

Nepal parties agree on division of ministries

Nepal's eight main political parties, including Maoist ex-rebels, Friday agreed on division of ministries paving the way for the formation of an interim government.

The agreement came after daylong talks between the top leaders to hammer out their difference over claims to key ministries.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Jhalanath Khanal of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) said the leaders had agreed to form a 22-member cabinet.

Under the agreement, Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and the Maoists would get five ministries each. Nepali Congress (Democratic) led by former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba will get three ministries while the remaining four parties will get one ministry each.

'The decision and agreement of the leaders will be ratified by the meeting of eight parties on Saturday. It will then be presented to parliament,' Nepali Congress leader Ram Chandra Paudel told reporters.

The agreement indicates major climb down by the Maoists who have been demanding the posts of deputy prime minister, and the ministries of defence, finance and water resources.

They have been given the ministries of information and communication along with local development.

Nepali Congress has kept key ministries of defence, finance and home while CPN-UML got foreign ministry.

It is likely that the interim government will be formed Saturday. The interim government will govern Nepal until the constituent assembly elections scheduled for mid-June.

The agreement makes it certain that the Maoist ex-rebels become part of Nepal's government exactly a year after they gave up armed insurgency.

The agreement also marks a transition of Nepal's Maoist from a rebel force to a mainstream party.

Maoists were involved in decade long insurgency to convert Nepal into a communist state. However, a peace agreement with the government in November 2006 saw the rebels pledging to uphold democracy and human rights.

However, many people in Nepal as well as foreign governments have cast doubts on the Maoists' ability to stick to their commitments. They have accused them of continuing extortion, violence and abductions.

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