

Scorned deputy PM delays new government in Nepal

The formation of Nepal's new interim government was held back Saturday despite an agreement between four main parties, after deputy prime minister dissented saying his party was not consulted during distribution of ministries.

Amik Sherchan, chief of the fractured leftist People's Front party that is a junior partner in the seven-party coalition government, has expressed his anger over his party being given the health ministry. Sherchan is the present health minister as well.

Though the seven parties and the Maoists were scheduled to hold a meeting to finalise the names of the first lot of ministers, the meeting could not be held because of Sherchan's outburst.

After late-night parleys between the ruling alliance and the guerrillas Friday, Jhala Nath Khanal, leader of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), the second largest party in the government, said an agreement had been reached to form a 21-member ministry initially.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala will lead the new government of eight parties. It will be the octogenarian leader's fifth stint as the head of government.

While Maoist chief Prachanda will not join the ministry, his party, along with UML and Koirala's Nepali Congress, will have five ministries each.

The Nepali Congress, the biggest party in parliament with 85 MPs, will hold most of the key portfolios: defence, home, finance, science and technology and the newly created peace and rehabilitation ministry.

The Maoists have bagged the plum ministry of information and communications, local development, physical planning and works, forest, and women, children and social welfare.

The UML retains foreign affairs and culture, general administration and tourism and civil aviation, besides also getting education and sports and agriculture and cooperatives.

The Maoists' triumphant entry in the government means loss of stature for former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, deposed by King Gyanendra in 2005.

From the third largest party in parliament and government, Deuba's Nepali Congress (Democratic) goes one step down in hierarchy and gets only three ministries in the new government: water resources, labour and transport and law, justice and parliamentary affairs.

Three of the minor partners in the government get one ministry each while the fourth, the leftist Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, is to repeat its earlier stance and support the government from outside.

The United Left Front (UFL) gets land reforms, Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandi) industry, commerce and supplies and People's Front health.

The Maoists were the first to announce the names of their ministers.

Maoist spokesman and chief of the parliamentary party Krishna Bahadur Mahara has been earmarked for information and communications while Hisila Yami, wife of Prachanda's deputy Baburam Bhattarai, has been named for physical planning and infrastructure.

Marking a change from the earlier practice of allocating the soft women, children and social development ministry to a woman, the rebels have named Khadga Bahadur Bishwakorma, coming from an underprivileged community, for the portfolio.

Dev Gurung, a member of the Maoist peace talks team, has been named for local development while Matrika Prasad Yadav, a leader from the Terai plains, has been nominated for forest.

The UML was the next to announce its nominees.

Veteran trade union leader Sahana Pradhan gets the important foreign ministry portfolio and is expected to attend the SAARC foreign ministers' meet in New Delhi.

Pradip Nepal, foreign affairs in-charge of the party, has been named education and sports minister and Chhabilal Vishwokarma agriculture minister.

Prithvi Subba Gurung will be the new tourism, culture and civil aviation minister, replacing Pradip Gyawali, who was a member of the government team that held peace talks successfully with the Maoists last year.

Ramchandra Yadav has been named minister of state for general administration and Mohan Singh Rathore minister of state for education.

Two other minor allies have also named their candidates.

The UFL has nominated Jagat Bahadur Bogoti as land reforms minister while Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandi) selected Rajendra Mahato as the industry, commerce and supplies minister.

However, neither Koirala nor deposed premier Deuba have yet announced their ministers.

With both Koirala's daughter and nephew are senior members of the party, it is expected either of them or his cousin Sushil Koirala will find a berth in the new ministry.

Sudeshna Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)