

Why Maoists decided on talks for consensus govt

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KIRAN PUN

KATHMANDU, Feb 11, [2012]: A day after the radical faction of the party demanded that the prime minister step down, the ruling UCPN (Maoist) on Friday officially opened the door for discussions with other political parties on forming a government of national consensus but said it should, as now, lead such a government.

A meeting of the party Standing Committee took the decision a day after the radical faction led by Senior Vice-chairman Mohan Baidya demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai for revoking the decision to legalize conflict-era land transactions carried out under the Maoist people's government during the insurgency period. It also entrusted party Chairman Dahal with initiating the talks with other parties.

The party's decision comes at a time when the main opposition party, Nepali Congress, has stressed publicly that it is not interested in joining or leading the government until the peace process is completed.

This raises the interesting question as to why the UCPN(Maoist) has taken the decision?

There are three theories.

First, the party establishment led by Chairman Dahal and Prime Minister Bhattarai knows all too well that there is no chance of changing Bhattarai's leadership or persuading other parties to join the government before the end of the peace process. Therefore they took the decision just to placate the Baidya faction so that it doesn't walk away from the party any time soon.

The second theory is that Chairman Dahal is playing a game with both the Bhattarai and Baidya factions.

"When he meets Bhattarai, he tells him that he is the party's choice to lead a consensus government. But he tells Baidya that the prime minister must resign and he is open to accepting Ram Bahadur Thapa as prime Minister," said a party leader close to the Baidya faction.

Thapa, the party general secretary, is the Baidya faction's choice to lead a consensus government.

Some party insiders say that in pitting Baidya and Bhattarai against each other Dahal wants to pave the way for his own ascendance to Singha Durbar.

But this doesn't seem to be possible given the composition of parliament. It is unlikely that the Nepali Congress, UML or the Madhesi parties will accept Dahal as prime minister even if the

Maoist party forces Bhattarai to resign, something the prime minister is fully aware of.

That's why immediately after the party decided to open the dialogue for a national consensus government Prime Minister Bhattarai offered to resign if there was an alternative to his leadership.

There is yet another theory, that says that Dahal wants to remove Bhattarai from the post of prime minister and cut him down to size even if he doesn't stand a chance of replacing him as head of government.

According to this theory, Dahal still sees Bhattarai as a threat to his leadership in the party and wants to eliminate that threat sooner rather than later.

"It's for this reason that Dahal is persistently pushing the agenda of national consensus government even if such a government will be led by a leader from another party, possibly Nepali Congress," said a Maoist leader who wished to remain unnamed.

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