

Senior US official meets Maoist leader in Nepal

A senior US administration official met Monday with Nepal's Maoist rebels in a sign of a growing thaw in relations between the two sides.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Evan A. Feigenbaum met Maoist supremo Prachanda, who is expected to head a new government to be formed within days.

The meeting has assumed growing importance because the Maoists are still listed by the US as an organization supporting terrorist activities.

Speaking to reporters after the talks, Prachanda said the meeting had further helped to reduce US mistrust of his party.

'We are hopeful that our party will be removed from the US list of organizations supporting terrorist activities,' Prachanda told journalists.

'I reiterated our party's commitment on multi-party democracy and liberalized economy and peace.'

'We have been assured of continuing American assistance to Nepal even after the formation of a government led by our party,' Prachanda added.

This is the second time in less than a month that high ranking US officials have met Maoist leadership. Earlier this month, US ambassador Nancy Powell met Prachanda.

The latest meeting came two days ahead of the scheduled convening of the newly elected constituent assembly that expected to declare Nepal a republic.

Nepal's Maoists emerged as the largest party in the April elections, winning 220 seats in the 601 member assembly.

The Maoists fought a decade long insurgency to convert the country into a communist republic, but gave up their armed struggle after signing a peace deal with the Nepali government in November 2006.

Nearly 14,000 people died in the insurgency while hundreds of thousands of others were displaced.

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