

Nepal Agreement May Break Deadlock Over Nation's Leadership
By Gardiner Harris
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NEW DELHI — [Nepal](#)'s major political parties have tentatively agreed to select the country's Supreme Court justice as an interim prime minister so elections can be held in June, potentially breaking a five-year deadlock that has left the nation with a hobbled government.

The agreement is expected to be formally signed early Tuesday evening. The chief justice, Khilaraj Regmi, is expected to lead a technocratic cabinet that will seek to resolve the many issues that have stymied for years efforts to hold a follow-up set of elections to those held in 2008.

Devendra Poudel, adviser to the present prime minister, Baburam Bhattarai, confirmed in a telephone interview that his Maoist party is ready to support Mr. Regmi's elevation.

"We support the chief justice's leadership of the elected government," Mr. Poudel said.

Rajendra Dahal, a spokesman for President Ram Baran Yadav, said that the president is expected to approve the new agreement when it is presented to him Tuesday evening.

"Of course the president will be happy," Mr. Dahal said. "The president's single mission is to have elections. That is his priority, so any way the parties get some consensus in the goal of having elections, the president will support."

Constitutional experts in [Nepal](#) have raised a host of concerns about the agreement, not the least of which is how Mr. Regmi will later be able to adjudicate challenges to an electoral process that he oversaw. His elevation also brings together two arms of the government that many see as vital to keep independent of one another.

Kanak Mani Dixit, a civil rights activist and commentator, said the selection of the chief justice may be the least worst option facing the country. But he said he was worried that the Maoists have supported the chief justice as an interim head of the government in hopes of discrediting the Supreme Court, which he said was the last civic institution in Nepal with any credibility.

"The Maoists agreed because they have already destroyed every other important institution of the state," Mr. Dixit said. "The only one remaining to be compromised is the Supreme Court."

Mr. Regmi is expected to be appointed to a three-month term as prime minister, after which he would return to the court. If Mr. Regmi is unable to oversee elections in that time, a new agreement would have to be reached.

Nepal's transition to democracy has taken more than five years, paralyzed by ethnic, caste, religious, ideological and regional differences that permeate Nepalese society and have made even the most basic political agreements impossible.

The move toward a representative government began in 2008 with great promise after the election of the Constituent Assembly. But the assembly was unable to draw up a constitution or settle on the timing or method of holding further elections.

In recent years, Mr. Bhattarai has led the government as prime minister. But he has rejected all proposals to replace him, and other political parties have refused to allow elections while Mr. Bhattarai runs the crucial levers of government, saying his oversight would make the elections unfair.

In the meantime, basic civil functions in Nepal have begun to fail one after the other, and its economy — never robust — has stalled. The result has been a diaspora of Nepalese to surrounding countries that has led to exasperation among Nepal's neighbors — particularly in India, where many of the immigrants settle.