

Prachanda blames India for political crisis in Nepal



Prachanda, leader of Maoists in Nepal.

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Nepal's Maoists on Tuesday threatened to paralyse the country with an indefinite general strike, as its supremo Prachanda blamed India's "naked interference" for the lingering political crisis in the country.

Serving an ultimatum to the embattled 22-party coalition led by Madhav Kumar Nepal to resolve the political deadlock by January 24, Prachanda demanded the formation of a national government, which will include the Maoists.

After paralysing the country for the last three days with its anti-government shutdown, it threatened to launch an indefinite general strike next month.

Prachanda lashed out against India for its "naked interference" in Nepal's internal affairs, saying he will only talk to New Delhi and not to the "puppet" government here.

Buses and cars remained off the roads, main shopping complexes and market areas were shut down and educational institutes were closed as agitating Maoist workers marched through the capital shouting anti-government slogans on Tuesday.

The Maoist chief, addressing a massive rally in the heart of the capital, demanded the disbandment of the present coalition government and replacement with a national government, which would include the Maoists.

"Unless a national government is formed by January 24, we will be forced to impose an indefinite strike," Prachadna told his thousands of his supporters.

The anti-government protests is aimed to step up pressure on the government to rectify the "unconstitutional" decision of President Ram Baran Yadav, who reinstated the then army chief Gen Rukmangad Katawal, dismissed by Prachanda in May.

Prachanda said his party is ready to hold "decisive talks" with the masters (India) and not the current "puppet government" to resolve the current political deadlock in the country.

The Maoists supremo said he has no hopes of ending the current deadlock through dialogue with the political parties including the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML as they act as per the orders from New Delhi.

The Maoists have been alleging that the present coalition was formed at the initiative of New Delhi and the government is acting like a "puppet".

"In the past, we wanted to hold talks with the monarchy as it was the lord of the political parties at that time," the Maoist chief said, adding "India has now become the lord of the ruling political parties, so we are also ready to hold talks with them."

Prachanda termed the political parties of the country to "robots driven by remote control" and claimed that no fruitful outcome can be expected from the talks with them. Accusing India of interfering in Nepal's internal affairs, he vowed to continue to fight for national sovereignty and integrity.

Prachanda also objected to Indian Army chief Gen Deepak Kapoor's reported comment opposing en masse integration of "politically indoctrinated" former guerrillas into the Nepal army.

"Who gave him (Gen Kapoor) the right to speak against the Comprehensive Peace Agreement?" Prachanda asked amid loud cheers from his supporters. "What can be more shameful and more insulting to the Nepali people?"

He said the party will hold the fourth round of protests focusing on "raising national awareness and to expose the designs of foreign agents" in the country. Life was paralysed for the past three days as the Maoists called three day general strike in a dispute with the president.

Political tensions have been high in Nepal since a government led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) resigned earlier this year, amid the dispute with the president over the army chief's refusal to incorporate former Maoist rebels fighters into the military.

The deepening political crisis has put new stresses on Nepal's reconciliation efforts after the end of the insurgency in 2006, amid fears that the already stalled peace process may be derailed.

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