

Nepal Maoists to lift siege to let parliament pass budget

Nepal's former Maoist guerrillas, who had laid a siege to parliament since the fall of their government in May, Sunday said they would lift the five-month blockade to allow the budget to be passed and rescue the government from bankruptcy.

Maoist lawmaker Narayan Kaji Shrestha, who has been leading the house obstruction for nearly five months, said at the end of the party's parliamentary wing's meeting in Kathmandu Sunday that the siege would be lifted for three days from Monday to allow discussions on the budget.

In July, the former rebels had lifted their siege for a brief period to allow Finance Minister Surendra Pandey to table the budget in the house.

However, after that, the largest party in the Himalayan republic stepped up its campaign against the new coalition government of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, not allowing the house to convene any more.

The stalled budget has plunged the government in an acute financial crisis. While civil servants and security personnel have not received their salaries for two months, remote districts are running short of food and state-run hospitals of medicines.

Though the Maoists have announced a fresh round of protests against the government from Sunday, their chief and toppled prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda said that since his party was committed to the people, it would allow parliament to convene for three days to tide over the funds crunch.

However, the former rebels will step up street protests from Dec 1, which will culminate in a three-day general strike nationwide from Dec 20.

The once underground party began protests after the government prevented its attempt to hold a debate in parliament on the role played by the President Ram Baran Yadav, which caused their brief government to collapse.

The Maoists tried to sack the chief of the army, Gen Rookmangud Katawal, accusing him of disobedience. But the general was reinstated by the president in a move the Maoists say was unconstitutional.

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