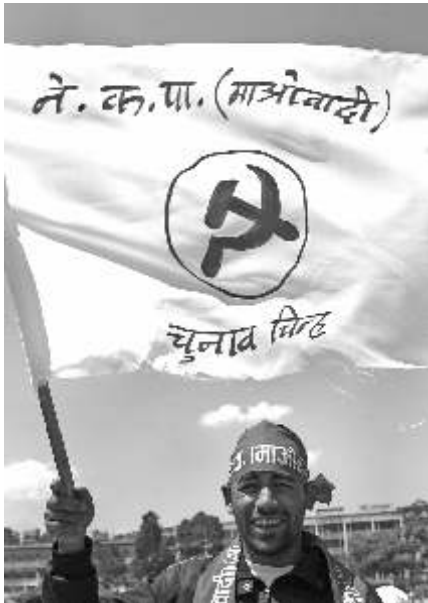


Red star rising

Prachanda's display of political maturity inspires confidence that the new government in Nepal will assume a pragmatic outlook, comments *Medha Bisht*



The common people's aspirations appear to have been the defining factor in sending the Maoists up the corridors of power in the recently held polls in Nepal. The Maoists have received 120 seats in the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, thus emerging as the largest party in the Constituent Assembly. They have also garnered 30 per cent of the votes in the proportional representation (PR) system. Though Madhav Kumar Nepal, General Secretary of CPN-UML (Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxist-Leninist) had declared that his party will quit the government on account of its dismal performance in the elections, a 'working settlement' seems to have been decided upon. The Nepali Congress (NC) has put certain preconditions for joining the government. First among these is renunciation of violence by the Maoist-sponsored Youth Communist League (YCL) and the return of properties seized by the Maoists in the past.

The Maoists on their part have

The Maoist road to elections

The Maoists formally ended their decade-long insurgency that claimed over 13,000 lives after signing a landmark peace deal in November last year

Key events in the peace process

- February 1, 2005**
King seizes absolute power
- November 22**
Political parties, Maoist rebels form alliance against king
- April 2006**
General strike by Maoists, opposition; king bows to demands to restore parliament
- May**
New cabinet unveiled, ceasefire declared
Parliament strips king of powers
- November 21**
Peace accord between government and rebels
- January 15, 2007**
83 Maoists sworn into interim parliament
- April 1**
Maoist ministers sworn into interim cabinet
- Apr 24**
New government says monarchy will be abolished by 2008
- May 31**
Elections for constituent assembly set for June pushed back to November

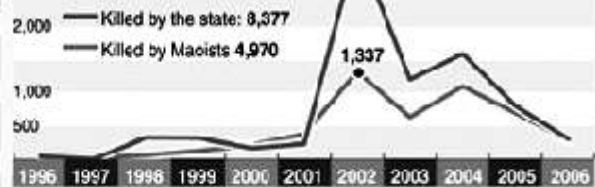
Maoist emergence

Their initial powerbase was in economically deprived western districts of Rukum and Rolpa



A decade of deaths

Total number of dead 13,347 according to human rights group INSEC



September 18

Maoists storm out of an interim government

December 15

New election set for mid-April 2008

December 28

Lawmakers approve abolition plans for the monarchy

April 10, 2008

First general election since 1999, set to create an assembly likely to abolish monarchy

AFP 100408

Source: INSEC

repeatedly asserted that all the parties should 'collectively write a new constitution' for securing a better future for Nepal. Prachanda (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) is claiming major portfolios like Home, Defence and Finance.

The Maoists' 'land to the tiller' slogan played magic with the voters. The framing of issues on caste and gender lines also paid rich dividends: the Maoists fielded women, dalits and marginalised sections of society as electoral candidates. The interim constitution worked out by the coalition parties mandated that women should constitute at least 33 per cent of party

candidates, but the Maoists alone fielded around 20 per cent women candidates.

The primary challenge for the Maoists would be the construction of a 'new security force' in Nepal. They have been using 'democratising the army' to serve the interests of the country as a catchword. The world will watch how the Maoists allocate roles and duties to different cadres and what influence political indoctrination would have in controlling violent inclinations. The issue of Madhesis of the Terai is another area requiring tactful handling. Already the Madhesis are upset over the earlier compromise on the PR system. The



issues relating to social, economic and cultural rights have to be recognised and addressed.

The Maoists have stated that they look forward to a new relationship with India. If the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which defines political and economic relationship between the two countries, is scrapped, sensitive issues relating to irrigation and river waters would assume importance.

Prachanda has stated that Nepal would follow a policy of equidistance from both India and China. Recently, however, he has expressed unequivocal support to China regarding the protests of Tibetans. When India's National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan openly declared India's support for the NC in a TV interview, however, Prachanda displayed political maturity in merely protesting mildly: he chose not to accuse India of meddling in the domestic affairs of Nepal. Also, a consensus government might work in India's favour as the NC is the second-largest party in the CA. But radical, separatist groups in the Terai pose a serious threat to India since their interests might coalesce with those of the Indian Maoists. The latter have already distanced themselves from the Nepalese Maoists. Restive elements in the Terai would provide a facilitating base for linkages with the Indian Maoists, who do not believe in the sanctity of electoral politics.