

Date:04/02/2011 URL:**<http://www.thehindu.com/2011/02/04/stories/2011020460791100.htm>**

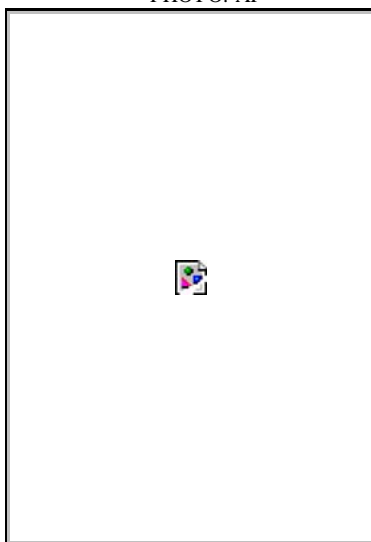
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Jhalanath Khanal elected Nepal's PM

Prashant Jha

Left alliance takes shape between UML and Maoists

— PHOTO: AP



New Prime Minister of Nepal Jhalanath Khanal in Kathmandu on Thursday.

New Delhi: After seven months of having a caretaker government, Nepal finally got a Prime Minister on Thursday. Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist), Jhalanath Khanal, secured the support of 368 MPs in the House of 601 to become the 34th Prime Minister. Mr. Khanal was supported by the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), whose chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' decided to withdraw from the contest right before the voting. Speaking in the legislature-parliament, Mr Prachanda said, "Being the single largest party in the country, we feel it is our moral responsibility to ensure that today's election becomes result-oriented. We have taken this decision to clear the ongoing political deadlock." The Maoists have 237 MPs, and the UML has 107 MPs. A number of smaller parties also voted for Mr. Khanal.

The UML and the Maoist chairmen had met on Thursday morning, following which the Maoists held an emergency standing committee in the parliament building in Kathmandu. Maoist sources said Mr. Prachanda proposed that since he did not have sufficient votes to win, the party should back Mr. Khanal as this would be a "nationalist government" and open the way for the peace and constitutional process. Party vice-chairman Dr. Baburam Bhattarai however registered a note of dissent, arguing that only a Maoist-led national consensus government, instead of a majority

government, could break the political deadlock.

After it became certain he would win, Mr. Khanal said in Parliament, “The politics of consensus is still essential to institutionalise the political changes. I will take everyone together for the sake of peace and constitution. The constitution will be drafted during my tenure.”

Mr Khanal's victory brings to life a new 'left alliance' between the UML and Maoists in Nepal, replacing the preceding 'left-democratic' alliance between the UML and Nepali Congress. NC leader, Ram Chandra Poudel, and a leader of the United Democratic Madhesi Front, Bijay Kumar Gachhedar, were the other candidates in the fray.

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