

Genocide Watch Update: June 2003

Ceasefire in Nepal Maoist Rebels Continue Negotiations

After years of brutality, murder and rape, Maoist rebels are now engaged in peace negotiations with Nepal's sitting government. King Gyanendra's government and the Maoists have agreed to a ceasefire, which has temporarily ended the rebels' campaign of terror. Fighting stopped following a January truce. King Gyanendra recently appointed a new Prime Minister, and the Maoists have pledged to continue negotiations with the new government. The Nepalese government and the Maoists have so far held two meetings. A third meeting, scheduled for April, was postponed following rebel charges that the army violated the terms of the ceasefire by patrolling outside of its designated area.

The past two years have been the bloodiest in Nepal's seven-year civil war, with over 5000 of the estimated 7200 total victims. This escalation in the Maoists' campaign of politicide may be responsible for their presence at the negotiating table. The Maoists have had diminishing returns in their campaign of terror, with Maoist cadres unable to penetrate the Kathmandu valley, or hold strategic outposts against growing pressure from the Nepalese military. The shocking brutality of the Maoist campaign has brought international condemnation upon the Maoist rebels, and increased support for the Nepalese government, particularly in the form of direct aid to Nepal's security forces. In public statements, the Maoists are distancing themselves from the extreme violence of the past two years, but terror remains central to the rebel movement's Maoist ideology.

Nepal desperately needs a successful resolution to the current peace negotiations. A resurgence of violence in the countryside would result in the continued postponement of national elections. The reintegration of rebels into society is a vital step in the peace process. Many of the Maoist fighters are under seventeen years old. The insurgency's damage will be long term if they are not brought back to school and into normal life.

Success in the peace negotiations depends on the unity of the Maoists. Fragmentation of the movement could result in the emergence of numerous warlords and bandits from the ranks of the rebels, and could plunge the country into prolonged anarchy in the countryside. A breakdown in the negotiations and resumed fighting would almost certainly result in heightened numbers of casualties. The Nepalese army has used foreign aid to greatly increase its firepower, and if fighting resumes, the army's deadly record on human rights ensures an increased civilian death toll. Amnesty International recently criticized both the army and the Maoists for human rights violations.

Nepal has long been ripe for civil turmoil, as the country has experienced exponential population growth without substantial parallel economic growth. The Maoist insurgency has covered over ethnic fault lines just beneath the surface. The Nepalese speak over 50 different languages. Linguistic groups have only recently begun identifying themselves as ethnic.

Many Nepalese people are demanding a new elected government, decentralized local governments, and land reform. The Maoists thus appeal to populist aspirations. But their brutal revolutionary tactics are early warnings of the politicide they would commit if they ever came to power.

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