q: Two line struggle has often been going in your party. Without trying to know who represents which line I would like to ask what are the two lines.

A: The reply is complicated. It is not so easy, even then I will explain about the two lines. Certainly our party had two line struggle and the just concluded central committee meeting had a long discussion. At this meeting through discussion the two line issue has been resolved. Now based on a new foundation a new unity has developed in the party. In fact a good number of comrades were sceptical whether the party was following in the lines of UML. Is it drowning in parliamentarism? Is it moving towards reformism? They were quite disturbed due to these questions. Our cadres were seriously anxious. This was a bigger problem. We were telling them that we were advancing only after making a thorough analysis of the basic principles of Marxism; concrete analysis of the concrete situation. We were advancing keeping in view our socialist and communist ideals and also our strategy for people's revolution. One section held this view. Other section felt that instead of moving towards revolution we were inching towards compromise and parliamentarism. This is the essence of debate. But after my resignation our comrades have come to believe that there was no deviation in the party. They felt that the party in the correct manner was progressing towards revolution by taking the people along with it. From outside my resignation would appear to be a negative step but whereas the unity of the party and the confusion in the party are concerned this has left a significant positive impact. Comrades who nursed the feeling that the leadership has developed lust for power are now feeling relieved. Their misconceptions have been removed. I had resigned with the commitment to struggle against the counterrevolutionary and reactionary elements and not to surrender to the dictates of foreign lords. I had told that I would not tolerate any kind of foreign intervention. This has created an atmosphere inside the party that the leadership was pursuing the correct line towards revolution. As a result of this not only the unity of the party has been strengthened but also credibility amongst the people has enhanced. After my resignation even the urban middle class has come to realize that our party could protect the national interest and preserve its sovereignty and pride.

Q: Your critics say that you have abandoned the base areas and disarmed the Janamukti Sena (PLA). How far is it correct?

A: This is not true. When we came in peace process and also came for democracy then it broadly implied that we were successful. We dislodged monarchy, constituted the constituent assembly

and emerged as the biggest party in the constituent assembly. Obviously I don't find any weakness. As for as the issue of base area and PLA are concerned; PLA is in the cantonment and the arms are with them. The keys of the boxes having the guns are with the PLA. This makes clear that we have not surrendered the arms. If the other side is willing to abide the peace accord then we are also ready for integration of the army. But we are not for surrender. Which is why the people who criticize us on this count are wrong. They fail to understand the true situation prevailing in Nepal. They are not able to comprehend the development of the revolution and its dynamics. They look at the entire scene in a narrow and mechanical manner. Our base areas are intact and the people in those areas are firm. The organization in those areas is also strong. I in fact believe that we have succeeded in expanding our base areas. It has been spread throughout the country. At present in a way the whole country has become our base area. Our victory and the manner in which we have amalgamated with the people, for me this is expansion of the base area. For this reason I don't believe that we have left our base areas.

Q: If the integration of the army takes place and if a unified National Army is constituted as the result of the merger of the Nepali army and the PLA, in that case are you conscious of the impending dangers? What I want to say cannot that army be used against you once you are out of power? The reason for this is what is the guarantee that the army constituting of the revolutionary cadres of the PLA and regular armymen nursing feudal would stand in the favour of people?

A: That danger is there, but we have faith in people. I have faith in integration of the army. If the integration of the army takes place then it should be viewed as the victory of the situation created through the peoples struggle. Obviously the entire army will stand in favour of the people. The army will stand in favour of the nation. And under the leadership of the party we could lead the country in a better way. This is my belief. Just some time back you wanted to know why the Indian ambassador, Mr Rakesh Sood and Mr Girija Prasad Koirala of Nepali Congress has been opposed to integration of army. Do you think they would have opposed this if the reactionary forces have visualized that the integrated army would stand in favour of reactionary forces? Once the integration takes place this army would ceased to be theirs. This would be completely the army of the people. Which is why they are speaking against it and trying to create hurdles. One should realize that the integration of army is not against Maoists. This is not against the people. This is in favour of people. This is the reason that the reactionary forces outside the country and also inside quite active against it. One should understand this.

Q: What is the programme for insurrection? And what should be its character?

A: I believe that Nepal would not have that nature of insurrection that took place in Russia under Lenin or the people's revolution that was witnessed in China under Mao Tse Tung. A new type and new form of insurrection is possible in Nepal. We cannot import any revolution in a mechanical manner. We would have to show the courage and strength of developing it. We are striving in this direction. And for this we are advancing in the right direction by pursuing a completely new style, in our own way and keeping in view the global situation. We have to chalk out the programme and strategy of the Nepali revolution keeping in view the global and regional balance of power and also in the background of relations with China and India. We are striving

in this direction. Which is why we do not understand the insurrection in a mechanical way. I don't think proper to speak more than this on this issue at this stage.

Q: The movement which you are going to launch may create the law and order situation, the government would also resort to repressive measures and the people may also take to resistance movement. In this background do you visualize that the movement may turn violent? Do you think that the situation would go to such extent that you would be forced to take to armed struggle of the days of the people's war?

A: The programmes of movement that we have announced are of peaceful nature. We would steer it in constitutional and peaceful manner inside and outside the parliament. In case the government resorts to repression then in that situation the people would come to realize that the Maoists intended to place their views in a peaceful manner but were not being allowed. The Maoists have been struggling for democracy and civilian supremacy through the constitutional means. The people would also see that the Maoists have been demanding to have a debate on this inside the parliament. If the government resorts to repression the people would find out their own way to resist. We are talking of 'Jan Andolan 3' (third people's movement). We will proceed through people's movement and they would be forced to accept the people's demand. We don't have any plan to resort to violent or arms struggle. The people will certainly resist in case the state perpetrates violence and repression. In this situation the Maoists would support the people's resistance movement.

Q: Don't you think this is hindering the process of drafting of the constitution for which you people have been elected?

A: No. The work of drafting of constitution is going on smoothly. Both the movement and drafting of constitution will continue. We will not create any obstruction in the task of constitution drafting. We are obstructing its parliamentary part. There are separate committees for drafting of constitution with different functioning and we are not creating any obstruction in that. We would continue to take active part.

Q: How do you visualise the future of Nepal in coming days?

A: The people of Nepal will win. We are trying for taking forward the revolution of the country in a different manner and confident of getting success.

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