

Secularism to go from Nepal constitution

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Kathmandu: In a major change, Nepal's political parties have agreed to remove the word "secularism" from the new constitution.

Nepal was declared a secular country in 2007 after Nepal's hardcore Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist joined mainstream politics after a decade-long insurgency that killed over 13,000 people.

The decision ended Nepal's century-old identity as the world's only Hindu kingdom. Over 80 percent of Nepal's population is Hindu.

The political parties were forced to take a U-turn after millions of people, in their suggestions and feedback on the new constitution, called for the removal of the word "secularism".

A majority of people wanted "secularism" to be replaced by "Hindu" or "religious freedom", according to Nepal's Constituent Assembly that is now busy studying people's views vis-a-vis the new constitution.

Nepal is in the verge of promulgating the new constitution.

"The word secularism does not fit. So we are replacing it by another word," UCPN-Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda told the media on Monday.

"The word has irked people... It has hurt the sentiments of millions," he said. "We must respect the verdict of the people."

The Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist and the Madhesi-based political parties also wanted "secularism" to go.

Other feedbacks from people included a directly elected prime minister or president.

- IANS