

Nepal Poll Postponed Indefinitely

Maoist leader and Nepal's ruling parties have agreed to postpone elections for the constituent assembly in the Himalayan nation. The election had been set for November 22. It was not clear when the vote would be held for the assembly which will be responsible for rewriting the constitution and shaping Nepal's political future. The constituent assembly is a major part of the peace agreement that ended the Maoists' decade-long war and brought them into politics.

"The leaders have decided to postpone the voting, but a new date hasn't been fixed," Prakash Sharan Mahat, of the leading Nepali Congress party, said on Friday.

Ram Chandra Poudel, the peace and reconstruction minister, told Reuters news agency: "Seven political parties have recommended to the prime minister to delay the elections for now. "The prime minister will formally request the election commission to postpone the vote."

Proportional system

The delay, if confirmed by the election commission, would be a major blow to a November peace deal that ended the Maoists' decade-long civil war against the monarchy - a revolt that caused more than 13,000 deaths.

The election was a key demand of the Maoists. Earlier this year, they had agreed to a mixed election system, where half the assembly members would be chosen through proportional representation. The other half was to be directly elected by the public. But last month they walked out of the government after the other political parties opposed fresh demands to abolish the monarchy before the elections and to introduce full proportional representation.

Such a system would require voters to cast ballots for political parties which in turn would appoint members to the assembly.

Mixed system

Most analysts believe the Maoists want a proportional election because they have few leaders with enough stature to earn many votes in a direct election. The Maoists have given the ruling alliance until midnight of Thursday to agree to their demands. They have threatened to launch widespread street protests if their demands are not met.

Last week, the Nepal Congress announced its support for declaring the country a republic, moving the government closer to abolishing the monarchy that ruled for centuries. The king remains on the throne, but was stripped of nearly all his power last year in the wake of massive street protests.