



Nepal government, Maoists agree on power sharing

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The first tussle over power sharing between Nepal's seven-party government and the Maoists since the rebels joined parliament was resolved Wednesday with both sides agreeing on a status quo.

Even as the guerrillas returned to parliament Monday, signifying a formal end to their decade-old armed uprising, fresh tension had started simmering between them and government over power sharing.

The three major parties in the government and the communist rebels remained deadlocked over the key parliamentary posts of Speaker and Deputy Speaker.

The current Speaker, Subhash Nembang, is from the second biggest party in the government, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML). He was appointed last year after a fierce tussle with deposed prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his Nepali Congress (Democratic) party, who had to settle for the post of Deputy Speaker.

'Everything will be changed,' Maoist chief Prachanda told the media on the eve of his party joining parliament. 'There will be a new Speaker and deputy.'

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who heads the Nepali Congress, the biggest party in the new house with 85 legislators, Wednesday held consultations with Prachanda with leaders of the other parties joining in afterwards.

Finally, the eight parties agreed to maintain status quo in the new parliament, deputy PM Amik Sherchan told the media after the meeting. While Nembang remains Speaker, Chitralekha Yadav keeps her post as Deputy Speaker.

A formal announcement to this effect will be made when Nepal's new interim legislature meets Wednesday afternoon.

However, Sherchan did not disclose whether the Maoists have been offered any plum ministerial berth in the cabinet to mollify them.

The Maoists are now the second biggest party in the interim legislature, along with the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), with both

holding 83 seats each.

Reports say the Maoists want the post of deputy prime minister if they can't get the Speaker's post.

Currently, Nepal has two deputy PMs: K P Oli, a UML member who is also foreign minister, and Sherchan from People's Front Nepal, who is also health minister.

The media has already started speculating that Oli will be replaced by Mahara. Or else, the rebels will jockey for the home minister's portfolio.

However, Nepali Congress leaders said after Wednesday's meeting that the allocation of ministries will be divided only when the new government is formed.

Koirala, who was visited by US ambassador to Nepal James Moriarty Wednesday, assured the envoy that the Maoists will not be inducted in the government till the UN certifies that all their arms and soldiers have been locked up, Koirala's adviser Dr Suresh Chalise said.