

Prince is safe, say Bhutanese officials

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BHUTANESE OFFICIALS on Sunday dumped reports that Prince Jigyel Wangchuk, the second son of King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, was injured in the ongoing counter-insurgency operations, saying he was safe and camping at Deothang in southern Bhutan.

Unofficial reports had claimed that the Prince received bullet injuries while leading an operation against the cadres of the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland

and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) in the dense jungles of Lilibum on the India-Bhutan border. Officials, however, negated it, saying it was just a rumour spread by militants. They added the slur that the Royal Bhutan Army was killing women and children in militant camps was also hearsay.

"The Prince is in the militia comprising young men and women who volunteer to guard vital installations within the country," Yeshey Dorjee, director of Bhutan's External Affairs Ministry told *Hindustan Times* from Sandrup Jongkhar

explained, while confirming that both the Prince and the King were safe.

Prince Jigyel abandoned his studies at Oxford University's St Peter's College and arrived in Bhutan in November. This gave rise to speculations that he had flown down to take part in the Royal Bhutan Army's operations.

Officials also brushed aside reports that all operations against the militants had been suspended. "Reports of suspension of operations against the insurgents are being spread deliberately," Dorjee said.

The Bhutan government

spokesperson said the Royal army was now smoking out militants from dense jungles, deeper inside Bhutan. "Of the 30 camps across southern and southwestern Bhutan that have been demolished, the Ulfa had 13, the NDFB 12 and the KLO five," he added.

The operations have been intensified along the western part of Bhutan, particularly in areas adjacent to the Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam's BARPETA district. "A large band of militants is believed to have sneaked into the reserve, which had been the most preferred hideout of Bodo

rebels in the 1990s," the director of the External Affairs Ministry said.

He said the King had come to the frontier to oversee operations. "The King is the supreme commander and it's only natural that he will be if there's a problem. His Majesty cares about the well-being of his subjects," Dorjee said.

Situated 10 km from Sandrup Jongkhar, Deothang had been a major haunt of both the Ulfa and NDFB for the past 12 years. So, the jungles neighbouring Deothang have been a major theatre of Operation All-Clear against the militants.

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Bhutan army smashes more camps

Samdrup Jongkhar: Led by King Jigme Singhye Wangchuk and his second son Prince Jigyel Wangchuk, the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) on Friday intensified its onslaught on the North-East insurgents, smashing 19 of their 30 well-fortified camps and handing over the first batch of seven captured ultras to the Indian Army.

Feeling the heat of the offensive coupled with Thimpu's rejection of their ceasefire appeal, the rebel groups—the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO)—have called for a 48-hour strike in Assam and north Bengal on Saturday.

Bangladesh urged to flush out militants

Agartala: Claiming that he had definite proof on the presence of ISI-backed militant camps in Bangladesh, Tripura chief minister Manik Sarkar on Friday urged Dhaka to carry out "Bhutan-like" operations to flush out the insurgents.

Bangladesh is a friendly neighbour and should also conduct a similar kind of operation there, Mr Sarkar told reporters here. PTI

In a major setback to Ulfa, its ideologue and senior leader Bhimkanta Buragohain, who was seriously injured on the first day of the offensive, succumbed to his injuries on Thursday.

The RBA, personally led by the King and the prince, was engaged in dislodging the insurgents from Bhutanese territory—from Dhangtar in Samdrup Jongkhar district to Ngaglam in southern Bhutan, Sarpang district in west Bhutan and beyond Samtse—a senior Bhutan government official told the media.

The King "is risking his life" to protect the sovereignty and security of the kingdom by leading the troops into the hostile jungles to flush out the holed up anti-India insurgents, Bhutanese Prime Minister Lyonpo Jigme Thinley said in a statement. "Despite having led the troops into hostile jungle, his Majesty, the King, is in good health and is very well," he said.

Meanwhile, reports from Tezpur say that at least 10 militants of the



Soldiers patrol the Indo-Bhutan border as a local villager goes about his work at Darranga, about 100 km north of Guwahati, on Friday.

NDFB, who had sneaked into Assam after being hounded out of Bhutan in the flushing out operations in that country, are waiting to surrender before the civil administration.

The militants, who are carrying firearms, had contacted mediators at Paneri and Tezpur along the Indo-Bhutan border to surrender before the civil administration rather than the Indian Army.

After crossing the deep forests of Bhutan they surreptitiously entered Assam at Paneri. Led by a senior cadre identified as 'Dowkha' they are presently sheltering in a village under Paneri police station in Darrang district, the sources said. PTI

Clipping

ভুটানে হত ১২০ জঙ্গি, অসমে বড়ো নেতা পাকড়াও, সিআরপি ফাঁড়িতে আলফা-হানা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি ও
কলকাতা: ভুটানের সঙ্গে আন্তর্জাতিক
সীমান্ত সিল করে দিয়ে সীমান্ত বরাবর
সেনা মোতায়েন করার ফল মিলল হাতে
হাতেই। ভুটানের শিবির থেকে পালিয়ে
আসার পথে ধরা পড়ে গেলেন এন ডি এফ
বি-র প্রচারসচিব বি এরাবুডা। অসমে
কামরূপ জেলায় রঙিয়ায় সেনাবাহিনী
তাকে ধরে। এ ছাড়াও নলবাড়ি জেলার
ভুটানের সীমান্তবর্তী দরঙ্গমেলায় এন ডি
এফ বি-র চার জন এবং কে এল ও-র এক
জন সক্রিয় কর্মী ধরা পড়েছে বলে অসম
সরকার সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে। আলফার
প্রচারসচিব মিথিঙ্গা দইমারি এবং কে এল
ও-র দুই কটর জঙ্গিকে মঙ্গলবারেই ভুটানে
গ্রেফতার করেছে ভুটান সরকার। তাদের
ভারতীয় সেনাবাহিনীর হাতে তুলে দেওয়া
হয়েছে। এ দিকে, সামরিক অভিযান বন্ধ
রাখতে আলফা যে-অনুরোধ জানিয়েছিল,
তা খারিজ করে দিয়েছে ভুটান। তারা
জানিয়েছে, অভিযান চলবে।

ভুটানে সামরিক অভিযানে ঠিক কত
জন জঙ্গির মৃত্যু হয়েছে, কোন জঙ্গি সংস্থার
কত ক্ষতি হয়েছে, সেই ব্যাপারে মুখ খুলছে
না কেউ। তবে ওই অভিযানে অন্তত ১২০
জন জঙ্গির মৃত্যু হয়েছে বলে বৃহস্পতিবার
কলকাতায় জানান ভারতীয় সেনাবাহিনীর
পূর্বাঞ্চলের জেনারেল অফিসার কমান্ডিং
লে. জেনারেল জে এস বর্মা। জঙ্গিদের
সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষে সাত জন ভুটানি সেনা মারা
গিয়েছেন বলেও জানান তিনি। তবে
দু'পক্ষের ঠিক কত জন আহত হয়েছেন, তা
জানাতে চাননি পূর্বাঞ্চলের সেনাপ্রধান। মৃত
জঙ্গিদের পরিচয় জানতে চাওয়া হলে বর্মা
বলেন, ঘন জঙ্গলে ঘেরা দুর্গম পাহাড়ে
শিবির তৈরি করেছিল জঙ্গিরা। সেখানে
যাতায়াতের অসুবিধা থাকায় মৃতদেহগুলি
এখনও শনাক্ত করা যায়নি। তাঁর দাবি,
ভুটানে জঙ্গিদের ২৪টি শিবিরের সব ক'টিই
গুঁড়িয়ে দেওয়া হবে।

পূর্বাঞ্চলের সেনা সদর দফতরের
হিসাবে বিভিন্ন জঙ্গি সংস্থার মোট সাত
জনকে ভারতীয় ফৌজের হাতে তুলে
দেওয়া হয়েছে। ফৌজি অফিসারেরা

জঙ্গিদের জেরা করছেন। ধৃত সাত জনের
নাম বা তাদের কে কোন সংগঠনের সঙ্গে
যুক্ত, তা জানাতে চাননি বর্মা। তিনি বলেন,
সন্দেহভাজন আরও চার জনকে ধরেছে
সেনাবাহিনী। তাদের মধ্যে এক জন এন ডি
এফ বি-র সদস্য বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে।

অন্য দিকে, ভুটানে তাদের শিবির
গুঁড়িয়ে দেওয়ার প্রতিক্রিয়া হিসাবে

বৃহস্পতিবারেই অসমে নিরাপত্তাবাহিনীর
উপরে আঘাত হেনেছে আলফা। ভোরে
শিবসাগর জেলায় সি আর পি-র একটি
ফাঁড়িতে আক্রমণ হানে আলফা। স্বরাষ্ট্র
দফতর সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, বীরপাড়ায় ওই
ফাঁড়িতে দু'পক্ষের গুলি বিনিময়ে তিন জন
আহত হয়েছেন। আহতদের মধ্যে দু'জন
সি আর পি জওয়ান।

নব্বইয়ের দশকে লাগাতার সেনা
অভিযানের পরে এই প্রথম আলফা দমনে
এত বড় অভিযান চালান নিরাপত্তাবাহিনী।
তাই আলফা যে তার প্রত্যুত্তর দেবে, সে-
জন্য তৈরিই আছে তারা। শিবসাগরে
ভোরে আলফা হঠাৎ আক্রমণ চালালেও
জবাব দিতে দেরি করেনি সি আর পি।
পুলিশি সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, শিবসাগরের
ঘটনায় ঘন অন্ধকারে এক ঘণ্টা ধরে জঙ্গি
এবং নিরাপত্তাবাহিনীর মধ্যে গুলি বিনিময়
চলে। 'অপারেশন অল আউট' শুরু হওয়ার
পরে এই প্রথম জঙ্গিরা অসমের কোথাও
আঘাত হানল। এই ঘটনার পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে
আলফা অধ্যুষিত এলাকাগুলিতে চূড়ান্ত
সতর্কতা জারি করা হয়েছে।

এ দিকে, অস্ত্র সংবরণের ব্যাপারে
আলফা নেতাদের আর্জি এ দিন ফের
খারিজ করে দিয়েছে ভুটান সরকার।
ভুটানের বিদেশ দফতরের অধিকর্তা ইয়েশি
দর্জি বলেন, "আমরা ওদের আর বিশ্বাস
করি না। ছ'বছর ধরে বহু আলোচনা
হয়েছে। ওদের বারবার বলা হয়েছে, ভুটান
ছেড়ে চলে যাও। ওরা কিছুতেই ভুটান
থেকে ঘাটি গোটাচ্ছে না। ভারতের সঙ্গে
ভুটানের সম্পর্কের ব্যাপারটাকে আমাদের
গুরুত্ব দিতেই হবে। তাই ন্যাশনাল
অ্যাসেমবলিতে দফায় দফায় কথা বলে এই
অভিযানের ব্যাপারে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া
হয়েছে।" নির্বিচার হানার ফলে নিরীহ
মহিলা, শিশুরও মৃত্যু হওয়ায় ভুটান
রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের নির্দেশিকা লঙ্ঘন করছে বলে
যে-অভিযোগ উঠেছে, সেই প্রসঙ্গে দর্জি
বলেন, "কেবল সশস্ত্র জঙ্গিদের উপরেই
আক্রমণ হানছে সেনারা। তাই রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের
নির্দেশিকা লঙ্ঘন করার প্রশ্ন ওঠে না।"

সামচি (ভুটান) থেকে শক্তিব্রত
মজুমদার জানাচ্ছেন, ভুটান পাহাড়ে সেনা
অভিযানে কে এল ও-র দুই শীর্ষ নেতা টম
অধিকারী ও মিল্টন বর্মনের ধরা পড়ার কথা
কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক বুধবার জানালেও
বৃহস্পতিবার রাত পর্যন্ত এই ব্যাপারে
জলপাইগুড়ির পুলিশ-প্রশাসনের কাছে
কোনও খবর নেই। এ দিন বিকালে
এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়

এ বার বাংলাদেশে জঙ্গি ঘাঁটি গুঁড়িয়ে দিতে উদ্যোগী ভারত

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৮ ডিসেম্বর: ভুটানের পর এ বার বাংলাদেশে আলফা-
কামতাপুরী ঘাঁটি নিশ্চিহ্ন করতে তৎপর হল ভারত। আশ্রয়গ্রহণকারী আলফা জঙ্গি
নেতাদের বাংলাদেশ থেকে ভারতে পাঠানোর দাবি জানানো হয়েছে। উপপ্রধানমন্ত্রী
লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী আজ বলেছেন, "বাংলাদেশে আশ্রয়গ্রহণকারী জঙ্গি নেতাদের
অবিলম্বে আমাদের হাতে তুলে দিতে বলা হয়েছে।" কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক সূত্রে বলা
হয়েছে, পরেশ বড়ুয়া, অরবিন্দ রাজখোয়া, অনুপ চেটিয়ার মতো নেতারা বাংলাদেশে।
রাজখোয়া ও চেটিয়া হাজতে থাকলেও পরেশ বড়ুয়া তো স্বাধীন ভাবেই সে দেশে
ঘোরাফেরা করছেন।

ঢাকা থেকে সরকারি সূত্র উদ্ধৃত করে নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা জানিয়েছেন, ভুটান থেকে
জঙ্গিরা যাতে বাংলাদেশে ঢুকতে না পারে তার জন্য ভুটান-বাংলাদেশ সীমান্ত সিল করা
হয়েছে।

এ দিকে, ভুটানে আজও জঙ্গি ঘাঁটি নিশ্চিহ্ন করার অভিযান চলেছে। আলফা
জঙ্গিরা আজ চতুর্থ দিনে কার্যত পরাজয় স্বীকার করে নিয়েছে। আলফা নেতারা
গতকালই সংঘর্ষ প্রস্তাব পাঠিয়েছিল, ভুটান সরকারের কাছে। আজ ভুটান সরকার
ভারত সরকারকে এ প্রস্তাব জানালে তা খারিজ করে দেওয়া হয়েছে। আডবানী
বলেছেন, এখন সংঘর্ষ বিরতির প্রশ্ন উঠছে না। আমরা বরাবর বলে এসেছি, এই
জঙ্গিদের অস্ত্র ত্যাগ করতে হবে এবং ভারতীয় সংবিধান মেনে চলতে হবে। এই
শর্তগুলি মেনে নিলে এই আঘাত হানার প্রয়োজনও হত না। শান্তির পথে আসার আগে
তাদের হিংসার পথ ছাড়তে হবে। আক্রমণ ও হিংসা চালালে সংঘর্ষ বিরতি হতে পারে
না। আডবানী আজ এ কথা বললেও বাজপেয়ী সরকার এ বার ধীরে ধীরে আলফা
নেতাদের আত্মসমর্পণ করিয়ে আলোচনার পথে নিয়ে যাওয়ার কৌশল গ্রহণ করবে।

তবে, গত চার দিনের সেনা অভিযানের পর এ বার বাংলাদেশ নেপাল ও মায়ানমার
সম্পর্কেও ভারত কূটনৈতিক কৌশল অবলম্বন করতে পারে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে।
ভুটানে আলফা জঙ্গি ঘাঁটি নিশ্চিহ্নকরণের সাফল্য বাজপেয়ী সরকারের আস্থাও
অনেকটা বাড়িয়ে দিয়েছে। এই সাফল্যের অন্যতম স্থপতি হলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর প্রিন্সিপাল
সেক্রেটারি ব্রজেশ মিশ্র। তিনি বেশ কয়েক মাস আগে গোপনে বাগডোগরা থেকে
ভুটান যান। সেখানে তিনি ভুটানরাজের সঙ্গে দেখা করে এই শিবিরগুলি নিশ্চিহ্ন করার
এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়

Bhutan army captures Ulfa HQ

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Samdrup Jongkhar (Bhutan): After more than 24 hours of launching a full fledged operation against the United Liberation Front of Asom, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation, on Bhutanese soil, Bhutan the Royal Bhutan government appeared confident that they would be able to wind up the operations soon.

According to an army official, the Royal Bhutanese Army has captured Ulfa's council headquarters at Sukhni while one the outfit's camps at Kaowipani has been dismantled by the Bhutanese forces.

Bhutan's director, ministry of foreign affairs, Yeshey Dorji, camping at Samdrup Jhongkhar, 100 km north of Guwahati and one km away from the Indo-Bhutan border, told TNN on Tuesday that the RBA had met with resistance from the militants in several

places. "So far, 16 RBA personnel had been injured and evacuated out of Bhutan in Indian Army helicopters for medical attention. Four of them are in serious condition," Mr Dorji said.

"We are determined to flush them out and the process, we hope, will end soon. But, it was a hard decision for us to launch this offensive as we are a Buddhist nation that preaches complete peace. The military offensive was decided after all our peaceful efforts to persuade these militants leave our country for the last six years have been exhausted. It is a situation that is not our making," Mr Dorji said.

He denied that the operation was a joint one with the Indian Army but said they had been given good cooperation.

Mr Dorji said that the Bhutan government had issued a warning to Ulfa, NDFB and KLO on December 13 through the national newspaper *Kuensel*. Military action was then initiated against all camps on

the southern district of Samtse, Kalikhola sub-district, Sarpang, Nanglam sub-district, Samdrup Jongkhar, Bhangtar sub-district and Daifam sub-district.

Even as the fighting continued on Tuesday and artillery gun shots were heard at Samdrup Jongkhar at around 12.30 p.m, Ulfa chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa appealed to the King of Bhutan, the people of Bhutan and the Royal Government of Bhutan to call off the military action. In a statement, the militant leader described the "Indo-Bhutan joint massive army operation" as a "totally illegal one."

Reports reaching Guwahati said that the insurgents had suffered several casualties as a number of their camps in the forests were destroyed.

A caller claiming to be Ulfa commander-in-chief Padesh Baruah told a local daily here that the outfit's seniormost leader Bhimkanta Buragohain alias 'mama', some trainers and 13 children were injured in the army operation.

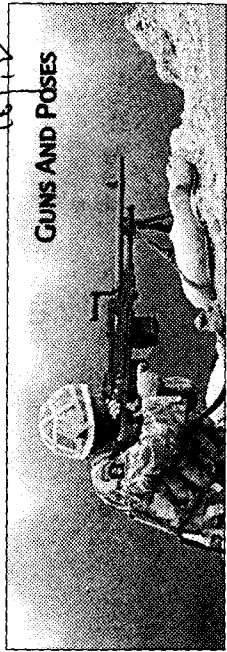
India providing logistical support

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: India is providing crucial "logistical" support, including arms and equipment, to Bhutan in its ongoing military crackdown on Indian insurgent groups operating from its soil, say defence sources.

The Indian armed forces have also deployed helicopters to evacuate Bhutanese Army "casualties" in the operation. Army chief General N. C. Vij on Tuesday said force levels along the entire Indo-Bhutanese border had been beefed up to intercept fleeing militants from Bhutan.

Bhutan launches offensive against NE ultras



GUNS AND POSES

Our Bureau
GUWAHATI, SILIGURI 15 DECEMBER

THE Royal Bhutan Army and the Royal Bhutan Guards have launched a major offensive against Ujfa and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) around Sunday midnight in Bhutan to flush out militants from the Himalayan kingdom. The Indian Army too has taken position along the Indo-Bhutan border to prevent infiltration of militants to India.

Assam home secretary Badal Mitra Majumdar told ET that the Indo-Bhutan border has been sealed by the Army from Monday. He informed that the Assam government was undertaking necessary arrangements to deal with the situation.

According to sources, out of the 18 camps in the hilly jungles, eight each were run by Ujfa and NDFB while 2 were run by KLO. Most of these were spread over the entire border along Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts of North Bengal. Mr S.N. Gupta, SP,

Jalpaiguri, said that the police was keeping the best possible vigil to maintain law and order situation in the district.

The Bhutan government had earlier set a December 31 deadline to the Northeast-based militants to leave its soil. But now it has decided to launch an attack before that deadline expired. Army sources said that NDFB camps in Sarpaang area and areas north of Samdrupthangkhar faced the major brunt.

Ujfa camps situated in Kalkhola area at the tri-junction of Assam, Bhutan and West Bengal border also came under heavy firing from the Bhutanese Army.

Ujfa and NDFB militants retaliated by firing rocket propelled grenades (RPG) at army personnel from across the international Indo-Bhutan border along Assam in a bid to prevent the forces from setting up a camp at Ghopakona.

There was no immediate report of any casualty or injury. Of late, there has been tremendous pressure from the Government of India on the Bhutan govern-

ment to launch operations against the militants. There were even reports of Bhutanese people mobilising funds and manpower for an offensive against the militants.

According to intelligence sources, preparation for the operation began late on Sunday after clearance from the Union home ministry. The first attack was launched at around 9 a.m. on Monday and by evening, at least three camps, including the notorious Piping Camp have been demolished. A team of around 12,000 heavily armed Indian Army jawans has been deployed in the border within dense hilly forest in Alipurdooar area to crush the militants from south. Three Indian Army helicopters, equipped with air raid arms and ammunition have been pressed into service.

According to the district administration sources, Jaigaon, Birpara, Nagrakata, Kalcchini, Buxa, all were sealed. Border area villages in Samsi block of Jalpaiguri district have already been evacuated.

36 die in Nepal's 24-hour cycle of violence

Kathmandu, Dec. 3 (Agencies): At least 36 people including six policemen were killed in Nepal in the past 24 hours in some of the deadliest clashes between troops and Maoist guerrillas since the rebels quit peace talks in August, officials said.

Maoist rebels, fighting to topple Nepal's Hindu monarchy, killed six policemen and wounded 11 in the Kailali district, 600 km west of Kathmandu, district administrator Sibendra Purush Dhakal said by telephone today.

The area is a Maoist stronghold. The rebels ambushed the patrol, throwing crude bombs and

opening fire with rifles, as the policemen were going through a forest.

"There was a fierce battle and many Maoists could have also been killed," an army officer said.

State radio said bodies of 14 Maoist guerrillas were recovered from the site of the battle.

Elsewhere, 16 guerrillas were killed in separate gunbattles, the defence ministry said in a statement.

The rebels, who follow the teachings of the late Chinese leader Mao Zedong, have been fighting to set up a communist republic since 1996. More than

8,100 people have been killed.

Violence has increased since August when peace talks collapsed after the government rejected a rebel demand for a new constitution to curb the role of the monarchy.

Officials say the rebels, who until recently were most active in Nepal's Himalayan foothills, are now mounting attacks in cities and on the southern plains, the country's main business and industrial area along the border with India.

The violence has hurt the country's important tourism sector, although the rebels have said they have no intention of at-

tacking foreign mountaineers, hikers and other visitors.

Beijing has told Kathmandu to resolve the seven-year old Maoist problem without any foreign intervention.

"Nepal is capable of dealing with its internal problem by itself and there is no need for foreign intervention," chairman of the Chinese Peoples' Political Consultative Committee Jia Qinglin told Nepalese Premier Surya Bahadur Thapa during a meeting here.

China has also wished Nepal success in establishing peace in the country, nepalese foreign secretary Madhuraman Acharya

said after the meeting.

"The government of China wants to see political stability, peace and development in Nepal," he said.

Jia, fourth in rank among Chinese leaders, and Thapa discussed bilateral relations and political matters, he said.

The Chinese leader, who arrived here yesterday for a two-day visit, also had an audience with King Gyanendra at the Narayanhiti royal palace today. The meeting lasted for about half

-an-hour, royal palace sources said. Jia also met Rajparishad chairman Parasumarayan Chaudhari.



Chairman of the National Committee of Chinese People's Political Conference Jia Qinglin (left) with Nepal Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa (right) in Kathmandu. (AFP)

25 Maoists killed in intensified crackdown

Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU, Dec. 1. — Security forces have killed 25 rebels in intensified anti-Maoist crackdown across Nepal in which one army personnel also died, officials said today.

In a related development, rebel commander Man Bahadur Malla was captured after an unsuccessful attempt by the rebels to loot a bank in Khotang in East Nepal.

Security forces shot dead eight Maoists in Sunsari district and two in Panchthar district in east Nepal yesterday, the officials were quoted as saying by government daily the *Rising Nepal*.

In a separate incident, two rebels were killed in search operations carried out by security forces in Madhavpur in Chitawan district, the sources said adding the Maoists were shot as they tried to run away after being arrested. Four rebels each were killed in Syangja districts, three in Siraha chowk, Tanahu and Panchhar districts.

A soldier was killed and two

others sustained injuries in a Maoist attack in Bharatpur Municipality. Security forces killed a man in Gulmi district after he defied the night curfew order at Pholchowk area in the district.

On Saturday, security forces had foiled an attempt by the Maoists to break a district jail in Khaldhunga in east Nepal. There was an exchange of fire for about two hours, which left half a dozen rebels injured.

Nepal PM visits Pak

Prime Minister of Nepal Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa arrived in Islamabad today on a two-day visit to discuss bilateral issues as well as arrangements for the Saarc summit to be held here next month.

Mr Thapa, who is also the Saarc chairman, was received by Pakistani foreign minister Mr Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri.

Mr Thapa would meet General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Mr Mir Zafarullah Jamali later today. Mr Kasuri and commerce minister Mr Humayun Akhtar will also call on him during his stay in Islamabad.

Nepal PM on support recce

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Nov. 21: Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, with his back to the wall amid growing resignation demands from both within and outside his party, is coming to Delhi on Sunday to enlist India's support.

A deadline set by the president of Thapa's Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Pashupati Shamsheer Rana, expires today. But Thapa held a news conference in Kathmandu yesterday to make it clear that he had no desire to quit, leading to the possibility of a split in the RPP.

The ostensible reason behind Thapa's visit is to discuss the forthcoming Saarc summit in Islamabad. Nepal is currently the chairman of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Over the next few days, the Nepalese Premier is also scheduled to visit other member countries.

But the country's foreign ministry admitted that Thapa would also discuss important

bilateral issues with India.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is scheduled to hold a lunch for Thapa on Monday and the two leaders are likely to discuss the situation in Nepal in view of the present political crisis. Thapa will also meet other senior Indian leaders and explain his stand.

Known to be close to India, Thapa would try to enlist the country's support and ensure that it does not join the resignation chorus.

If there is a crisis in the ruling RPP, the Opposition is no better. The five-party alliance of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), the Nepali Congress, the Sadbhavana Party, the Nepal Mazdoor-Kisan Party and the Jana Morcha can neither force King Gyanendra to restore democracy nor resolve the Maoist crisis.

The alliance, too, has been asking Thapa to quit and demanding that an all-party government be put in its place. However, the problem lies in deciding who would be the next Prime Minister.

6 NOV 2003

Prince puts country first, Oxford second & rebels on top of agenda

Associated Press

LONDON, Nov. 5. — A Bhutanese prince has broken off his studies at Oxford University, saying he was going home to join his country's fight against Indian separatist rebels, a fellow student said.

Nineteen-year-old Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, whose father is king of the Buddhist monarchy, said he was bound by an oath of allegiance to return home and fight after joining his country's military without telling his parents, according to Mr Anjool Malde, the deputy news editor of the Oxford Student newspaper, who interviewed Wangchuck.

The prince said his mother was disap-

pointed that he was giving up the chance to study at Oxford, where he had begun classes in history and politics only a few weeks ago, said Malde, whose story about the prince was to appear in the newspaper next week.

"I love Oxford because I can be Jigyel, not constantly in the spotlight like in Bhutan," the prince was quoted as saying. But he also said: "Though I was happy here in this amazing city, I've done the right thing."

Working from illegal forest training camps in southern Bhutan, the separatists have been crossing the border to launch attacks against security forces in Assam, India, since 1979. Talks between the rebels and the Bhutan government broke down last week.

More than 2,000 rebels from the United Liberation Front of Asom and the National Democratic Front of Boroland moved into Bhutan in 1990 to avoid Indian forces.

In December, Bhutan's king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, threatened to use military force against the rebels if they didn't leave. Bhutan's army, however, is regarded as ineffective and poorly equipped. Bhutan, one of the world's poorest countries, has a population of 2 million people and is landlocked in the beautiful mountainous region between India and Tibet.

The prince's brother Jigme, the crown prince of Bhutan, left Oxford last week after completing his master's degree in politics at Magdalen College.

KOKRAJHAR, Nov. 5. — Bhutanese Prime Minister Mr Lyonpo Jigme Yozer Thinley is camping at the Kalikhola area of Bhutan, near the Assam border, holding talks with militant outfits in the area, officials said here today.

Mr Thinley is trying to persuade leaders of the Ulfra, NDFB and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) to close their camps in Bhutan, the sources said. Bhutan's National Assembly

had adopted a resolution in its 80th session stressing the need for dialogue to convince the militants to leave the kingdom and retreat.

According to a list prepared by Bhutan, Ulfra has nine camps, NDFB has eight and KLO has three in the country.

Mr Thinley was provided with armed escorts from Datgiri to Srirampur on the Assam-West Bengal border. He will be camping at Kalikhola on the borders of Assam, Bengal and

Bhutan PM holding talks with ultras

Bhutan for five days before returning to Thimpu via the same route, a senior police official said.

Mr Thinley's visit to the area is being viewed as a last-ditch effort to ensure that the militants leave the Himalayan kingdom without any confrontation. During his five-day visit to India, Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuk had assured that the militant camps in his country will be soon dismantled. — PTI

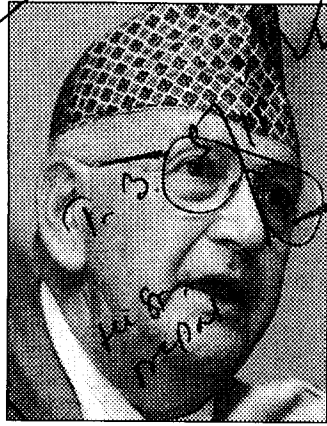
Koirala seeks UN intervention

3/11 *Himalayan*

Kathmandu: Charging the government and the Maoists of violating human rights, opposition Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala has sought United Nations' intervention to restore democracy and human rights in the Himalayan kingdom.

Both the Maoist rebels and the government are violating human rights in Nepal and the UN should take initiatives to restore democracy and human rights in the country, Mr Koirala told mediapersons in Janakpur. Mr Koirala said that he had appealed the UN to intervene in the matter through a special envoy of secretary general Kofi Annan. PTI

THE HIMALAYAN NEWS
5 NOV 2003



Nepal Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa in Kathmandu. (Reuters)

Nepal plans drive to crush rebels

Kathmandu, Nov. 4 (Reuters): Nepal's Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa vowed today to step up a drive to crush Maoist insurgents and hold early elections in the Himalayan country.

"The government is committed to control the violence and maintain law and order," Thapa said in his first meeting with the media since his appointment in June.

He said the army and police would launch unified action to flush rebels out of their hideouts and disarm them.

Thapa, a staunch royalist, said the government would hold elections for nearly 4,000 village assemblies after quelling the Maoist revolt, and would follow them up with national elections.

He set no dates.

THE TELEGRAPH

5 NOV 2003

Nepal Maoists' assets on US blacklist

Washington, Oct. 31 (Reuters): The US has added the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to its list of organisations whose assets in the US must be frozen because of their links with "terrorism," the federal register said today.

The Communist Party, which follows the teachings of Chinese leader Mao Zedong, took up arms against the Nepalese monarchy in 1996 and is fighting for a communist republic. More than 7,700 people have been killed in the war, which has hit the struggling economy and scared off tourists. The US has sided with the government and provided it military assistance.

The state department said the party killed two US embassy guards in 2002. The party says it has given its members instructions not to attack foreigners.

The notice in the federal register also proscribed two of the Nepalese party's aliases — the United Revolutionary People's Council and the People's Liberation Army of Nepal.

"The Communist Party of Nepal... has committed, or poses a significant risk of committing, acts of terrorism that threaten the security of US nationals or the national security, foreign policy, or economy of the US," said the notice, signed by deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage. The listing also bans financial dealings with the party.

The state department had already listed the Communist Party of Nepal in an annual report among "other terrorist groups" — a descriptive category that has no legal implications.

It was not immediately clear whether the party had any assets subject to US jurisdiction, but the state department lists Nepal as its only theatre of operations.

NOV 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

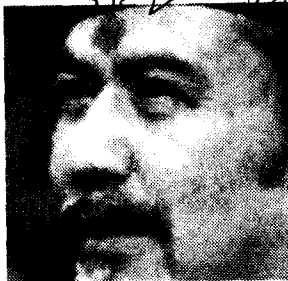
NOV 2003

Maoists turn ire on Americans

Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Oct. 22. — The Maoists today announced that they would target US-backed organisations in Nepal but cease attacks on government infrastructure.

In a statement sent to the media, the rebels said they were changing their strategy and would stop attacking Nepalese government buildings, telecommunications towers, national heritage and development works. But the elusive rebel leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda said the rebels would not allow organisations that are funded by "American imperialists" to operate in Nepal.



Maoist chief Prachanda

The rebels have been especially critical of Washington because it has provided the Nepalese government with millions of dollars in military and development aid.

The rebel leader also said they would stop killing individual Nepalese policemen and soldiers and instead give them a chance to leave the force. They would also cease extorting money

from people and instead impose a "tax" on businesses, Prachanda said.

Most US-funded projects have already withdrawn staff from the field, although there have not been any attacks reported on Americans in Nepal.

The Maoists' promise to reduce violence was short-lived as a grenade attack by the rebels injured five people, including two children, early today.

Police said a group of rebels tossed the grenade at a drinks stall where two soldiers were drinking tea. The soldiers escaped unhurt but the owner, his wife and 9-year-old son were injured, the officer said. Their neighbour and her 3-year-old daughter were also injured.

MAOIST THOUGHTS

W. S. M. S. A welcome climbdown in Nepal 5/8

HOWEVER belated, the Maoists' decision to spare civilians, village development committee buildings and utility infrastructure in Nepal should help to regain public sympathy. They were killing poor and innocent villagers in whose behalf they claim to be waging a war against the establishment. Since the abrupt end of talks on 27 August and the ceasefire in force since January having been called off, more than 220 people have reportedly been killed. The government retaliated by reimposing the "terrorist" tag, the removal of which had paved the way for talks. However, Maoist intentions must be judged by deeds — the public learnt of their new strategy when a VDC building near Kathmandu went up in flames and 13, including two policemen, were killed. A bitter chapter could well be on the cards if they insist on keeping their pledge to hit out at US-backed organisations.

What led to the breakdown of peace talks is not clear but Maoists allege "cold blooded" killings by the Royal Nepalese Army; the reference is to the "massacre" of 19 villagers on 17 August at Doramba in eastern Nepal. The army claims the dead were rebels, but investigations by human rights groups have revealed that the victims, which included six women and a boy, had their hands tied and were shot from close range. That this should have taken place when the truce was in force puts intent in a totally different perspective. But it is more or less clear now that military action is no remedy, that the only practicable alternative is to thrash out differences at the negotiating table. Which, of course, would call for mutual repentance. It takes two to tango.

57-3
27/10

Maoists kill eight

Mr Sr
Mpd

Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU, Oct. 26. — Five policemen and three civilians were killed today when 200 Maoist rebels attacked a police station in Nawalparasi district of Nepal, state-run radio said.

The rebels launched an attack on the police station at Sunaulbazaar village, near the Capital at 7 in the morning. Police retaliated, leading to an exchange of fire that lasted for about half-an-hour. The Maoists then set off a bomb before fleeing.

Two civilians were also shot dead by the rebels during the fighting. The Maoist violence is yet to scale down despite top Maoist leader Prachanda's announcement last week that they would not target civilians, infrastructure and low ranking police officials.

In a separate incident, Maoists killed

a worker of Nepal Communist Party-UML in Dhading district after abducting him.

CPN-UML acting general secretary Mr Amrit Kumar Bohara in a statement condemned the killing, saying the continued killing of individuals by the rebels despite their announcement not to target civilians and infrastructure has raised doubts about their sincerity.

The Nepal government has awarded a cash relief to families of victims who lost their lives while fighting the Maoists. Information and communication minister Mr Kamal Thapa and tourism and culture minister Mr Sarvendra Nath Sharma gave away Rs 50,000 in cash to families of two people, who lost their lives while retaliating the rebels in Dhankauli village of Kapilvastu district. And Rs 5,000 was given to each of the injured.

pic
map
10/10

35 Maoists killed in gunbattle with police

Kathmandu, Oct. 11 (Reuters): At least 38 people, including 35 Maoist rebels, were killed when the guerrillas attacked a police post in western Nepal, ending a Hindu festival truce, a police official said today.

He said the Maoists, fighting to replace the constitutional monarchy with a communist republic, bombed the Armed Police Force base at Kusum, 450 km west of Kathmandu, late yesterday, triggering a fierce exchange of fire. Three policemen were also killed in the gunbattle, he said.

The incident marked the end of a nine-day ceasefire announced by the rebels during the Hindu festival of Dussehra that concluded yesterday.

"We have recovered 35 bodies (of the Maoists) from the site and more bodies have been buried by them (the rebels) near a river," police official Shiva Raj Gauli said by phone after a visit to the site. Another official said the police have also recovered automatic weapons and ammunition.

"I was woken up by sounds of gunshots," said 18-year-old resident Khim Bahadur Sen, who runs a public telephone call kiosk near Kusum. "I was so frightened that I could not sleep the entire night," he said by telephone. "Unexploded bombs, improvised explosive devices, blood stains, empty alcohol bottles and rice littered the site of the overnight gunbattle that lasted for more than six hours," said a local photographer.

हि 87 - नरपु

Nepal Maoists seek UN role

Aloke Banerjee ^{हि-15}
Kolkata, October 13 14/10

WITH TALKS between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the palace breaking down a month ago, Nepal's Maoists have again started letting out signals that they favour of fresh talks.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan last month, CPN(M) Chairman Prachanda wrote: "We would again reiterate our commitment to find a forward-looking political solution through dialogue and peacefully." A copy of the letter is in the possession of the *Hindustan Times*.

Insisting that ceasefire should not be a precondition for talks and that his party had never closed the doors on negotiation, Prachanda said: "Negotiation can take place with various parties even in a state of war." He, however, insisted that Maoists were not ready to compromise on the "sovereignty of the country and the necessity of change".

37 killed as Maoist army attacks camp

Kathmandu, Oct. 13 (Reuters): At least 37 people were killed when about 1,000 Maoist rebels tried to storm a police training centre in western Nepal two days after ending a truce with the government, police said today.

The clash began late yesterday when the rebels fighting to topple the constitutional monarchy began firing from higher ground at the roadside camp in Bhaluwang, 400 km west of Kathmandu.

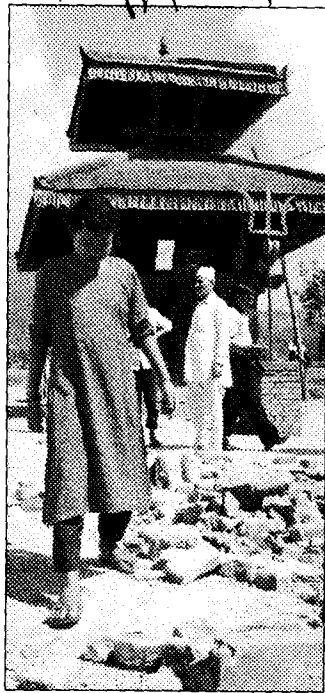
"The rebels had snapped telephone cables, set up roadblocks by felling trees or blowing up highway bridges to prevent reinforcements from coming," a witness, Krishna Adhikary, said.

The clash came after 37 Maoists and three policemen were killed in a fierce gunbattle in the west of the Himalayan kingdom late on Friday, ending a nine-day truce called by the rebels for Nepal's largest annual festival, Dasain.

A dozen policemen on patrol and 25 rebels have died in the latest recent gunbattle, a police official said.

"More rebels might have died in the search for bodies in neighbouring jungles is continuing," he said. There was no immediate comment from the rebels, who have tended to report smaller tallies than police figures in the past.

The Maoists, who steal money from banks and arms from security forces, have been fighting since 1996 to set up a communist republic in the im-



A Nepalese girl walks through debris caused by a bomb blast at Sankhu, 28 km northeast of Kathmandu. (AFP)

poverished nation.

They have stepped up attacks since walking out of peace talks in August after the government turned down a demand for a new constitution to decide the future of the monarchy. The revolt has claimed more than 7,600 lives, ravaged the economy, crippled tourism in the scenic mountainous nation and endangered stability.

Warning that the "senseless" acts of violence could damage

Nepal's fragile infrastructure. Germany has offered to mediate to resume the peace process in Nepal. "The violent internal conflict is having a negative effect on Nepal's image abroad and is depriving the country of the benefits of positive development," German ambassador to Nepal Rudiger Lemp said, adding Berlin is ready to mediate to resolve the problem.

Pointing out that the European Union and its member states had offered to assist in the peace process, he said both the conflicting parties would have to be willing to accept such a role.

However, there was no positive signal from either side and instead both sides warned against excessive outside interference being sounded from different quarters, he said.

"We have witnessed such senseless acts in the past and are compelled to assume that the insurgents, who profess to act in the interests of the people, are hell-bent on creating maximum damage to the fragile infrastructure of one of the poorest countries of the world," he said.

14 OCT 2003

CHANGES IN BHUTAN-II

Need To Solve Problem Of Terrorist Camps

By PARMANAND

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Nehru's historic visit to Bhutan in 1958, as revealed by former foreign secretary Jagat S Mehta, was more of a coincidence rather the outcome of any serious thinking and planning. Nehru was slated to visit Lhasa at that point of time, but the Chinese authorities concocted reasons for that visit's cancellation at the last moment. The slot was used to visit Bhutan, in which the Indian delegation had to cross through the territory of Tibet — last such occasion. Mehta, who had accompanied Nehru on this visit as a deputy secretary in the ministry of external affairs, rightly feels that the "greatest single legacy that we have of Nehru's foreign policy is the good relations with Bhutan".

Symbiotic relation

Indo-Bhutanese economic relations have been evolving over the last four decades from a donor-recipient relationship into one that is increasingly symbiotic. The basic framework of trade relations between the two countries is covered by Article V of the 1949 Treaty, which provides for "free trade and commerce" between the two. According to this provision, the government of India has also agreed to "grant the government of Bhutan every facility for the carriage, by land and water, of its produce throughout the territory of the government of India, including the right to use such forest roads as may be specified by mutual agreements from time to time".

Significantly, periodical bilateral agreements have strengthened trade relations between Bhutan and India. Four trade agreements signed in 1972, 1983, 1990 and 1995 have been concluded between the two countries. The 1995 agreement, with a validity up to March 2005, provides, inter alia, for free third country trade for Bhutan, and transactions in Rupees and Ngultrums.

Relevantly, the volume of trade between Bhutan and India has steadily increased over the yrs. India continues to remain Bhutan's largest trading partner,

accounting for more than 90 per cent of Bhutan's exports and more than 60 per cent of imports. On 18 September, the day the King left for Bhutan, New Delhi announced an enhanced package of Rs 1,614 crores for the kingdom's ninth five-year plan.

Bhutan would now be seeking India's cooperation in drafting

Sonam Tobgye.

The first draft of the codified constitution was discussed in depth by the members of the commission, which comprises several members of the elected Tshogdu (National Assembly). After it was scanned by the council of ministers and the King, the second draft was made ready.



its first-ever codified constitution. Bhutan is the only country in the South Asian region to enjoy the distinction of being without a written constitution. On the global plane, though, it finds itself in the company of the United Kingdom, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Oman, New Zealand and some new micro-states.

Codified constitution

However, thanks to the initiative of the King, Bhutan has moved in the direction of joining the mainstream trend. The King insists that Bhutan's codified constitution would be based on the basic principles of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. Indeed, Bhutan has moved fast in this direction. The most concrete step taken by the king in this direction was the formation of a draft commission under the chairmanship of the High Court chief justice, Lyonpo

ling with this, the problem has continued to India's chargin and embarrassment.

The illegally constructed camps by Indian militant and secessionist groups, the Ulfa, Bodos and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation in Bhutan has obviously introduced elements of worry in bilateral ties. Several rounds of talks between the Royal government of Bhutan and these militant organisations' leadership on their quitting Bhutan have not resulted in anything concrete.

Care and caution

Albeit sotto voce, many in Bhutan say that this is India's internal problem and the Indian authorities should have solved it internally. On the other hand, the Bhutanese are, by and large, scared of the consequences the forceful eviction would have on their safety and security since they travel frequently to Assam and West Bengal.

Some components of Indian public opinion also suggest - even if less vocally - that Bhutan should not have allowed them to establish camps in the first instance. Some also feel that they were encouraged to settle there to counter the politicised ethnic Nepalese or the Lhotshampas, as they are officially called in the kingdom. Be that as it may, both governments probably feel that the time for some physical-military action has arrived. On his part, King Jigme said that he would invite the leadership of these groups for talks. The Tshogdu has authorised the kingdom's government to hold one last round of talks before taking any military action.

In any case, the meeting between the King and Advani has helped in understanding each other's position much better. Some military action seems inevitable. After its experiences in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the Indian authorities have also to act with care and caution. One hopes that this problem is solved in a manner that only makes Bhutan and India better, stable and more useful friends.

(Concluded)

Many Maoist rebels die Nepal fighting

By Suman Pradhan
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kathmandu: Dozens of Maoist rebels are feared killed in the heaviest fighting since the collapse of the ceasefire and peace process last month.

The Royal Nepal Army sources said that "hundreds" of rebels were killed in intense fighting in Bhawang, a village in the western district of Rolpa, a Maoist stronghold. "We are still recovering dead bodies and the toll could go higher," an army colonel

said on Wednesday. He said that four soldiers were also killed in the fighting. However, unconfirmed reports say that 25 soldiers were also killed in the fighting.

Minister for information and communication Kamal Thapa said, "More than 30 bodies have already been recovered from the clash site. Security services indicate that the toll on the Maoist side could be much higher."

The fighting began late Tuesday and is continuing at

The fighting is the most intense since the collapse of the ceasefire in late August. The rebels, who are demanding a republican state in this Himalayan monarchy, have stepped up their violent "people's war" since then, targeting top politicians and army officers as well as planting bombs indiscriminately in the capital Kathmandu. The fighting also comes just one day ahead of a three-day back-to-back general strike called by the Maoists.

this hour, army officials said. They said that the fighting began when soldiers stumbled upon a Maoist training camp in the Rolpa jungles. Throughout Wednesday, military helicopters could be seen flying west from Kathmandu in an attempt to reinforce troops.

The government has stepped up security throughout the kingdom in a bid to foil violence during the strike. Curfew has been clamped down in several large towns and cities, including Kathmandu.

Meanwhile, a human rights group said that at least 227 people have lost their lives after the government and the Maoist side pulled out of the truce in late August. The total death toll in the seven-year insurgency is now well above 8,000. The figures were put out by Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), a well-known rights group in Nepal.

Three scenarios loom on king

BHARAT BHUSHAN

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Kathmandu, Sept. 12: Of the three political forces in Nepal — the monarchy, the Maoists and the political parties — at least two have to come together for any long-term understanding with the third. This alone can prevent Nepal from becoming a failed state.

King Gyanendra's attempt to compromise with the Maoists has failed. He has also distanced himself from his natural allies — the political parties — because he wants to play a politically active role. The political parties are in the streets united against the unconstitutional acts of the king. And the Maoists are not allowing the political parties to function in areas under their sway.

Under these circumstances, broadly three scenarios can unfold in Nepal: the king becomes more autocratic and cracks down on the Maoists and the political parties; the king compromises with the political parties and together they deal with the Maoists; or the political parties and the Maoists get together and take on the monarchy.

Former foreign minister and Nepali Congress leader Chakra Prasad Bastola rejected the scenario of the king cracking down to assume a more autocratic role. "By trampling on human rights and democracy, the king cannot buck the international trend. The roots of democracy are strong in Nepal. The Nepalese people have waged far too long a struggle for democracy for the king to decide suddenly to crack down and hope that there will be no reaction," Bastola said.

K.P. Oli of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist — UML) felt that the monarchy had already been much damaged under King Gyanendra and that he

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could ill-afford to alienate the people further by opting for autocratic rule.

"In the past 11 months since he assumed an active role, the king and the monarchy are being criticised openly, sharply and widely. The king has to decide whether he wants longevity and popularity of the monarchy or be an autocratic monarch for a short period. This is the twenty-first century and peoples' consciousness is high. I don't think that an autocratic system can be imposed and if imposed, expected to last," he said.

The political parties cannot compromise with the Maoists easily because their *raison d'être* is mass political activity and the Maoists are curtailing that. There are also differences between them over Republican-

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ism. The political parties want to limit the king to a constitutional role; the Maoists wish to decide the fate of the monarchy itself through a Constituent Assembly.

Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the UML, said that a working relationship was possible with the Maoists if they agreed on two basic principles: "One, they must have a theoretical and practical commitment to multi-party democracy. This would mean accepting co-existence with other political parties, tolerating differences and debates and respecting the right of the political parties to educate and mobilise the people. And second, they should give up violence and adopt peaceful means — that is, they should join the democratic mainstream."

Under such circumstances, Nepal said: "We can then put pressure to isolate the government. The international community and our own civil society organisations will support us. But first, the Maoists have to decide on what their attitude to democracy is — are they still for one-party rule or not? Will they allow political activity in the areas under their control?" Since there are no clear answers to these questions from the Maoists, as of now at least no compromise seems possible with the Maoists.

Even a compromise between the king and the political parties is not easy. "King Gyanendra has convinced himself that he knows the answers to the political problems of this country. I think he is making a mistake in keeping a distance from the political parties," said Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of *Himal*.

However, the political parties think that a compromise with the king is desirable. Ramsharan Mahat, former finance minister and a Nepali Congress leader, felt: "If there is a compromise between the king and the political parties, that would at least put us back to October 4, 2002. The constitutional crisis would be over and all constitutional forces would be under one umbrella. Together we can then deal with the Maoists."

But if the king does not open up the political space to include the parliamentary political parties, the crisis may worsen. "A gloomy scenario will unfold. The political parties will be pushed to the extreme. How our neighbours and other international actors would view such a scenario is a matter of speculation. But it can only mean great chaos," said Hari Sharma, a political analyst and principal secretary to former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

Talks failure stick on army

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Kathmandu, Sept. 11: After the revocation of the ceasefire by the Maoists, the public criticism of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) is no longer as muted as it used to be. Many hold it directly responsible for the breakdown of the peace talks. Others believe that having acquired weapons from India, Belgium and the US, the army does not want peace talks and would like to give the Maoists a bloody nose.

Even before the Maoists called off the ceasefire last month, according to Subodh Pyakurel, a human rights activist, "a strong lobby within the army was pressing the government that they should be given full support to deal with the Maoists".

A former foreign minister of Nepal, Chakra Prasad Bastola, said that after the killing of an army colonel in Kathmandu recently, the army is certainly putting pressure on the government to take a tougher line on the Maoists. However, he claimed that there was a difference in outlook towards dealing with the Maoists between the officers and the ranks.

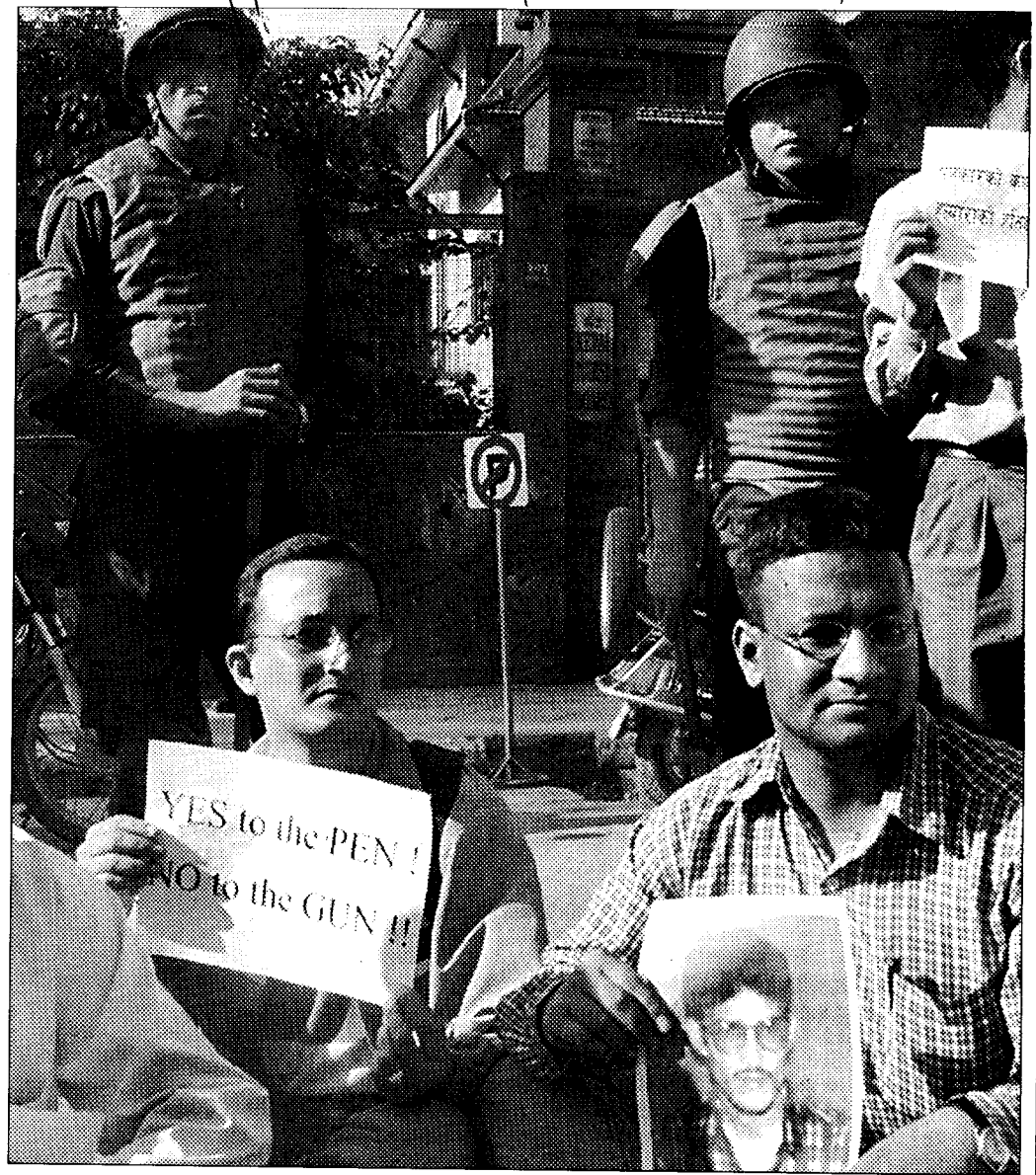
"The upper echelons of the RNA consist of the traditional nobility — the Ranas, the Shahs, the Pandeys, the Basnets and the Thapas. The real fighting forces comprise the have-nots and they want peace," Bastola claimed.

K.P. Oli, a senior leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) also does not see the RNA as a monolith. "The opinion at the higher and the lower levels is different. I suspect that a small section of the military leadership was in favour of breaking the ceasefire and pushing the country towards conflict. The lower levels of the army were and are strongly in favour of the ceasefire," he said.

According to Oli, there could be two reasons for the confrontational attitude of some of the RNA officers. "They would like to push politics in Nepal further to the Right by moving towards a more autocratic regime. And they would like to create opportunities for financial benefit for the suppliers of weapons as well as logistics equipment to the army." Like in every third world country, there are allegations of kickbacks in such deals.

Both in terms of its history and social composition, the RNA does not have a democratic ethos. It was a militia converted into an army over time. Ever since the days of Prithvinarayan Shah, the founder of the Shah dynasty, the army in Nepal saw itself as a nation builder but loyal only to one institution — the monarchy.

"The Nepalese army does not have a military mind. It is headed by an arm-chair feudal milita-



Nepalese journalists defy the government's ban on demonstrations in Kathmandu on Thursday while staging a sit-in to protest the murder of a colleague by Maoists. (AFP)

ry class. It is its class composition which prevents it from functioning as a professional army. The last decade or so has seen a sharp rise in free public education. The army leadership has not been able to gauge its impact on its rank and file," said Hari Sharma, a political analyst, explaining the dichotomy between the views of the officers and the ranks.

There are those in the establishment, however, who dismiss the idea of any division within the RNA. "I would not entertain this notion at all. I think there is both unity of thought and action within the army. But there is a school of thought that a much tougher policy should be followed against the Maoists — an eye for an eye if not two," a government official said.

Some Nepalese shudder at the thought of giving a free hand to the army. "The RNA has not learnt to fight without collateral damage. That is why it must not be allowed to fight," said a Nepalese political observer who did not want to be identified.

However, he pointed to a more disturbing trend. "There is a group within the RNA which

wants to go beyond the king by seeking a role in the national polity. This faction wants a proactive army. Were this to happen, it would lead to a militarisation that Nepal has never seen before. They don't want to mount a coup — the army here has always been in the background and then there is always the fear of India — but it has not had a finger in

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national affairs. Now the army wants that. And I blame the Maoists for this," he said.

The RNA, he said, does not trust the Maoists at the negotiating table. What riled it the most, in his opinion, was the informal agreement at the second round of peace talks with the Maoists boxing it in a five-km limit of its camps. Ultimately the government had to disown the agreement as it was not minuted and had only been an oral commitment. The army, he said, also does not trust the political parties.

Damannath Dhungana, a fa-

cilitator in the peace talks, went a step further. He claimed: "Earlier, the army was under the king. Now, there is every indication that the king is under the army. I can assure you that the king had, in fact, agreed to the five-km limit for the army. The army opposed it and the government backtracked. The army was for a military solution. That is why they deliberately killed 17 unarmed Maoists a day before the peace talks."

What is clear, however, is that the Nepalese intelligentsia, the political parties and the Maoists are grappling with defining a clear and accountable role for the army. In fact, the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala resigned in 2001 when the army despite being deployed in Rolpa deliberately refused to engage the Maoists who had taken 69 policemen hostage.

The accountability of the RNA has been at the centre of the peace talks with the Maoists demanding that it be brought under full control of the executive instead of the monarchy. This is also the demand of the democratic political parties.

Bungling king clues in to revolt roar

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Kathmandu, Sept. 9: After dismissing the democratically elected government of Sher Bahadur Deuba on October 4, 2002, on the ground of incompetence, King Gyanendra himself has not measured up to the task of ruling Nepal. He has neither managed to provide good governance nor brokered peace with the seven-year-old Maoist insurgency. The two governments appointed by King Gyanendra and headed by monarchist front-men of the panchayat era of controlled democracy have proved to be weak and incompetent. The government of Lokendra Bahadur Chandra had to resign under pressure from the king on May 30, 2003, after eight months in power.

The Chand government tried to negotiate with the Maoists but it was clear that no deal could be struck between the two sides that was not underwritten by the mainstream political parties. The Chand government had to be dismissed when it agreed to the Maoist demand of limiting the movement of the Royal Nepal Army to a 5 km radius of their camps.

The king then indicated that

he was ready to form an all-party government. However, desirous of continuing his control over the government, he once again chose a palace loyalist acceptable to India, Surya Bahadur Thapa, as the new Prime Minister. Like Chand, Thapa also came from the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, a party fronting for the monarchy. He had served as Prime Minister three times during the panchayat era (1963-64; 1965-69; 1979-83) and once after democracy was reinstated in Nepal (1997-98).

He, too, has been unable either to get the support of the political parties or move the peace process with the Maoists forward. There is every indication that the days of the Thapa government are also numbered.

Although the Nepalese political parties are normally fractious, five of them — including the two largest parties in the dissolved Parliament, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) or UML and the Nepali Congress — have come together. For the past six months, they have led a countrywide movement to protest the trampling of democracy by King Gyanendra. This was also the only way they

could keep their party structures at local levels intact in view of the double onslaught from the Maoists and the palace.

On September 4, they had planned to lay siege to King Gyanendra's palace in Kathmandu in a bid to pressure him to restore democracy. The king himself was away in London for a medical check-up.

Barely three days before the mass agitation was to take place, the ambassadors of the US, UK and India sought to defuse the crisis. They went to meet the president of the Nepali Congress, Girija Prasad Koirala. It is septuagenarian Koirala who has virtually galvanised the Nepali countryside through hundreds of mass meetings against the undemocratic rule of King Gyanendra. In the process, he has also managed to rehabilitate himself and his party, the Nepali Congress, discredited for its misrule for the better part of the last 12 years of democracy.

The message of the foreign envoys, according to Nepali Congress sources, was the same: If Koirala and the five-party coalition brought thousands of people to Kathmandu, they would consider it an irresponsible po-

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King Gyanendra

litical act on their part. The diplomats told Koirala that there was every danger of the Maoists taking over the movement and that if the agitating political parties could not convince the security agencies and Prime Minister Thapa that the movement would be entirely non-violent, they should call it off.

Koirala was advised that the

alliance should make a conciliatory gesture towards the king so that the political space could be opened up.

The American and British ambassadors assured him that they in turn would impress upon the king the necessity of reviving parliament for a short while so that an all-party government could be formed. This government could then restart the peace process with the Maoists.

The Indian ambassador met Koirala separately on September 1, a day after he had met the US and British envoys. The Indian message was also the same except that New Delhi, according to sources, did not want the movement for reinstating democracy to be called off completely. India instead wanted the parties to engaged peace and remained within their control. This was in keeping with the Indian position of supporting constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy in Nepal.

As a consequence, the five-party alliance decided on September 2 to change the agitation from being Kathmandu-centred to a decentralised one with party activists courting arrests in the

districts. A programme of court-martialing arrest daily in the capital was also chalked out.

Through international intervention then, a confrontation between the people and the king was averted.

Although the agitation launched by the political parties is continuing all over Nepal, there is a sense of euphoria in the political circles in Kathmandu. The expectation is that on his return from London on September 10, King Gyanendra may initiate the formation of an all-party government.

The immediate reason for the euphoria is the return from London of Prabhakar Shamsher Rana, King Gyanendra's former business partner.

Rumours are rife that the king has indicated to Rana that he wants to reconcile his differences with the political parties. This is what necessity would dictate. But it remains to be seen whether an ambitious but bungling king can get himself to follow the logical path. This would not only be a step towards peace but would also help ensure the longevity of the Shah dynasty that has ruled the Himalayan kingdom for 260 years.

Boy killed as blasts rock Kathmandu

9/9
Kathmandu, Sept. 8 (Reuters): Six bomb blasts hit Kathmandu today, killing a 12-year-old boy and wounding about a dozen people in the worst attacks in the Nepali capital since a truce between the government and the Maoist rebels collapsed.

No one claimed responsibility but an interior ministry official blamed Maoist rebels, fighting to overthrow the constitutional monarchy and establish one-party communist rule, for the explosions at government installations. "Obviously it was the work of Maoists," he said.

The bombs exploded almost simultaneously as people headed to work or school. "I was in my morning prayers when a big bang shook the house. It was terrible," 43-year-old resident Ajay Bhatta said about the attack in which the boy was killed.

The rebels called off a seven-month truce late last month after the government rejected their demand for an assembly that would draft a constitution to set up a new political structure.

About 7,300 people have been killed in the revolt since it began in 1996. Interior ministry spokesperson Gopendra Bahadur Pandey said security had been tightened. Soldiers cordoned off areas near the attacks and patrolled the streets.

The blasts came a day after at least nine guerrillas and four security personnel were killed in separate gun battles across the troubled Himalayan kingdom.

The rebels were also accused of killing a journalist from the state-run Rashtriya Samachar



An army security expert checks fragments after the blast in Kathmandu on Monday. (AFP)

Samiti news agency at Sindhu-palchowk, near Kathmandu.

The violence came as the country's main political parties pressed on with a campaign to force King Gyanendra to fire the Prime Minister and appoint a new government. Police said 400 people were detained when the parties again defied a ban on protests and demonstrated in Kathmandu. A police official said they would soon be released.

The ban on protests was imposed to maintain law and order after the rebels ended their truce.

Political parties have been

campaigning since October, when the king fired Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba after a dispute over the timing of a general election and named royalist Lokendra Bahadur Chand in his place. Chand resigned in May after protests but Gyanendra picked another royalist, Surya Bahadur Thapa, over a candidate proposed by the parties.

The parties are demanding that the monarch, who ascended the throne after a 2001 palace massacre, reinstate the parliament dissolved last year or appoint their nominee as Prime Minister.

Nepal Opposition rally peaceful on day one



Without anti-monarchy slogans as they are arrested in Kathmandu on Thursday. — AFP

KATHMANDU, Sept. 4. — Kathmandu sighed in relief as day one of the seven day agitation called by Nepal's Opposition parties ended peacefully today.

The rally, led by nearly 500 protesters folded up in half an hour as sloganeering party members courted arrest peacefully.

Fearing violence, the government has banned meetings and processions in Kathmandu till 23 September. Kathmandu-bound vehicles were checked to prevent possible cadre-gathering in the city. Yesterday's arrest of 150 student leaders also helped keep the protest low key. The agitation will

continue till 10 September.

The government also owed its reprieve to ambassadors of USA, UK and India who met former Prime Minister Mr Girija Prasad Koirala and former deputy Prime Minister Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal and asked them to show restraint. The two leaders, who had turned down the Prime Minister's appeal to defer the movement were persuaded by the diplomats to ensure the agitation was peaceful.

The decision is reported to have caused a rift between the big two and the three smaller coalition partners who were urging for a "decisive" movement. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

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Nepali rebels to pursue twin-track approach

By Jal Taraporevala
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The head of the Maoist rebels in Nepal, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), has reaffirmed his intention to pursue the twin-track approach of intensifying the armed struggle and leaving the door open for negotiations with the government. By reviving the guerrilla campaign, the Maoists are essentially seeking to step up the pressure on the leadership in Kathmandu to make concessions on such rebel demands as the setting up of a broad-based interim government and the convening of a constituent assembly to draft a new basic law for Nepal.

The move should also be interpreted in terms of an attempt on the part of the Maoists to take political advantage of the narrow power base of the present government and the failure of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa to enlist the support of the mainline parties, including, the Nepali Congress and the United Marxist-Leninist. Besides, the rebels would seem to calculate that, despite the military assis-

tance which Kathmandu has recently received from London and Washington, the government is not in a position to launch a sustained offensive against the Maoists.

At the same time, by holding out the possibility of future substantive talks with the government, the rebels appear to be tacitly acknowledging that, by itself, the military option will not ensure victory. In addition, this approach of not ruling out the role which the peace process could play in the coming months is an implicit recognition by the Maoists of the feeling of war weariness in parts of the country that has been fuelled by seven years of civil strife and the growing problems on the economic front.

However, for the time being at least, the prospects for successfully reactivating the search for peace appear slim in view of the entrenched positions held by both sides and the contentious nature of the issues that remain unresolved. These include the future of the monarchy, land reforms, the powers of the security forces and the creation of institutional mechanisms to make certain human rights more legally enforceable.

Nepal bans public meetings after surge in violence

Kathmandu: Nepal on Monday decided to ban public meetings in Kathmandu and diplomats pressured major parties to give up months of protests, following a surge in Maoist violence in which 30 people were reported killed. *U.S. - Nep*

Officials said five weekend clashes were the result of Maoist ambushes on security patrols, which the army has stepped up in rural areas since the guerrillas on Wednesday abandoned a seven-month truce and peace talks. In the Sarlahi district, about 300 km east of Kathmandu, five Maoists and two troops died in a day-long gunbattle, a local police officer said. In a similar clash at the same time in Melarani village in the south-western Surkhet district, seven Maoists and three soldiers were killed, an army official in Kathmandu said, adding that eight more rebels and four more troops or police died in three other gunfights on Saturday and Sunday.

In a separate incident in the capital, a street-sweeper employed by the Birendra Military Hospital was shot dead by two suspected Maoists on Sunday at a video store he also ran, home ministry spokesman Gopendra Bahadur Pandey said.

Troops have been put on alert amid fears of trouble ahead of a September 18-20 nationwide strike the Maoists have called to push for the abolition of the monarchy, the key demand of their seven-year "people's war" that has left more than 7,800 people dead. But the government will ban with immediate effect all public meetings of five or more people in the Kathmandu Valley "to maintain law and order," a cabinet minister said. The ban will also make illegal a new round of protests planned from Thursday by Nepal's five major political parties, which have been pressing for new elections since King Gyanendra dismissed the elected government in October 2002. Agencies

THE withdrawal of Nepal's Maoists from the dialogue of several months with the Royal Nepal Government has come as a disappointment, but not wholly a surprise. The talks were faltering and had lost momentum. With the shutdown, the Maoists have restarted their lethal attacks and the government has proscribed them once more as terrorists, thus revoking the ban that was resuming prior to the talks. It seems as if matters are back where they began. The peace hopes and the respite from violence that dialogue offered are suspended, and what comes next is not predictable. There has been quick international condemnation of the Maoists

and calls have come from several quarters asking for resumption of the talks. A stronger message comes from peace marchers in Kathmandu who have openly manifested the anxiety of ordinary citizens at the prospect of yet more violence.

Certainly, turning away from the talks, as the Maoists have done, is to be condemned. It has led to a hardening of positions, to the point where peace seems remote from anyone's thoughts, and attempts to sort out differences through armed conflict seem, once more, to be the order of the day. Yet, such setbacks are not unusual in negotiations between mortal foes.

Nepal back to square one

misunderstandings that are never far from the scene. At present, Nepal is receiving considerable external support in its campaign against the Maoists: not so long ago this could have been a source of anxiety to New Delhi, but not today, in the current circumstances. Apart from modifying its long-held position on this matter, India also has to adopt a more active role of its own that requires strengthened anti-insurgent activity on the Indian side of the border and firm support and backing for the pressured Nepalese authorities.

Anti-terrorist measures cannot be the sole focus of Indian policy. Lack of adequate economic development is an important contributory factor to Nepal's problems and India can do a good deal to help bring about improvements. It is the country's most significant trading partner and provides access for landlocked Nepal to the outside world. Nepal has a

In the Middle East, for instance, despite the agreed "road map" and strong US pressure, the "peace process" is no more than a phrase and an impossibly distant aspiration. The basic assumption that peace is ineluctable and attainable only through dialogue, does not seem to be shared by Israel and Palestine and each pursues its own way when it feels it must. In Nepal, talks became possible only when it appeared to both sides that there was no other way. But as the Middle East has shown, this can be a fragile assumption. Elsewhere, too, practically every such dialogue, whether it leads ultimately to success or not, has been

through a series of stops and starts. For insurgent groups in particular, whose authority is acquired through military prowess, prolonged talks without tangible results can look like a way of eroding their strength. Yet, however discouraging the present circumstances may appear, experience elsewhere can permit one to hope that the current setback in Nepal will not prove lasting.

The breakdown of the talks has once more drawn attention to the problems underlying Nepal's insurgency. It is a time of change in that country, when its social and political order is being remade and

shocks and the erosion of state authority could encourage armed groups to take matters into their own hands. In this difficult situation, as Nepal grapples with change and its internal complexities, the current tendency seems to be for power to gravitate once more towards a revived monarchy.

International developments have also had their impact on Nepal's affairs. The worldwide alert against terrorism after 9/11 drew increased sympathy and material support for the government in its struggle against the Maoists. In this, India's role is especially important because of the

open border between the two countries. A stronger international focus on the situation may have had some influence in bringing about the dialogue in Nepal that went through four rounds before being suspended, the differences between the two sides having proved impossible to reconcile. Perhaps international expectation will once more help to bring the parties back to the negotiating table by pressing home the point that there is no other way to deal with their differences.

India cannot avoid being closely involved in Nepal though this can be a delicate matter. Any heavy-handedness can easily raise the ghosts of past



UNITED WE STAND: Members of the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist communities assemble for a peace rally in Kathmandu, urging the Maoists not to disrupt the peace process. — AFP

Wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

its traditional ways are being slowly transformed by the experience of democracy. The process of democratic politics has added to the complexity of the transformation, as there are sharp divisions between political parties which have found it difficult to unite in enduring coalitions. Three elections in fairly quick succession have produced a number of short-lived governments of limited effectiveness. The institutions of the state have been hard-pressed to absorb recurrent

(The author is former Foreign Secretary, government of India.)

Maoists end truce over constitution claim

DEEPAK THAPA

Kathmandu, Aug. 27: The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) today decided to end the eight-month-old ceasefire due to the government's reluctance to accept their main demand to frame a new constitution.

The Maoist chairman, Prachanda, said the rebels were ready to sit down for talks again provided there is the possibility that the "sovereignty of the people" is established through a constituent assembly.

The government responded by contradicting the Maoist interpretation of the present situa-

tion and said: "The government is always ready to discuss all alternatives to find a peaceful resolution to the problem." It also urged the Maoist leaders to reconsider the decision to end the truce out of deference for the people of Nepal's desire for peace and to return to negotiations. The government also warned that it is "alert and ready to protect the people, the multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy".

Prachanda's statement comes exactly a week after the third round of peace talks between the government and the Maoists stalled over the rebels'

demand to frame a new constitution. While the Maoists insisted that election to a constituent assembly is the only way to express the people's sovereignty, the government said the reforms demanded by the Maoists was possible by amending the present constitution.

The Maoists also objected to the government proposal that they disarm while the talks were on.

Both sides have accused each other of violating the code of conduct agreed in February. Encounters between the Maoists and the armed forces had accelerated in recent weeks.

At least 15 people have been killed in clashes in the last 24 hours, including three policemen.

The most serious incident took place on August 17 when the army gunned down 17 members of a Maoist party in eastern Nepal.

Human rights groups have described such incidents as "extra-judicial killings" and have been referred to in Prachanda's statement as well.

Both the government and the Maoists seem intent on putting the blame for the breakdown of the truce on each other rather than saying it had lapsed out-

right. If the number of violent incidents increase, the end of the truce is expected to be a de facto reality.

This is the second ceasefire that has broken down since the Maoist "people's war" began in February 1996, a conflict that has cost over 7000 lives so far.

The first was in 2001 when it lasted for four months and ended with the rebels attacking the military barracks for the first time.

The attack had dragged the army into a war that had, till then, only involved the police.

The present ceasefire was brokered by the previous government led by Lokendra Ba-

hadur Chand. They had agreed to three key rebel demands that the government withdraw the rewards announced on top Maoist leaders and remove the "terrorist" tag and the Interpol Red Corner Notice. However, after the 2001 truce failed the notice was back in place against the Maoists.

In a press conference, the Maoists regretted the assassination attempt on former Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba. The western regional commander, Diwakar, said they did not know Deuba was in the convoy that was attacked in a Maoist stronghold of western Nepal.

Aug 28, Nepal

NOT PEACEABLE

Nepal's Maoists have once again proved bad peacemakers. Their insincerity had been exposed even on two previous occasions when they walked out of the peace talks. Their insistence in the latest round of talks on a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution now looks suspiciously like a ploy to sabotage the peace initiative. More so because the rebels, belonging to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), also wanted this assembly to decide if Nepal wanted to continue with its constitutional monarchy. It was inconceivable that a government, appointed by King Gyanendra, would accept the demand and thereby put a question mark on the future of the monarchy. The Maoists' recalcitrance confirms the suspicion that they sought to use the peace process, not to end their seven-year-old rebellion, but to replace the Himalayan kingdom with a communist republic. The prime minister, Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa, sent out a positive signal by agreeing to hold the talks this time, not in Kathmandu, but in a remote rebel stronghold. The government's negotiators were also realistic enough to concede that the present constitution needed some reforms. But they had no political or moral authority to agree to the rebels' demand for the scrapping of the constitution, which ended absolute monarchy and ushered in parliamentary democracy in Nepal in the wake of a popular uprising in 1990.

Ironically, the failure of the talks may now lead to some developments that the Maoists were anxious to avoid. Although both sides want to maintain the ceasefire, the absence of a formal peace process may eventually see a resumption of hostilities. The assassination attempt on former prime minister, Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba, in a rebel-controlled area within days of the peace talks foundering is an ominous signal. Moreover, some Western powers may now feel more anxious than before to mediate and resurrect the peace process. It was significant that the diplomatic missions of the United States of America and the European Union in Kathmandu officially expressed their views on the issue, for the first time, even while the peace talks were on. External interventions would complicate the problem for all sides and also cause unnecessary strains in Nepal's relations with India. New Delhi has a stake in seeing an end to the rebellion, not only because peace in Nepal is crucial to the security of the region, but also because of the Nepalese rebels' links with Maoist groups in India. Nepal has been facing a dangerous political void ever since the king dissolved the elected parliament nearly two years ago. The government must foil the Maoist game to exploit the vacuum.

THAPA ON TEST-I

Maoists Hold The Key To Peace

By PARMANAND

57.6
22/8

Seventy-five-year-old Surya Bahadur Thapa took over as the 13th Prime Minister of Nepal in the post-1990 multi-party democracy phase on 5 June. But he could form a seven-member ministry only on 12 June. This shows the problem of government formation in the landlocked Himalayan kingdom where becoming a minister presently is not considered something very prestigious. In the event, Thapa could only rope in politicians of his own Rashtriya Prajatantra Party as ministers, and an all-party ministry remains only a dream.

Faction fights

Those who know Surya Bahadur Thapa might never have imagined that he would face such a plight. He was the kingdom's Prime Minister during the partyless panchayat era between 1966 and 69 and again between 1979 and 83. He also became Nepal's premier in the multi-party democracy phase during 1997-98. In other words, Thapa has become Prime Minister for the fourth time — an achievement in itself.

He is credited with getting leaders like the first-ever democratically-elected Prime Minister, BP Koirala, his second-in-command, Ganesh Man Singh, and would-be Prime Minister GP Koirala released after an eight-year-long imprisonment without trial in 1968. He also showed his political prowess by leading the panchayat system to victory in the May 1980 referendum.

This time, though, Thapa has got involved in intra-RPP factional politics. RPP chairman Pashupati Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana has shown his strong displeasure over the style of cabinet formation by Thapa. Thapa is said to have ignored Rana's nominee, asserting that ministry-formation is a prime ministerial prerogative. It is altogether a different matter that he is trying his best to patch up with Rana — underscoring his highly accommodative political nature and skill.

The author is Hon. Director, South Asian Studies Foundation, New Delhi.

Notwithstanding the formation of an all-party government — which even Thapa's predecessor Lokendra Bahadur Chand could not accomplish, even though at that point King Gyanendra could rope in elements from various social strata — Surya Bahadur Thapa has to prove the competence of his

activities, including their war with the Nepalese state, have left more than 8,000 Nepalese, including the personnel of the Royal Nepali Army and the police, dead.

There has been tense atmosphere since 29 January when the Maoists announced unilateral ceasefire. In fact, their coming



government.

The Thapa government, indeed, has no qualms about talking to leaders of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoists). Working rather quickly and on a priority basis, the government announced the names of finance minister Prakash Chandra Lohani and information and communications minister Kamal Thapa as the government's representatives at the forthcoming talks.

Down but not out

Thapa also acted quickly on 18 June in establishing a peace talks coordination secretariat under the office of the Prime Minister to assist and coordinate with the government negotiating team in holding talks with the Maoists. A press release of the prime minister's office on 18 June said that the secretariat was set up at the Singh Durbar — the central secretariat of His Majesty's government. The Maoists' violent

overground has created another kind of panic. The Maoist cadres have been indulging in kidnappings and extortions even if at a relatively low level. The Informal Service Sector Worker, a human rights organisation, in its latest report has stated that 15 people have been killed in the past four months after the truce became effective.

The Maoists and the Nepal government have held two rounds of peace talks in the post-Deuba and Pratinidhi Sabha dissolution phase on 27 April and 9 May. They did not seem to be satisfied with the outcome of the talks during the prime ministership of Lokendra Bahadur Chand, whose credibility and legitimacy they had questioned. They had held talks when the executive powers were vested in the king. In truth, the Maoists had insisted on talking directly to the king — which did not become possible.

Obviously, the internal and external political circumstances have weakened the Maoists to the extent that they are no longer capable of dictating terms to the government. Nor do they seem to be in a position to wage another war — like the one they had done in November 2001 — against the Nepalese state. But it cannot be said, as of now, that they have been thoroughly weakened or demoralised; they may be down, but they are certainly not out, as of today.

Common agenda

Now that the Thapa ministry has been given back the state's executive powers by the king, the Prime Minister is not as comfortably placed as his predecessor. On their part, though, the Maoists are now trying to strengthen themselves politically. Speaking in Kathmandu on 12 June, Baburam Bhattarai, chief ideologue and coordinator of the Maoist negotiating team said: "The King's unilateral act of appointing Surya Bahadur Thapa as the Prime Minister has brought the parliamentary parties and the Maoists closer".

Bhattarai added: "So it is the best opportunity for all of us to form a common agenda of progressive outlook and continue people's joint movement". He demanded that the king's "state power" must be seized and the Royal Nepal Army should be brought under parliament's control, which according to him, could be a common agenda of the movement.

Kamal Thapa, minister for information and communications and the chief spokesman of the Thapa government, said on 12 June that the new government was formed with a mission to establish permanent peace in the kingdom and hold general elections soon. While the Deuba government had held three rounds of peace talks with the Maoists spanning over five days between August and November 2001, the Chand government held two rounds of talks. The Thapa government has not been able to hold any peace talks, generating a great deal of cynicism and pessimism.

(To be concluded)

War and peace

हिंसा नेपाल Nepal negotiations botched 5-6

The Nepal monarchy may be in a similar place after the palace massacre that wiped out many of its members, as the British monarchy was after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. King Gyanendra, crowned after the massacre, does not by any means evoke the kind of trust among Nepalis that previous royals did. Some radical Labourites have called for abolition of the British monarchy, which sounds to them like an anachronistic institution, but the truth is that cultures don't change easily. Similarly Nepal's Maoists, who are estimated to be in control of two-thirds of the country's territory, have called for a republican form of government. A workable compromise may be a constitutional monarchy, with the king's powers strictly defined. But peace talks ran into trouble even before the bloody clashes in east Nepal.

Finance minister Prakash Chandra Lohani, who led the government negotiators, seems to accept that the political system as it exists now is flawed since certain classes of people are not represented. The government had proposed a round-table conference involving all political forces, setting up an interim government which would include the Maoists, and holding parliamentary elections, all of which sounds reasonable. But this wasn't enough for the rebels, who are holding out for an election of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution for Nepal. What has contributed to the impasse is the personal unpopularity of the king. It was Gyanendra who dismissed elected Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba last October; since then, he has appointed a loyalist, Surya Bahadur Thapa, as the new prime minister. Actions like these do place the spotlight on the king's role and what it ought to be. If he is to exercise leadership in the current situation he should oversee Nepal's transition to a full democracy, perhaps with a role for a constitutional monarch, as in Britain.

21 AUG 2003

THE STATESMAN

Nepal govt, Maoists realise dialogue is only way out

By Jai Taraporevala
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The resumption of talks between the government and the Maoist rebels in Nepal, after a gap of four months, underscores the pressures on both sides to explore the path of negotiations. The motivation of the government of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa to revive the dialogue with the Maoists should be interpreted in terms of an attempt to blunt the challenge it faces from the mainline parties, especially the United Marxist-Leninist and the Nepali Congress, which have refused to participate in the transitional administration in Kathmandu and which have expressed their reservations about the manner in which the peace process has been conducted so far.

The government also seems to have been influenced by the growing sense of war weariness in several parts of the

For the rebels, intensification of the armed struggle is not a viable option at this juncture in view of the military assistance the government has received from Britain and the US

country, its inability to defeat the Maoists militarily and the mounting economic costs of the seven-year-long civil war. As far as the rebels are concerned, intensification of the armed struggle is not a viable option at this juncture in view of the military assistance the government has received from Britain and the US and the changed realities on the international stage in the post-September 11 period. Besides, the Maoist leaders

would seek to use the present process to regroup their forces and gauge the government's willingness to effect substantive concessions.

Given these factors, the coming weeks could witness agreement between the two sides on such confidence-building measures as the release of more Maoists from detention, the monitoring of the ceasefire, the movement of the security forces and the easing of political restrictions. Even so, the long-term success of the peace process can scarcely be taken for granted because of the political fragility of the current administration in Kathmandu and the wide differences between the government and the Maoists on the core issues in the conflict. These include the future of the monarchy, land reforms and the Maoist demand for a constituent assembly to draft a new basic law for Nepal.

Nepal talks end

15 2008 Himalayas Nepal
Nepalgunj (Nepal), Aug. 19 (Reuters): A third round of peace talks between Nepal's Maoist rebels and the government ended without agreement today but the two sides said they would meet again to try and end a revolt that has killed thousands.

The rebels, who have been fighting since 1996 to establish communist rule, stuck to their demand for a new assembly to draft a new constitution to define the role of the king, chief government negotiator Prakash Chandra Lohani said. "We think that their demand can be accommodated by amending and reforming the present constitution," Lohani said in Nepaigunj, 500 km west of Kathmandu, after talks concluded in the nearby rebel-held village of Hapure.

"We had a divergence of views so the present round of talks has ended. We will meet again and the date and the venue for the next meeting will be decided by the facilitators within one week," Lohani said. A Maoist source reiterated that the two sides would meet again but gave no dates. The third round of talks, which had been stalled since May over rebel demands, began on Sunday.

Kathmandu had agreed on the opening day to include the rebels in an interim government and offered to convene a conference of political parties to look at the conflict.

20 AUG 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Nepal talks resume despite violence

19/8

Nepalgunj (Nepal), Aug. 18
(Reuters): Peace talks between Maoist rebels and the Nepal government resumed today despite the killing of 17 guerrillas in the biggest clash with government troops since a January ceasefire, officials said.

Government negotiators managed to fly to the rebel-held village of Hapure, some 400 km west of Kathmandu, for the second day of the latest round of talks that began yesterday, after rain had earlier prevented their journey.

"We have started discussing," government negotiator Kamal Thapa said after the 90-minute meeting with the rebels ended. "We are trying to find common points and will meet again tomorrow."

More than 7,200 people have been killed since the rebels launched their campaign to overthrow the monarchy in 1996.

Earlier, an army official said soldiers shot dead 17 Maoists in eastern Nepal, the worst of a series of sporadic clashes since the ceasefire. "A regular army patrol was ambushed by the guerrillas at two places...the rebels died in ensuing gun battles," the officer said, adding there were no casualties on the government side.

The Maoists have not commented on the incident. Despite the clashes, the ceasefire has largely held.

Yesterday, on the opening day of the latest round of talks, Kathmandu agreed to include the rebels in an interim government and offered to convene a conference of political parties to look at the conflict, but rejected a rebel demand for an assembly to draft a new constitution.

19 AUG 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Nepal says no to new statute

1878
Gr A *Himalayan Nepal*
Nepalgunj (Nepal), Aug. 17 (Reuters): Nepal today rejected Maoist demands for a new constitution to define the role of the king but agreed to include the rebels in an interim government to end violence that has killed thousands and wrecked its economy.

About 5,500 of the deaths came after peace talks collapsed late in 2001, after which Nepal deployed its 60,000-strong army for the first time to take on the estimated 15,000 guerrillas.

The revolt has scared away vital tourist dollars and wrecked Nepal's aid-dependent economy, pushing growth down to 2.4 per cent in 2002-03 from 6.1 per cent three years ago.

"We are ready to form an interim government by including the rebel side and also hold elections for the parliament," government negotiator Kamal Thapa said. But the rebels want an election to the assembly to prepare a new constitution to define the role of the king.

The government also agreed to meet key political parties and said the laying down of arms by the rebels must also be part of discussions in peace talks now under way.

"The demands raised by the Maoists can be addressed by amending the existing constitution and the government is ready to discuss with an open mind all possibilities," chief

government negotiator Prakash Chandra Lohani said.

The Maoists said the government proposal was "quite disappointing" and lacked sincerity. "It is very unlikely the talks will lead to any fruitful end," chief rebel negotiator Babu Ram Bhattarai said after the first 90-minute session.

The rebels' key political demand is for an interim government to oversee elections for an assembly to draft a new constitution to define the king's role.

But the government wants elections to a new parliament, which the rebels oppose.

Both sides said they would continue the talks and the second round is expected to begin later today and may go on for several days before a deal is hammered out, negotiators say.

The crucial talks are being held amid high security in Nepalgunj, 500 km west of Kathmandu, in an area where the Maoists control large swathes of farmlands and forests.

Bhattarai, however, said the rebels would not abandon the talks and would give the government time to reconsider its position but rejected the government demand for the rebels to give up their arms.

The meeting takes place amid fears of violence if talks break down. Sharpshooters have been posted in the bustling business centre in west Nepal.

Nepal removes rebel bounties

DEEPAK THAPA

Kathmandu, Aug. 6: In a move that may affect future dialogue with the Maoists, the Nepal government informed the Supreme Court that it has withdrawn the reward offered for the capture or death of top rebel leaders.

The bounty, nearly Nepali Rs 5 million, had been announced by the Sher Bahadur Deuba government early last year and its removal was one of the pre-conditions set by the Maoists for the current ceasefire, in force since January 2003. The apex court had asked the government for a clarification on the issue.

In a related development, an appellate court dismissed a "state offence" case filed by the government against Baburam Bhattarai, number two in the Maoist party hierarchy and other leaders.

The case, filed soon after the Maoist insurgency began in February 1996, was thrown out of court for lack of evidence.

In a 20-day-long exchange of letters, the Maoists had issued an ultimatum that should their immediate demands not be fulfilled, they would end the ceasefire.

After the government conceded some of their demands, including the release of three of their central committee mem-

bers on July 31, the rebels agreed to continue talking. Two rounds of talks have been held so far.

For the moment however, the Maoists have downgraded their negotiating team to two from the earlier five members.

They have also expressed their desire to sit down for talks as soon as possible and discuss political issues they have raised.

However, one of their demands for future talks — the inclusion of the political parties agitating for the restoration of parliament and formation of an all-party government — seems unlikely to be fulfilled.

Like his predecessor, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa has repeatedly asked political parties to cooperate with the government to find a resolution to the crisis but without success.

Former Prime Minister and president of the Nepali Congress, Girija Prasad Koirala, has called the Maoist insistence on the participation of political parties a "conspiracy" to weaken their movement.

Similarly, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), Madhav Kumar Nepal, has rejected the government's offer to take part in talks, calling the Thapa government "unconstitutional".

The power play in Nepal

By John Kifner

THE KINGDOM of Nepal is once again seething with intrigue and rumour, caught in dramas involving its monarchy, its struggle for democracy, and outside powers. Two years ago, Nepal was shaken to its core when the royal family was all but wiped out in an attack that was officially attributed to Crown Prince Dipendra, who also died. Now its citizens are wondering whether an unsteady six-month ceasefire with Maoist guerrillas can survive during off-and-on peace negotiations.

There is an ever-shifting struggle in Nepal among three power centres: the Hindu monarchy, which has ruled for more than 200 years; the far weaker political parties, born in the 1990s after calls for more democracy; and the Maoists. The United States, Britain and India are pouring in aid for the Government, fearful that Nepal could descend into chaos or become a haven for terrorists. But the U.S., which is providing \$17 million to turn the parade-ground royal army into an anti-insurgent force, may find itself backing a tough king whose democratic credentials are in doubt.

King Gyanendra, a wealthy businessman, took the throne after the palace killings as a constitutional monarch of limited powers. But now he has taken full control, dismissing Parliament, putting off new elections and appointing a royalist Prime Minister over the objections of the major political parties. The parties have broadly discredited themselves with corruption, ineffectiveness and re-

volutionary governments, and they fear that the king will make a deal with the Maoists and move them even further on to the margins of power. "What is the king's role," Girija Prasad Koirala, leader of the Nepali Congress Party, asked at a recent party gathering. "I conclude that these are parts of the design already reached between the king and the Maoists."

During the ceasefire, the Maoists became very public, opening an office in Kathmandu, holding rallies

and giving speeches. Then in mid-July, the office was closed and the Maoist leaders dropped out of sight. Later the Maoists sent a message to Government mediators demanding to deal directly with the king.

The Maoist rebellion in the countryside has its roots in complex religious, ethnic and tribal realities, along with deep poverty — per capita income is \$220 a year, and even less in remote areas — and the concentration of the meagre resources in a few hands. About 85 per cent of the 24 million mostly poor people are Hindu. The top two castes, 29 per cent of the population, hold most of the Government jobs. The Shah family, which founded the Nepalese kingdom in 1768, and the Rana fam-

ily, which ruled as hereditary Prime Ministers from 1846 to 1950 with the king as a figurehead, have intermarried so much that they have formed an aristocracy that controls much of the wealth.

"The reasons for discontent are real," a Western diplomat said. But he was critical of the guerrillas nonetheless. "When the Maoists started," he said, "they got a lot of sympathy from intellectuals, but it has dissipated because of their brutality." More than 7,000 people have been killed since

The political parties (in Nepal) fear the king will make a deal with the Maoists and move them even further on to the margins of power.

the Maoists went into the jungle in 1996, and Amnesty International and other groups have recorded charges of widespread human rights abuses on both sides.

Rebellion flared here in 1990 with the formation of the People's Movement, which demanded multiparty democracy. Demonstrations led to riots and some 300 protesters were killed. Finally, under foreign pressure, the royal family caved in. A new Constitution was written in 1990, intended to establish a symbolic monarchy somewhat along the lines of Britain, and an elected Parliament. But the system has been a bitter disappointment. King Gyanendra was known to have argued in family circles against the Constitution ap-

proved by his older brother, King Bishnu Raj Upreti, a conflict management expert. "The real problem is discrimination, injustice, poverty, bad governance. The role of the international community should be to put positive pressure on the king, the Maoists, the Government, but that is not happening." — *New York Times*

Last October, the new king dismissed the Government in a proclamation assailing its "incompetence" and appointed his own Prime Minister. He cited Article 127 of the Constitution, which outlines the monarch's "power to remove difficulties." But Devendra Raj Panday, a former Minister who helped write the Constitution, says Article 127 does not empower the king in that way. "The king has trampled all over the Constitution... We are in for more difficult times."

The U.S. role, in particular, has drawn criticism from the rebels, who in their latest statement charged that aid from Washington was converting the Royal Nepalese Army into the Royal American Army. The Maoist leaders are from the highest Brahmin class, and the guerrillas, many of them teenagers, are recruited from the same hill tribes as the army. Late-ly they have dropped their initial demand that the monarchy be abolished. Their current position calls for an interim government, round-table discussions over Nepal's future and an eventual constitutional convention.

"The scenario is really bleak," said Bishnu Raj Upreti, a conflict management expert. "The real problem is discrimination, injustice, poverty, bad governance. The role of the international community should be to put positive pressure on the king, the Maoists, the Government, but that is not happening." — *New York Times*



PM wants parties in Nepal talks

Kathmandu, Aug. 3 (AFP): Nepal's Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa has instructed officials to invite political party leaders to the proposed third round of peace talks between the Maoists and the government, officials said today.

"Accordingly, the official team on behalf of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa (**Picture above**) will call on leaders of all major political parties represented in the dissolved parliament," a cabinet source said.

The leaders of the major political parties — including president of the Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala and the general secretary of the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist — have already said they will not cooperate with the government.

Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal last Thursday called on the official peace team to include the country's major political parties in the next round of talks.

4 AUG 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Wind of change

Handwritten: Nepal
Glimmer of hope in Nepal 5-6-18

Having managed to bring the Maoists back to the negotiating table the Nepal government must display a willingness to find a solution to end the general trauma. The Maoist uprising since February 1996 has so far claimed more than 7,200 lives and in some areas people are so desperate as to threaten to parade naked in Kathmandu if talks were not resumed. Admittedly, the peace process has been slow — only two rounds of talks since the Maoists declared their truce last January. The government has shown a conciliatory gesture by releasing three rebel leaders, the other prime demands include a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution and a secular republic. It would, however, be better if all democratic political parties are involved in the talks since the pro-monarchy Surya Bahadur Thapa government lacks credibility. All the same, there is a glimmer of hope. What the government should note is the Maoists' opposition to efforts at seeking US and other foreign help to curb their activities. Nothing could be more disastrous and Kathmandu's caretaker rulers would do well to remember the lessons of Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The worst sufferers of frequent work stoppages are villagers in remote areas, for whose uplift the Maoists say they are fighting and those whose livelihood depends on daily earnings. The majority of Nepalese live below the poverty line, their wherewithal dependent on the country's ability to catch up on development. But peace is of the essence, its return guaranteeing the cooperation of donor countries.

UN offer to push Nepal peace upsets Delhi

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 31: India is upset over the offer of the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, to help Nepal negotiate a peaceful settlement with its Maoist insurgents. The offer came in the form of a statement from the spokesman for Annan on Wednesday commenting on the stalled peace process with the Maoists in Nepal.

The operative part of the statement said: "The secretary general remains at the disposal

of Nepal to assist the achievement of a negotiated peaceful solution."

The statement says that "the secretary general has been following with keen interest the peace process in Nepal" and notes that the process is facing some obstacles. It is in this context that Annan has offered his services to Kathmandu.

As it happens, Kathmandu has not sought UN assistance at any point of time in dealing with the Maoists. And, after an exchange of letters between

the government at Kathmandu and the Maoist leadership, some prominent Maoists have been released from Nepalese jails. As a result, today the Maoist leadership itself has expressed willingness to come for a third round of talks with the Surya Bahadur Thapa government.

Although this makes Annan's offer unnecessary, India is upset at the interventionist role being sought by the UN in Nepal. The UN normally intervenes only in intractable disputes between nations and is

not expected to interfere in the internal matters of any sovereign country.

The negotiation between the Maoists and Kathmandu is a matter internal to the Himalayan kingdom, official sources point out. Therefore, they claim, there is no role for the UN in trying to "help" with the negotiations with the Maoists.

Another situation under which the UN has begun intervening is to prevent humanitarian crises — caused by genocide or large scale deaths due to

famine, for example. There is no such humanitarian crisis in Nepal, Indian government sources point out. Most importantly, they say, Kathmandu has at no point sought third-party intervention by the UN or any other multilateral organisation or country.

Some extra-regional powers have, however, been showing considerable interest in acting as neutral umpires between Kathmandu and the Maoists. They want to offer the help of conflict resolution experts to facilitate the negotiations.

"If the talks between Kathmandu and the Maoists get stalled, it is not because the two sides lack conflict resolution skills or do not know how to negotiate. The negotiations will succeed or fail depending on whether a meeting ground is reached on substantive issues being raised by the Maoists," Indian officials point out.

"And how can anyone be neutral between a state which is trying to maintain law and order and those taking up arms against it?" they ask.

Maoists agree to resume talks

1-2 118 K & Nepal

Kathmandu, July 31 (Reuters): Nepal's Maoist rebels agreed today to resume stalled peace talks with the government, which welcomed the move aimed at ending a seven-year revolt that has claimed more than 7,200 lives.

Maoist chief Prachanda's announcement came three days after the government freed three rebel leaders and provided information on guerrillas missing in the revolt, meeting some of the key demands to begin fresh talks. The rebels control large chunks of the Himalayan nation's countryside, but they have suffered most of the 5,500 deaths in the last 20 months. The revolt began in 1996.

The Maoists had given the government until today to also curb army operations and get a commitment from King Gyanendra to authorise government negotiators to talk. "Although gov-

ernment action has not been able to create a completely favourable atmosphere for talks, we take some of the steps positively," Prachanda said in a statement. "Our party has decided to sit for the third round of talks and directed the (Maoist) negotiators to make arrangements for the same," he said. The Nepali government welcomed the announcement and said the date for the meeting would be agreed mutually with the rebels.

"The government takes the Maoist decision positively," information and communications minister Kamal Thapa said.

Thapa, who is also a government negotiator, said the next round of talks would focus on the political agenda — Maoists want elections to an assembly to prepare a new constitution which they say should abolish the monarchy. But the government insists that an agreement

should be reached within the framework of the constitutional monarchy and a multi-party democratic political set up.

Prachanda also urged the government to persuade mainstream political parties, which are not part of the ongoing talks, to get involved in the fresh negotiations. The rebels, who are fighting to topple the constitutional monarchy and set up a communist republic, have held two rounds of talks with the government but the negotiations were stalled in May after a rebel demand to curb troop movements. There have been no

major battles or guerrilla attacks since a January ceasefire but about a dozen people have died in sporadic clashes.

27 killed in landslide

At least 27 people were killed, many as they slept, today and 27 more were missing after landslides and flash floods swept parts of Nepal.

Home (interior) ministry official Lekhnath Pokharel said 22 people had died when landslides triggered by monsoon rains swept away several houses in the western village of Manakamana, 100 km from Kathmandu.



Maoist chief Prachanda

Nepal govt sets up talks with Maoists

DEEPAK THAPA

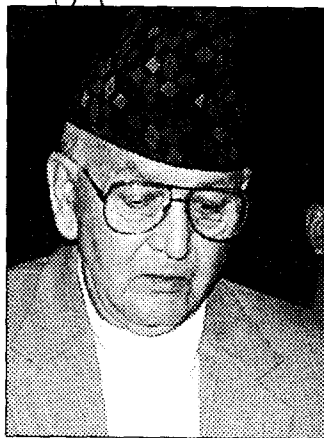
Kathmandu, July 14: After six rounds of informal meetings with Maoist leaders, the government has invited the rebels for a third round of talks.

If the Maoists agree to the meeting, it will be their first formal contact with the government of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa.

The government has remained in touch with the Maoist negotiating team, which was formed after the ceasefire announced in January, in order to sort out differences arising from the second round of talks held in May with the earlier government led by former Premier Lokendra Bahadur Chand.

There has been some misunderstanding on two issues between the two sides. One was the question of releasing three senior Maoist leaders from government custody, and the second was limiting the army's movements to within 5 km of the barracks all over the country.

The Maoists said that was part of the agreement at the second round of talks and have



Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa. (AFP)

threatened to walk out of any future negotiations if their demands are not met. The government has not made any commitment on the Maoist demands and the army has said it opposes the rebel condition for talks.

The government's move comes a day after the five-party Opposition alliance declared a fresh round of protests against King Gyanendra's removal of an elected Prime Minister in Octo-

ber last year. The two Prime Ministers appointed since then, Chand in October 2002 and Thapa in June 2003, are both known royalists.

The political parties, which have been agitating since May, have not endorsed the new government either, arguing that there is no difference between this and the previous one.

The parties want the parliament — dissolved a-year-and-a-half ago — restored and an all-party government formed under a consensus candidate of their choice.

Despite the backing from intellectual circles, the level of support on the streets has been minimal and the protests, which included a "special session" of the dissolved lower house of parliament and the existing upper house, have taken more of a ritualistic turn.

However, this time, there seems to be more of a concerted approach to taking on the king and the government appointed by him with the parties agreeing on an 18-point agenda, some of which will stand as a direct challenge to the king.

Maoists pose no threat to tourism: Nepal Minister

Handwritten notes: "Maoists pose no threat to tourism: Nepal Minister" and "15/7/03"

By T.S. Shankar

CHENNAI, JULY 14. "The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has never disturbed the tourism sector. No tourist was ever assaulted by them and the Maoists have made known their mind through their website that they are never against the tourism sector," the Nepal Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Sarvendra Nath Shukla, said today.

As far as the tourism sector is concerned, it is totally free from any disturbance. Even people going on adventure tourism by trekking have never been disturbed.

As far as the Government is concerned, we have already initiated peace talks and we want to resolve the problem politically once and for all," Mr. Shukla said in an interview to *The Hindu*, before leaving for Hong Kong to attend the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) meet.

Stating that there was so much of "misinformation about

was on improving infrastructure for attracting more visitors, especially those from different parts of India, the Minister noted, "We are very sure that as soon as we see the potential we are going to introduce air links to Chennai. We will either request the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) to extend the existing service from Bangalore or provide a new link to commence the Chennai service, which would then become the fourth metro city to be linked to Kathmandu as services already operated out of Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore. "We will accord first preference to the RNAC to introduce the Chennai link or else on a short-term arrangement, we will encourage Nepal-based private sector air taxi operators to accomplish the Chennai link."

On the Nepal Government's talks with the Chinese Government on the proposed introduction of Mt. Kailash and Manasarovar flights, Mr. Shukla said: "We are going to sign the

air bilateral agreement with China before August 15. As for Kailash and Manasarovar mountain flights, we wanted to introduce this sector with a helicopter service or deploy a smaller plane from Kathmandu or fly out of Nepal-based smaller airports to provide a spectacular closer view of Kailash and Manasarovar, especially to benefit senior citizen pilgrim tourists."

As part of the promotional campaign, Mr. Shukla had talks with the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) authorities on Friday, Mr. Shukla said: "We are going to put up an information centre in Tirupati. We are happy to learn that the TTD authorities have also agreed to incorporate our website into the TTD's. We want a similar information kiosk for Chennai and the proposed centres in Tirupati and Chennai would be established in close association with the Nepal Tourism Board and the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation.



the law and order problems in Nepal," the Minister said that with the help of the year-long "Destination Nepal Campaign" unleashed on the internet, travel agents and media familiarisation tours, the Nepal Government was determined to "clear the clouds of confusion" and instill confidence in the global travellers.

Air link to Chennai

Explaining that the Nepal Government's current focus

Nepal in dilemma as rebels set up informal talks

PRANAY SHARMA

Kathmandu, July 10: An informal meeting between Maoist leaders and government representatives is scheduled for tomorrow in a bid to iron out some of the differences that could lead to resumption of talks between the two sides.

However, there are no easy solutions before Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa who is likely to come under renewed pressure from the Maoists and the Opposition democratic parties in Nepal.

The five major political parties — the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), the Satbhavna Party (Anandi Devi faction), the Nepal Mazdoor Kisan Party and the Jana Morcha — have been holding demonstrations in different parts of Nepal since April this year.

They have been protesting against the "take-over" of parliament by King Gyanendra in October last year.

The leaders of the five parties have been also on a hungerstrike to intensify their movement, press for an all-party government and revive the parliament.

The Indian foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal, who is scheduled to meet King Gyanendra, Prime Minister Thapa and other senior Nepalese leaders in the next two days, has ruled out India playing any mediatory role to narrow the existing gap between the democratic parties and the palace.

India maintains that the constitutional monarchy and democracy are the two pillars on which Nepal's stability rests. However, it has ruled out being a mediator between the two to find a solution to the Maoist impasse.

At this juncture, the informal talks with the Maoists does not augur well for the Surya Bahadur Thapa government.

The Maoists are likely to

renew their demand that some of the points agreed between them and the Lokendra Bahadur Chand regime be implemented.

Crucial among them is the demand to confine the royal Nepalese army to within 5 km of their barracks and bases to ensure they do not conduct unnecessary raids in Maoist strongholds. The other demand pertains to the immediate release of some important Maoists leaders who are currently lodged in different jails in the country.

For Prime Minister Thapa, conceding either of the demands and implementing them is a tall order. The army is not happy with the Maoists' demands. The army believes that the Maoists are taking advantage of the ceasefire — announced by the government and the rebels in January — to regroup and get fresh arms supplies. The force feels that releasing the jailed Maoists will also demoralise the troops.

However, if either of these demands is not met, it will lead to renewed pressure on the gov-

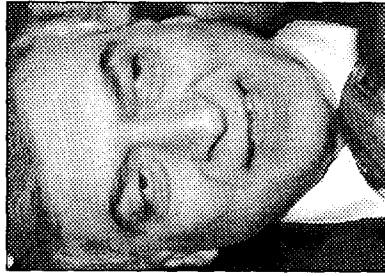
ernment and a clamour for the Prime Minister's removal.

Two rounds of talks were held between the Maoists and the Lokendra Bahadur Chand government. After the talks, some Maoist leaders were released from jails and the two sides drew up a code of conduct to maintain the ceasefire. A monitoring committee was also set up by the government to see how the ceasefire was progressing. But four months after the ceasefire was announced, Chand was replaced by Thapa as the Prime Minister by King Gyanendra.

A new committee with information minister Kamal Thapa and finance minister PC. Lohani has now been set up by Thapa to draw up the agenda for talks with the Maoists.

Though the democratic opposition has been demanding the setting up of an all-party government, so far, they have not been able to come to an agreement on who should be Prime Minister. This has given the palace yet another opportunity to play a greater political role in Nepal.

However, diplomats as well as political leaders in Nepal feel that if tomorrow's informal talks between the government and the Maoists fail to make any headway, it is likely to have an impact on the six-month-old ceasefire.



Kanwal Sibal

BHUTAN AND INDIA-II

Need To Update Treaty Of Peace And Friendship

sr 6

By PARMANAND

87

King Jigme Singye Wangchuk is unhappy with the way the things are projected in some sections of the Indian media on the question of militants. But he insisted in an exclusive interview at Tashichhodzong that "there has never been a difference between the two governments on this issue". The King says that this is a very unique situation in as much as the militants are Indian citizens from Assam and West Bengal. He stresses that the Royal Government of Bhutan has spent a lot of money and 10 Army camps have been established involving 5,000 young able-bodied soldiers. Bhutan is trying to raise militia from the 20 districts of the kingdom. The King insists that some people in India have a feeling that the Bhutan government has done nothing for the last several years, which is not fair.

Militant camps

Home minister Lyonpo Thinley Gyamsto told me that in June 2001 the ULFA had nine camps, but by 31 December 2001, as per their promise, they dismantled four camps. The Bhutan government had had four rounds of talks with the ULFA leadership. The Bhutan government has by now two rounds of talks with the NDFB. The Bhutan government has held one round of talks at the lowest level with the KLO — which has shown its presence since 2003.

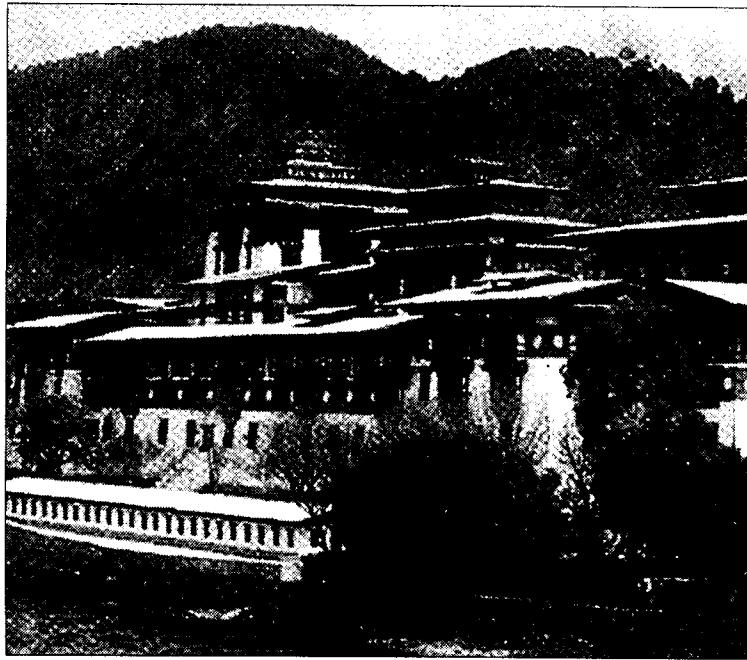
Lyonpo Gyamsto insists: "As far as we are concerned, we'll exhaust all our peaceful means". The *Tshogdu* (National Assembly) — the unicameral national legislature — in its 80th session last year had resolved that there should be one more round of talks with the ULFA, but it could not be held. Bhutan would now demand that the ULFA close its central headquarters. The home minister emphasised that India is a very close and friendly country and has always been good to them.

In any case, West Bengal and

Assam are getting restive. Needless to stress, the problem of militants' presence in Bhutan is a serious matter of discussion during the 81st session of the *Tshogdu*.

The formal and government-

Article 2 of the Treaty states: "The Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part, the government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice



to-government level relations between Bhutan and India are supposed to be governed by the 1949 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the two countries signed on 8 August 1949 in Darjeeling. In the era of transparency, this treaty, too, has begun to receive focused attention by analysts of various hues.

No hindrance

It is altogether a different matter that King Jigme stresses that the Treaty does not come in the way of strengthening ties between the two countries and Ambassador Jasrotia emphasises that the provisions are in no way hampering the interest of Bhutan.

Technically, though, two things are clear: first, it does not mention at any point the sovereignty of Bhutan and, second, it curtails the autonomy of Bhutan in conducting its external affairs.

of the government of India in regard to its external relations".

This Article has been interpreted more often than not by many segments of the Nepalese media to embarrass both Bhutan and India. Many newspapers in Nepal keep writing frequently that it is India's responsibility to advise Bhutan to take back refugees from various camps in Nepal, and they cite this particular Article for this purpose.

But there are other well-meaning people, too, who think that this Article needs to be amended under the changed circumstances. For instance, at a seminar organised by the South Asian Studies Foundation in collaboration with the India International Centre in New Delhi, Dalip Mehta, who was India's Ambassador to Bhutan between 1995 and 1998, said on 4 February that the Treaty has been variously described by the

Bhutanese as "inequitable, humiliating, paternalistic, anachronistic, irrelevant and an aspersion on their sovereignty".

Professor Muchkund Dubey, India's former foreign secretary, delivering his valedictory address at the same seminar, said that he would like to be on the side of Dalip Mehta and that "we must modernise the treaty according to the canons of modern international law keeping in view the sovereign equality of Bhutan".

Road construction

Many young elements in Bhutan today find their voices being echoed by Mehta and Dubey. More often than not, eyebrows are raised, though at present sotto voce, at the overactive nature of the road-building by the Dantak (Indian agency) and activities of the IMTRAT (Indian military agency). Indiscriminate killings of Bhutanese bus passengers in India in the recent past without any follow-up action by the Indian authorities has left much to be desired. The Phuntsholing wall to demarcate the border properly and Indian reaction thereto has left many Bhutanese rather unhappy.

India today is not dealing with the Bhutan of the 19th or the 20th century. The new millennium has certainly brought a new Bhutan on the international plane. It feels more confident, more assertive and more involved in the multipolar world politics — even if geographically it remains a small and landlocked state, sandwiched between the two Asian giants, India and China.

Both India and Bhutan would need to be more transparent and circumspect in dealing with each other. The realisation is already there and it augurs well. His Majesty is slated to visit India soon after a long gap. This would certainly give both countries an opportunity to understand each other much better.

(Concluded)

Nepal cracks down on Dalai Lama's birthday celebrations

Sudeshna Sarkar in Kathmandu

July 6. — While Nepal is gearing up to celebrate the birthday of its king tomorrow, the government moved to prevent celebrations for another birthday today — the Dalai Lama's. Tomorrow, as King Gyanendra turns 57, the event, a national holiday, is being celebrated with a flurry of activities ranging from a seven-day mahayajna to a football match. A 247-member birthday celebration committee was set up under Prime Minister Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa to celebrate the occasion.

But the government stopped the Tibetan community here from celebrating the 68th birthday of the Nobel Peace laureate Dalai Lama today. The nearly 20,000-strong community of Tibetan refugees in Nepal had obtained permission from the district authorities about two weeks ago to hold a prayer meeting and offers-giving ceremony in a monastery in Kathmandu this morning. It was to have been followed by a Tibetan cultural programme and dinner reception in the evening.

But the home ministry withdrew the permission at the last moment, without giving any reasons.

"These must have been very compelling reasons for this," Mr Wangchuk Tsering, administrative head of the Tibetan Welfare Centre in Kathmandu, said.

"The Nepalese government must have been under very strong pressure from somewhere. We are deeply distressed as there was nothing political about our programme, it was to have been a purely religious ceremony."

Tibetans say there has been "an alarming deterioration in Nepal's level hospitality towards Tibetans" and link it to better relations between Beijing and Kathmandu fol-

lowing King Gyanendra's visit to China last year.

Last year too, Nepal's home ministry asked the Radisson Hotel in Kathmandu to shut down a celebration in honour of the Dalai Lama's 67th birthday and "not to accept any orders for receptions or entertainment from any Tibetan refugee groups". And the next month, police stopped a press conference by Tibetans trying to defend charges against the religious leader by a group believed to be backed by China and arrested two of the organisers, including Mr Tsering.

Though they were released later,

Tibetan refugees seeking safe transit through Nepal with the help of the UNHCR have been feeling the heat.

This May, Nepal deported a group of 18 Tibetans who were trying to reach India via Nepal. The incident was condemned by the US, Amnesty International, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other rights organisations. It also resulted in a trade Bill, that would have helped Nepal's economy, being removed from the Senate by a pro-Tibetan US Senator.

So when a second group of 19 refugees was caught in June, the government decided to hand them over

to the UNHCR.

A leading human rights activist feels Nepal lacks a uniform policy towards refugees.

Former minister and facilitator for government-Maoist peace talks Padma Ratna Tuladhar said, "Though Nepal recognises Tibet as part of China, it should have a uniform procedure for all refugees, be they Tibetans or Bhutanese. I don't know why Nepal deported 18 Tibetans in May so that it became an international issue. Once they are accepted as refugees, they should be referred to the UNHCR and allowed to proceed to wherever they are seeking asylum."

Peace talks to resume: Nepal

Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU, June 23. — The Nepalese government is constantly in touch with the Maoist rebels and is hopeful the third round of talks will start soon, information and communication minister, Mr Kamal Thapa, said today.

Mr Thapa told reporters here he had recently met with the members of the Maoist talks team and they are positive towards resuming the dialogue.



Mr Kamal Thapa

On Maoist negotiator Mr Ram Bahadur Thapa's willingness to meet King Gyanendra before the next rounds of talks start, the

minister said the institution of monarchy was common to all the Nepalese people and there was no problem if anybody wanted to have an audience with the King.

On differences between the Maoists and the government on the mobilisation of army in the Maoist-controlled territory he said the government was ready to settle the dispute through mutual understanding. "We have also established a peace talks coordination secretariat to facilitate dialogue," he said.

Nepal Opp ruffles

PM's party

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, June 12. — Nepal's five-party Opposition coalition today said it will continue its agitation against the king even as new Prime Minister Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa's new Cabinet of six more ministers was sworn in at the royal palace this evening. After he failed to persuade the Opposition parties to join his government, Mr Thapa decided to go ahead with a skeleton ministry formed of confidants from his own Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), a decision that drew flak from other party leaders.

Mr Thapa retained 18 key portfolios himself, including home, defence, foreign affairs and royal palace affairs, saying that some of them would be allocated to Opposition party leaders when they decided to join the Cabinet.

Mr Buddhiman Tamang, a veteran RPP leader close to Mr Thapa, was given physical planning and works, replacing the high-profile former minister Mr Narayan Singh Pun, who was initially the lone government negotiator holding peace talks with the Maoists.

The gulf widens

Gyanendra must drop the cynicism

Apart from deepening the political stalemate, King Gyanendra has also widened the gulf between himself and the mainstream political parties by appointing Surya Bahadur Thapa Prime Minister. Considering the circumstances under which Lokendra Bahadur Chand was forced to step down — protests by five parties — he should have accepted Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) general-secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, the consensus candidate chosen in response to the King's invitation to name a new successor within three days of Chand's resignation. Like his predecessor, the 75-year-old Thapa belongs to the pro-monarch Rashtriya Prajatantra Party and this is his fifth stint. The restoration of political order is obviously his priority but it will prove a daunting task without cooperation from the opposition.

Nepali Congress chief GP Koirala's suggestion for revival of parliament could have helped, but this would have been against the Supreme Court ruling which upheld Sher Bahadur Deuba's action in dissolving the house in May last year. In 1994, the apex court ruled that a majority government had the prerogative to dissolve parliament but only if no party could form an alternative ministry which, at the time of Deuba's action, was not the case. Another argument holds that dissolution is invalid if elections are not held within six months. There is no constitutional provision either for an interim all-party ministry. Uppermost in the public mind is restoration of peace and preservation of multi-party democracy. The King has himself to blame if the situation turns sticky. Sooner or later he will have to deal with the politics of discontent.

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On a palace coup

Nepal is on a dangerous drift that is reminiscent of the events of the Eighties which eventually led to the collapse of absolute monarchy and the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1990. The palace and the political parties are once again caught in a web of mutual distrust that sparked a similar political crisis twenty years ago.

There is even an uncanny resemblance to those troubled times in the resignation of the prime minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, the appointment of Surya Bahadur Thapa as his successor and the role of the palace in both events. In 1983, however, Chand succeeded Thapa, who had to quit despite enjoying the support of the majority of members of the Rashtriya Panchayat, thanks to the machinations of the palace.

The royal massacre of June 1, 2001 gave the throne at Kathmandu's Narayanhiti Palace to King Gyanendra, who was at the centre of a controversy following the serial bomb explosions around the palace in June, 1985 and subsequently in other parts of the country. The violence, it was later suspected, had been engineered by palace loyalists to scuttle the *satyagraha* launched by the Nepali Congress about a month earlier.

King Gyanendra finds himself at odds again with not only the Nepali Congress but also the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and most other political parties in the country. He ignored the major parties' choice of Madhav Kumar Nepal of the CPN(UML), as the next prime minister after Chand, and unilaterally appointed Thapa to the post.

Five major parties, including the Nepali Congress and CPN(UML), have been on a collision course with the palace ever since the king manipulated another former prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, to split the Nepali Congress and then dissolve parliament in October last year. The king's decision betrays his distrust of parliamentary democracy because Thapa, like Chand, belongs to the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, which had only 11 members in a parliament of 205. Impatient with an "overactive" king, the parties have threatened to demand the abolition of constitutional monarchy and the setting up of a people's republic.

The similarities with the situation in the Eighties notwithstanding, the present crisis seems to be far more ominous for Nepal in particular and the region in general. With parliament dissolved and the king's government lacking any legitimacy, Nepal faces a political vacuum that is worse than the one in the Eighties. Although the parties want the dissolved parliament restored, this looks unlikely to happen in view of the supreme court's verdict against it.

Some analysts in Nepal argue that the king has the powers under Article 127 of the constitution to restore the dissolved parliament. It is true that the article gives the king powers to intervene "to remove difficulties" in the formation or the running of a government. It is true that the constitution debars anyone from challenging any action of the king

Nepal's royalty is exploiting the constitutional crisis which it had itself created to subvert parliamentary democracy in the nation, writes **Ashis Chakrabarti**



Dangerous liaisons

in a court of law. But the same article says that the king has to place before parliament any orders he may issue to fulfil his obligations under it.

It is unlikely that the king will revive a parliament whose dissolution was largely his doing. If he has to do this, he may have to recall the government of Deuba who, as the prime minister, dissolved parliament. That he may not do either of these is also borne out by the fact that he appointed Chand and now Thapa as prime ministers on the premise that they would form an all-party government and hold fresh elections within

six months of their appointments. Chand failed to do so, and Thapa too may not succeed if the major parties continue to dissociate themselves from his government.

The constitutional problem is actually more complicated than it appears to be. On the one hand, the constitution gives the king the powers to intervene; on the other, it says that there cannot be a gap of more than six months between one parliament and the next. The present situation, in which the country has been without a parliament since last October, is clearly one which the makers of

the 1990 constitution had not envisaged.

The palace is exploiting the constitutional confusion, which it has insidiously created in the first place, in order to subvert parliamentary democracy. But it is impossible that King Gyanendra can put the clock of history backwards and rule by proxy. His slain brother, King Birendra, tried that with the elections to the Rashtriya Panchayat in 1981, which the major parties had boycotted but which threw up Thapa as the prime minister. But that palace intrigue unleashed political forces which King Birendra could not control.

King Gyanendra could be caught in a worse situation. Some observers argue that he may actually do better in his battle against the parties because, unlike during the popular agitation of 1989-90, the parties now are deeply divided. They also point out that 12 years of multi-party democracy have disillusioned the people with the parties and their corrupt, unstable and incompetent governments.

There is a great deal of truth in this assessment of the political parties. But it seems to ignore two fundamental facts. First, the failure of the parties has not endeared the people to royalty. King Gyanendra, who began his reign under a cloud because of his blood-soaked succession, does not enjoy the kind of popular support that King Birendra — or his father, King Mahendra — enjoyed before the democracy movements caught on. Secondly, despite the public disenchantment with the parties, multi-party democracy remains the people's only choice.

Also, King Gyanendra now has to deal with a challenge that his brother did not face — that of the Maoists. If the people are angry with the parties, they are more likely to turn to the Maoists than to the monarch. In 1983, the palace could make use of agent provocateurs to set off bomb blasts to spread confusion in the public mind about the *satyagraha* of the Nepali Congress. Any strategy today to use the Maoists to undercut the agitation by mainstream parties now can only be suicidal because the Maoists have their own agenda of knocking down the monarchy and setting up of a people's republic. That is why any peace talks with the Maoists are bound to fail unless the king involves the major parties in the process.

With the Maoists running their own governments in nearly half the country, any secret understanding with them is bound to be a dangerous gamble. Any attempt by the king to enlist international support to tackle the Maoists, on the other hand, may turn the tiny kingdom into a regional theatre of a new Great Game. Nepal's two big neighbours — India and China — would certainly see such an eventuality as a threat to their own security and to the regional balance of power.

To avert a Himalayan blunder King Gyanendra, therefore, has only one choice — to regain the confidence of the political parties by restoring multi-party democracy. Even the current constitutional confusion may not be a big hurdle in his way if he shows the will.

‘ The constitution gives the king powers to intervene, on the other hand, it says that there cannot be a gap of more than six months between one parliament and the next. The present situation, in which the country has been without a parliament since last October, had not been envisaged by the makers of the 1990 constitution ’

Nepal PM finds few takers for consensus

DEEPAK THAPA

Kathmandu, June 9: Despite the confidence with which he staked his claim for leading a government of national consensus, Nepal's new Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa is no closer to reaching an agreement with political parties than his predecessor, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, had been.

Chand, appointed in October 2002, quit on May 30 this year to ease the pressure that the political parties had put on the king. Politicians have been agitating for the re-instatement of parliament, dissolved more than a year ago, and the formation of an all-party government.

Thapa's attempts to get other parties to join his government have been unsuccessful. Leaders of the three largest parties in the last parliament, including Nepali Congress chief, Girija Prasad Koirala, have rebuffed his overtures. Indications are that the Prime Minister will have to rely on his own party, the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (to which Chand also belongs), and smaller outfits to cobble together a Cabinet.

King Gyanendra's appointment of Thapa has attracted criticism from the beginning, as it

breached an understanding the king had arrived at with leaders of major parties when Chand quit.

The king had then asked the agitating parties to name a consensus candidate for Prime Minister, and they came up with the name of Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), the biggest party in the last parliament.

But the king instead chose Thapa, a former prime minister who served three of his four previous terms during the three decades of direct rule by the monarchy from 1960 onwards.

After his nomination, Thapa said the ongoing agitation could no longer be justified since exec-

utive powers had been transferred back to the Premier with his appointment — but the other parties did not quite agree.

Thapa's present manoeuvres come amid growing criticism of the king by political parties and the Maoist rebels, currently observing a ceasefire after seven years of violence. Speaking at a rally in his home district of Gorkha, west of Kathmandu, top Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai said King Gyanendra's refusal to abdicate and relinquish control over the army was hindering progress on talks.

Parties have become increasingly vocal in demanding that the King declare his assets as well as that of his late brother, King Birendra. This was one of the resolutions passed at the June 6-7 'special session' of the National Assembly. The upper house session was held in a public place after Opposition MPs were barred from parliament.

Promising to continue peace talks with the Maoists, Thapa has said peace is a pre-condition for fresh elections. But the rebels have stated they are not satisfied with his appointment and have announced a country-wide 'peaceful' movement in which they may make common cause with the political parties.



Surya Bahadur Thapa

Three-way alliance key to nuke solution: Seoul

Korea Herald/ ANN

SEOUL, June 9. — South Korea has said it wants to resolve the standoff over the North's suspected nuclear arms development through close consultation with the USA and Japan.

Unification minister Mr Jeong Se-hyun told the National Assembly today that the Roh Moo-hyun government is persuading the North to make visible efforts to resolve the issue so as not to provoke hard-liners in the USA.

The unification minister, along with Prime Minister Mr Goh Kun and security ministers, attended the interpellation session in the National Assembly.

Mr Jeong said the government is trying to lay the groundwork for national reunification and hoping that inter-Korean exchanges and economic and cultural cooperation will spill over to the military field, thus thawing tension and building up mutual trust between the Koreas. "The settlement of North Kore-

an nuclear issue will facilitate inter-Korean relations. The government is consistent in aiming to reconcile with the North..."

But lawmakers of the Opposition Grand National Party called on Mr Roh to employ more aggressive tactics, while members with the ruling Millennium Democratic Party urged the USA to rule out military options against the North.

Defence minister Mr Cho Young-kil said that talks of the relocation of US troops to south of Seoul would be finished by October, but the issue triggered a heated debate from lawmakers.

An Opposition lawmaker said: "Relocating the 2nd US Infantry Division which guarantees an immediate intervention in the event of a North Korean attack, will leave South Korea more vulnerable to certain contingencies."

But a ruling party MP said: "The government has no reason to oppose the plan as the USA will redeploy its troops in line with its world defence strategy."

N Korea in nuke overdrive, blames USA

SEOUL, June 9. — North Korea today publicly admitted for the first time that it was seeking nuclear weapons and blamed "hostile" US policy for forcing it to develop a deterrent.

Since the nuclear crisis erupted eight months ago, North Korea has often referred to its possession of a powerful physical deterrent. But Pyongyang has carefully avoided admitting in public to either seeking or possessing nuclear weapons.

"We have no other option but to have nuclear deterrence if the USA keeps its hostile policy," the Korean Central News Agency said. The KCNA commentary, however, stopped short of saying Pyongyang has already developed nuclear weapons. — AFP

Lean, mean Cabinet likely for Nepal

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, June 9. — A skeleton Cabinet in Nepal is likely to be announced on Wednesday, nearly a week after Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa of the royalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party succeeded Mr Lokendra Bahadur Chand as Prime Minister. And two of the top jobs are likely to go to politicians described as "tough", given the fact that they have been on the government team negotiating with Maoist rebels.

RPP sources today said a three to six-member Cabinet would be announced. Ministers from the Chand Cabinet may also be included, said an official.

The important portfolio of home ministry, is likely to be allocated to Mr Buddhiman Tamang, senior RPP leader and a confidant of Mr Thapa. Mr Tamang is also scheduled to get labour, earlier held by Mr Kamal Prasad Chaulagain.

Interestingly, both Mr Mandal and Mr Chaulagain had been part of the six-member ministerial team set up by the government to negotiate with the Maoists.

10 JUN 2003

Khukri Rum

No apparent end to Nepal's political crisis

11-19 7/6
109 Nepal

The situation in Nepal is getting more and more rum. It is anybody's guess whether the new prime minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa — the 13th since 1990 — will have a better run of luck than his predecessors. When king Gyanendra removed Lokendra Bahadur Chand, there was speculation that the palace had bowed to pressure from the mainstream political parties. King Gyanendra's usurpation of executive authority through his 'royal coup' on October 4 last year had led to widespread political unrest and agitation. In the eight months since then, the palace had achieved a measure of truce with the Maoists and brought the rebels to the negotiating table. Even so, the king continued to face opposition for excluding the mainstream parties from the political process. When he jettisoned Mr Chand and asked the agitating parties to name their consensus candidate for prime ministerial office, it was interpreted as a conciliatory move on the king's part; a move aimed at giving the parties a bigger role in administration. In the event, the choice of Mr Thapa, four-time prime minister and widely-experienced in the panchayat system, has only added a new dimension to the spiralling of crisis.

The perception of Mr Thapa as being close to New Delhi, read with the fact that he was in India on a PR mission in April, has led to allegations in Kathmandu of "meddling" by 'Big Brother'. Whatever the truth about India's role in Nepal, what is relevant for now is the mess in that country. The king, his men and the popular political forces have simply failed to get their act together. The political parties and the Maoist rebels, who point a finger at New Delhi, forget that this amounts to admitting that they are helpless in Nepal, indeed that their country can easily be swayed by external influence. Such accusations bring little credit to forces that overthrew the autocratic panchayat regime to usher in multiparty democracy. The political parties and the king must speedily resolve the many-sided conflict. If they don't, the forces shaping a new world order elsewhere — from Palestine to Kashmir — will take charge of Nepal too. That 'foreign hand' will not be that of New Delhi.

Allahabad alumnus new Nepal PM



Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa

Sudeshna Sarkar
in Kathmandu

June 4. — An old boy of the University of Allahabad is the new Prime Minister of Nepal.

Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa, four-time former Prime Minister, a royalist and an arts graduate from Allahabad, was today chosen by King Gyanendra to head the 11th government since 1994.

The 75-year-old pipped the consensus of a five-party coalition whose continued Opposition was

the reason for the resignation of his predecessor, Mr Lokendra Bahadur Chand, on Friday.

In his first interview to the media after being declared the new PM, the diminutive, whitehaired leader said today his priority would be to bring peace and start talks simultaneously with the five agitating parties as well as the Maoists for a reconciliation.

Regarding his foreign policy, he said he would endeavour to improve Nepal's ties with friendly nations. Mr Thapa, considered to be pro-Indian, told journalists speculating about Delhi's role in his selection that his India trip had nothing to do with his new post.

Mr Thapa said it would take some time for the formation of the new Cabinet and he would consider if any of the ministers from the old cabinet would be retained. Asked if the constitution of the government team formed of ministers to negotiate with the Maoists would also change, he said that too was under consideration.

Sources from the Rastriya Prajatantra Party said Mr Thapa was chosen over Leftist leader Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal, the consensus candidate named by the five parliamentary parties, because the RPP had argued that it was a pro-monarchy party unlike the coalition, who've been pressing for curbing the king's powers.

Nepal gets royalist PM

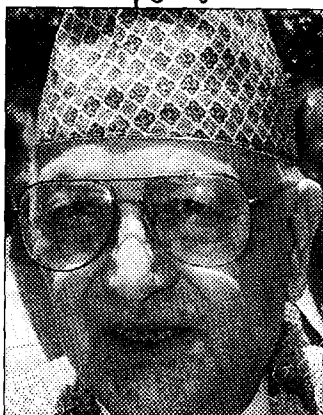
Kathmandu, June 4 (Reuters): Nepal's king defied opposition demands and appointed a royalist as the new Prime Minister today, setting the stage for fresh political turmoil.

Opposition parties had proposed their own candidate and said King Gyanendra's choice of Surya Bahadur Thapa was undemocratic.

They vowed to continue nationwide protests that forced his predecessor out last week.

Gyanendra, brought to power by a royal massacre which shocked Nepal two years ago, also transferred his executive powers to Thapa, a four-time Prime Minister, and asked him to form a Cabinet from all major parties, a palace statement said.

"This is undemocratic. The king has ignored the recommendations of the five opposition



Newly appointed Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa in Kathmandu on Wednesday. (Reuters)

parties," Nepali Congress spokesperson Arjun Narsingh K.C. said.

"Our agitation will continue. The Nepali Congress will not join in the new government."

Other opposition parties were expected to follow suit.

Because of the strength of the opposition, analysts said Thapa's term as Nepal's 13th Prime Minister in as many years might be brief.

"I think the king is going in for a direct confrontation with the opposition parties," said Rabinendra Khanal, who teaches political science at the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu.

"This shows the shortsightedness of the king."

Thapa, 75, leads the Rastriya Prajatantra Party of Lokendra Bahadur Chand, who quit as Prime Minister on Friday after months of protests by Congress and four other opposition parties.

"The country is in crisis. I urge everybody's support," Thapa told reporters. He is expected to be sworn in tomorrow.

Thapa said his immediate priorities were to secure cross-party support and to end a Maoist rebellion that has killed more than 7,200 people since 1996.

The Maoists, who began peace talks with Chand's administration after a surprise ceasefire in January, were unfazed by Thapa's appointment.

"The change of guard by the king will not make any material difference," chief negotiator and Maoist number-two Babu Ram Bhattarai said.

Before Chand's resignation, talks had already stalled over the government's delay in meeting a Maoist demand to send the army back to its barracks.

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THE TELEGRAPH

On the face of it

Why Nepal must pay the piper

Lokendra Bahadur Chand's resignation as Prime Minister only serves to throw more mud on an already murky scenario in Nepal. Not that he had a choice, following the mass movement by four major parties against his government. Appointed last October after King Gyanendra dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba caretaker government for its inability to hold mid-term polls in November as scheduled, he sought to defer the process by six to 12 months. Nepal's constitution does not permit poll date extension by more than six months. Chand's primary duty was to create conditions conducive to holding a snap poll by persuading Maoist rebels to come to terms, but he faced obstacles. Then when the government made some concessions, the rebels called a ceasefire in January but sat down to a formal dialogue only last month.

The Himalayan kingdom has been in a mess for over a year after Deuba recommended parliament's dissolution and a fresh poll following rifts in the ruling Nepali Congress over the extension of emergency. This eventually split the party. If Nepal's 13-year-old multi-party democracy must be preserved, politicians of every hue have to evolve a consensus. And Nepali Congress chief GP Koirala's suggestion that parliament be revived seems the best possible solution for the moment. General elections are, in any case, due in May next year and there is little point in a snap poll now. Any new government will have enough time to ensure security, albeit with some sort of commitment from the Maoists. Without their cooperation, there is little hope of a return to normality.

Tibetan refugees face Chinese punishment

Stateaman News Service & AP

BEIJING/ KATHMANDU, June 2. — China will punish a group of 18 Tibetans who illegally crossed into Nepal and were sent back to China last weekend, a Communist Party newspaper said today.

"These Tibetans illegally entered the territory of Nepal, violating the relevant laws of the government of China," the *Global Times* said, citing a Chinese foreign ministry statement. "Their behaviour will be punished under the law." The Foreign Ministry didn't immediately respond to requests to confirm the report.

On Saturday, the Nepal government had clandestinely deported back to China a group of asylum seekers from Tibet, ignoring requests by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for their custody.

The group, mostly farmers, included four teenaged girls, three boys below 15 and three children below 10. The oldest member of the group was 30. "They were trying to escape to Nepal because they said they had no freedom and rights in Tibet," said Mr Wangchuk Tsering, representative of the Tibetan Refugee

Welfare Office in Kathmandu.

"Some of them were monks who said they were not allowed to practise their religion and wanted to reach the monasteries in Dharamshala. Some of the girls said they wanted to go to India for education since education was costly in Tibet and it didn't teach Tibetan language or customs."

USA raps Nepal

KATHMANDU, June 2. — The USA today strongly reacted to the Nepal government's deportation of 18 Tibetan refugees to the Chinese government. "The US government deplores the Nepal government's deportation of 18 Tibetan asylum seekers to China," a press release issued by the US embassy here said. The action not violated international norms and also tarnished government of Nepal's long standing and well-deserved reputation for tolerance. — PTI

Criticising the deportation of the asylum seekers, Mr Tsering said: "This is the first time the Nepalese government has officially handed over Tibetan refugees to China and that too in Kathmandu and on a Saturday, which is a government holiday when no official work is done.

"There must have been immense pressure put on them by the Chinese

authorities to stop the refugees from escaping as their tales of being suppressed in Tibet would give the lie to the Chinese government's claim that Tibetans are happy in China. We are shocked and grieved that Nepal deported them in spite of appeals by the UNHCR. Those deported people are bound to face torture, imprisonment and hard labour and will certainly continue to remain under observation even after that."

Madhav Nepal stakes claim to form govt

Sudeshna Sarkar in Kathmandu

June 2. — A Left leader chosen by five parliamentary parties as their candidate for the post of Nepal's Prime Minister today staked his claim to form the new government, party sources said.

Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal, general-secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist-Leninist, was chosen as the consensus candidate by the Nepali Congress, the Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party, People's Front and a splinter of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party besides his own after Prime Minister Mr Lokendra Bahadur Chand resigned on Friday.

Mr Nepal staked his claim on a day regarded in the Nepalese calendar as the day of the royal massacre, which passed without notable memorial programmes in Kathmandu today.

The connection between the royal massacre and Mr Nepal, however, does not end here. A party leader said: "Mr Nepal was asked to be on the committee investigating the royal massacre in June 2001, but he declined, saying it was not his party's mandate. This has made the palace regard him in an unfavourable light, as someone not amenable to the palace's will."

Earlier, King Gyanendra, who gave collective audience to the five parties as well as the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and the Nepali Congress (Democratic), had asked them to come up with a consensus candidate by Monday.

THE STATESMAN

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THE STATESMAN

Parties keen on interim govt

King pressured on new regime

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Kathmandu, May 31 (Reuters): Thousands of Nepalis protested across the country today as Opposition parties kept up their pressure on the king for a new government of national unity, a day after the caretaker Prime Minister quit.

"We don't want an arbitrary king," said pamphlets handed out by chanting protesters, some waving red flags, as they marched peacefully through the narrow, ancient streets of the capital, Kathmandu.

After eight months of increasing protests, Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand — the 12th Prime Minister since 1990 — resigned yesterday to help ease pressure from Opposition parties on King Gyanendra.

Gyanendra appointed Chand, widely seen as the king's man, after assuming executive powers and sacking Chand's predecessor in October in a row over the timing of national elections.

Chand's resignation brought fresh political uncertainty to the troubled Himalayan nation and cast a shadow over peace talks with Maoist rebels.

Gyanendra has asked the five parties plus two others, including Chand's, to propose a candidate for Prime Minister.

But the main Opposition parties want to form a new interim administration themselves, or for Gyanendra to reinstate the parliament he dissolved in May last year.

The latest crisis comes two years after the crown prince massacred nine members of the royal family and then killed himself, bringing Gyanendra to the throne.

The second anniversary of the massacre is on Monday, according to the Nepali calendar, when the Opposition groups plan their biggest rallies yet.

Last week, as the world media spotlight focused on Nepal for celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the scaling of Mount Everest, at least 20 people, including ousted lawmakers, were injured when police broke up a rally in Kathmandu.

Newspapers on Saturday welcomed Chand's departure.

"Lokendra Bahadur Chand may have been an insignificant political personality, but his departure will be far more significant politically," *The Kathmandu Post* said in its editorial.

"It paves the way for initiating the much-awaited conciliatory process between the king and the political parties."

Nepal parties feel the heat

DEEPAK THAPA

Kathmandu, May 12: Less than a week after five political parties initiated a mass movement against the ouster of the Sher Bahadur Deuba government last year, the political temperature is again rising in Nepal.

The country has witnessed daily protests calling for the restoration of parliament and the formation of a "sovereign all-party government".

The government of Lokendra Bahadur Chand had warned that strong action would be taken against protesters. Yesterday, it followed up its threat by attacking protesters during a banned rally in Kathmandu.

A number of senior political leaders were injured during the police charge and 11 protesters were arrested. A police official said officers used "mild force" but would not comment on

whether people were injured. The government last week banned torchlight protests, saying they were dangerous.

The parties condemned the government move and a rally was held today in Kathmandu with two Opposition heavyweights, former Prime Minister and president of the Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala and general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) Madhav Kumar Nepal, in attendance.

These developments come amidst growing political confusion.

Days after King Gyanendra expressed concern about the line of action taken by Opposition parties during a meeting with the king and said a constitutional monarch should not air his views through the press.

As reported in the daily *Kan-*

tipur, Koirala has accused the king of trying to pit the parties against each other. The army has also warned the Opposition parties against making any anti-monarchy remarks.

This comes after comments by Opposition leaders against the king and his son during protest marches.

The defence ministry yesterday accused Opposition parties of undermining national sovereignty and said it was ready to protect the country's security.

The parties "are engaged in activities that seek to undermine the integrity, sovereignty and independence of the country," the ministry said in a statement late yesterday.

"The ministry is ever ready to fulfil the responsibility of national security," it said, without elaborating.

No other government comment was available. It was un-

clear what had prompted the ministry's statement or what steps it would take.

The only organisation that doesn't seem to be affected by the present scenario are the Maoists.

They have been enjoying a breather since a ceasefire in January this year and have participated in two rounds of talks with the government.

The rebels hope to take up political issues during their next meeting with the government.

So far, the government has already conceded to one Maoist demand that the army be reined in. According to the agreement reached on Friday, army movements will be restricted within a 5-km radius of the barracks.

The government has also agreed to release three central committee members of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) currently under custody.

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THE TELEGRAPH

Nepal will partially withdraw army from rebel areas

Kathmandu: Nepal government has agreed to partially withdraw the army from rebel areas and release three central level Maoist leaders at the end of a second round of peace talks which the two sides termed as "satisfactory".

"As per our demands for the withdrawal of the Royal Nepalese Army from the Maoist areas, the meeting on Friday agreed to withdraw the army to within five kilometres of their barracks," Maoist negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara said while addressing a joint press conference with government negotiator Narayan Singh Pun.

"It was agreed that the army would not go beyond five kms from their barracks", Mr Mahara said.

Though the talks did not touch on the political agenda put forth by the Maoists earlier, the negotiating parties decided to set up a 13-member talks monitoring committee with participation by the government, the Maoists and civil society organisations.

"The talks were satisfactory," Mr Pun said after the

conclusion of the three-hour long dialogue.

Though the negotiators did not enter into the three-point political agenda of round-table conference, interim government and constituent assembly elections put forth by Maoists, the government said the political agenda would be discussed in the next round of talks, the date and venue of which has not yet been fixed.

The home-works committee comprising two members each from the Maoists and the government will fix the date, Mr Pun said, adding it will study the political agenda in detail so that the matter could be taken up during next meet.

He said the talks monitoring committee will oversee the implementation of 22-point code of conduct formulated on March 13 to facilitate peace talks.

Other than the government and Maoists, it will have representatives from the Human Rights Commission, Federation of Nepalese Journalists Association, Women's Commission and Dalit Commission, Mr Pun said. PTI

Parties wary of tie-up with Maoists

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Kathmandu, May 4: The political parties in Nepal would like to come to an understanding with the Maoists but find themselves pushed to the margins of the present peace process. They remain unsure of a potential relationship with the Maoists.

Expressing grave apprehensions about a possible settlement between the king and the Maoists, former Prime Minister G.P. Koirala said: "Two forces wielding guns — the monarchy and the Maoists — are trying to negotiate a settlement. But the interests of civil society cannot be protected by those whose legitimacy comes from the possession of arms. That is why there is a need for an understanding with the democratic forces."

The Constitution which emerged out of the democratic movement culminating in multi-party democracy in 1990 is a bone of contention between the Maoists and the main political parties — the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) or UML.

According to the Maoists, that Constitution had failed. They are demanding a three-step resolution to the present crisis: a round table conference, an interim government emerging out of the round table conference and then elections to a Constituent Assembly which will frame a new Constitution.

Although the Maoists claim that they are Republicans, they have now said they would accept a constitutional monarchy if the people want it.

Former foreign minister Chakra Prasad Bastola of the Nepali Congress thinks that the Maoist demand for a Constituent

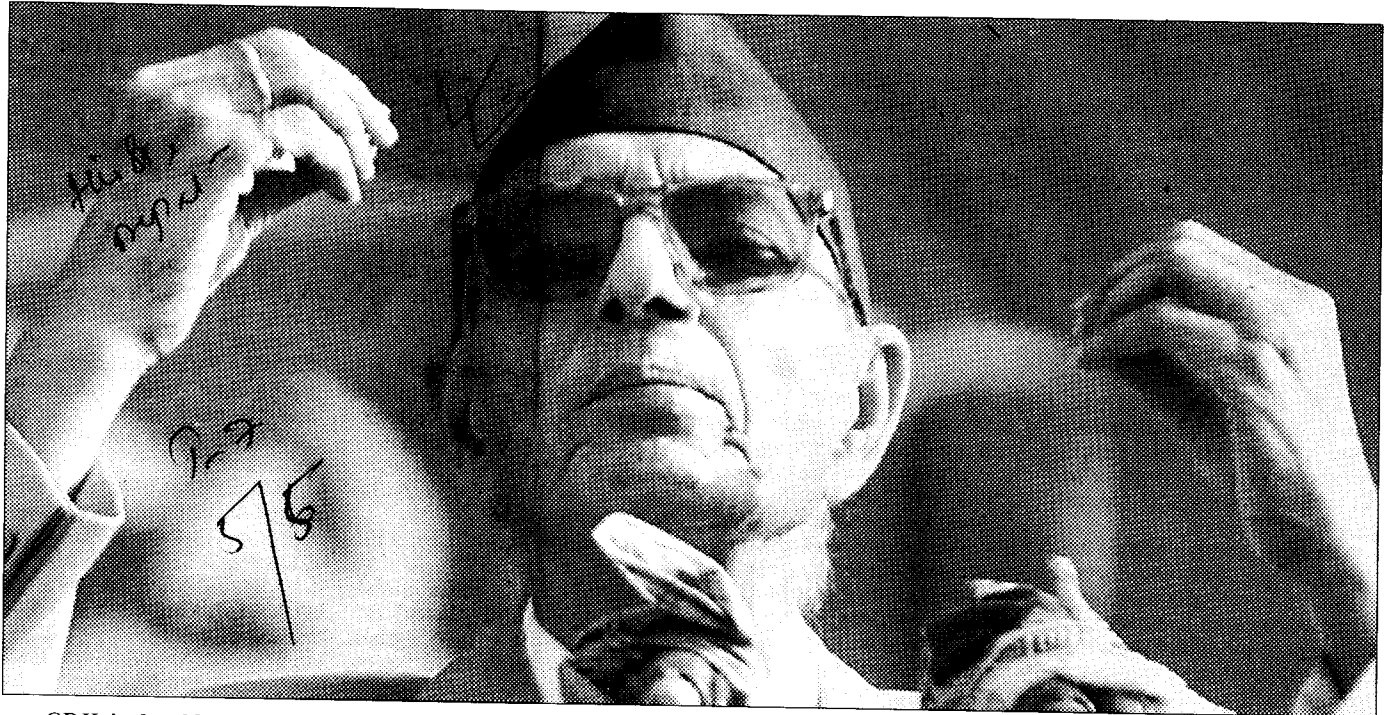
Assembly was primarily to de-legitimise the gains of the democratic movement. "The Maoists are saying that this Constitution has failed and so have the political parties and, therefore, there should be an evolution to a stage where they should be pre-eminent. But this would only glorify terrorism and violence," he argued.

Bastola felt that while the political parties supported a move for peace they could not agree that the present Constitution had failed. "If the Maoists had won, there would be a dictatorship of the proletariat in this country. But their armed revolution has not succeeded and they are in negotiation with an authoritarian king. The dialogue between two illegitimate political forces is being projected as legitimate. This will neither abolish monarchy nor lead to greater democratisation."

Madhav Kumar Nepal, former deputy Prime Minister and the general secretary of UML, argued:

"Nowhere has monarchy been abolished through negotiations. If the Maoists think that a Republic can be established through a dialogue, then they are mistaken. If, however, they are willing to accept constitutional monarchy, then they must explain why they took up guns, killed thousands of their countrymen and destroyed billions of rupees worth of property."

Madhav Nepal thinks that the Maoists are not for a Republic but for a reformed monarchy. Since the political parties also want the democratisation of the monarchy, "it makes sense for the Maoists to join hands with the political parties as long as they follow the norms of pluralistic and democratic societies," he argued.



GP Koirala addresses a meeting in Kathmandu on Sunday to protest against the sacking of the elected government by the king. Five major political parties jointly organised the protest. (Reuters)

The political parties are not clear about the long-term agenda of the Maoists. Koirala who has met the Maoists several times claims that they are confused.

"I am not against the round table conference but there are several issues on which they could not satisfy me — What will be its composition of the round table? What will be its agenda? If that agenda is accepted, who will endorse it — the king or a non-existent Parliament? As for their demand for an interim government, I said that they could join it along with the political parties represented in the dissolved Parliament and organise elections. But when I asked them what was their agenda for the Constituent Assembly, they only said that they want a progressive (*agrangi*) Constitution? But what "progressive" means is never clarified.

We have a Constitution, so why junk it? Isn't a bird in hand better than two in the bush?" he asked.

Koirala wants the 1990 Constitution activated so that Parliament can come into being — either through an election or by reviving the old one. That Parliament could then endorse the creation of a Constituent Assembly.

The coalition of five parties which is launching a 'satyagraha' movement now, has a broad consensus on formation of an all-party government — either through an election or by revival of Parliament, which would hold negotiations with the Maoists and then invite them to join the government. This government would generate a consensus for changes in the Constitution either through major amend-

ments in the 1990 Constitution or through a Constituent Assembly.

Not all political parties, however, believe that a resolution can be sought under the old Constitution. C.P. Mainali of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist Leninist) argued that the 1990 Constitution represented a compromise between the king and the Nepali Congress and the Left forces.

"That compromise has been abrogated by the palace. Clearly it was proving to be inadequate in the present circumstances. There is no compromise between the new political forces and those thrown up by the 1990 democratic movement. This is a period of transition which requires a transitional government representing all the forces — the Maoists, the political parties and the representatives of

the monarchy. Such a government cannot be formed under the old Constitution. It should be formed with an agreement between the major political forces. This government should then work for remaking the Constitution through progressive change," Mainali said.

Leelamani Pokhrel, ideologue of an important Left-wing parliamentary party, the Samyukta Jan Morcha, said: "The Maoists will not come into Parliament under this Constitution. Do not forget that they were in Parliament earlier and left it to take up arms. So their bottom-line is a Constituent Assembly. I think that most politically conscious people in Nepal today are for a Constituent Assembly. Whether the king should be there or not, let the Constituent Assembly decide."

**INSIDE
NEPAL**

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THE TELEGRAPH

MONARCHY AND MAOISM

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Talks Do Not Remove Uncertainty

By PARMANAND

At long last, His Majesty's government of Nepal and the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) held talks in a hotel located near the royal palace, Narayanhity Durbar, on 27 April. A great deal of homework had been done by the two sides. A ceasefire had been in force since 29 January; a code of conduct had come into effect; several Maoist leaders and cadres had been released to create a congenial environment; above all, the Maoists had apparently given up a bit of their obstinacy on the future polity.

It will not be an exaggeration to suggest that no one had expected any magical outcome. The way HMG had been taking the United Revolutionary People's Council — the decision-making committee of the NCP (Maoist) — after the ceasefire, many had felt the former was not serious in beginning a fresh dialogue. In fact, various leaders of People's War, who are said to have been inspired by Peru's Shining Path, had been saying the government was not interested in any dialogue. Significantly, the Maoists, like mainstream parliamentary political parties, had also been terming the Chand government "illegal" and "unconstitutional", and had been insisting on talking with King Gyanendra.

Ceasefire

The talks were held after a gap of 17 months — the last round having been held on 13 November 2001. In between, many events having serious implications occurred in the landlocked mountain kingdom. Nepal saw the Maoist insurgents going to war against the state, emergency being imposed and withdrawn, the popularly elected Pratinidhi Sabha being dissolved before its five-year term ended, a government with a popular mandate being dismissed and, above all, the executive powers of the state being usurped by a perceived constitutional monarch.

After the declaration of a ceasefire on 29 January this year, the Maoists had made three key political demands: a round-table conference to be attended by all political parties, the government and the king; an interim government in place of the present Lokendra Bahadur Chand government; and a constituent assembly that will draw up a new constitution. On 27 April, both sides stressed the talks had been held in a cordial atmosphere.

The government team was headed by Deputy Prime Minister Badri Prasad Mandal. Other members were: information and communications minister Ramesh Nath Pandey, health minister Upendra Devkota, labour minister Kamal Prasad Chulagai, physical planning minister Narayan Singh

Pun, and assistant minister Anuradha Koirala. Earlier, the Maoists side had shown reservations about Badri Prasad Mandal heading the government team. Dr Baburam Bhattarai, coordinator of the Maoist talks team, had said that Mandal did not represent the sentiments of the Terai people. The Terai is located in the southern part of Nepal and the people of Indian origin, called the Madheshis, constitute a majority there. The Madheshis differ culturally from the Paharis (hillmen)

and Sabha. He has been criticising King Gyanendra for his acts in the kingdom's politics.

On 26 April, speaking at a public meeting organised by the Nepali Congress District Committee at Kanchanpur, Koirala warned against the end of monarchy if the king fails to comprehend time and history. He claimed that the uprising would reach a decisive point encompassing people at all levels. Blaming the palace for the current instability, he said the trait of the divinity in the king had been



who constitute a majority in the overall Nepalese population. Significantly Mandal is the best Madheshi to become the Kingdom's deputy premier.

The five-member Maoist team, apart from Bhattarai, included Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a former member of Nepali Parliament, and Matrika Prasad Yadav. No date has been set for the next round of talks but they are likely to begin soon. The one-day talk between the two sides took place after more than 7,500 Nepalese — including army and police personnel, political leaders and activists and other innocent Nepalese — lost their lives. The Maoists have been demanding abolition of monarchy and establishment of a republican form of government.

Divinity

After the conclusion of the 27 April talks, Krishna Bahadur Mahara said that the two sides had agreed to appoint four facilitators who are expected to give fillip to the talk and iron out differences. The Maoist leaders had met leaders of mainstream parliamentary political parties, including former Prime Minister and President of the Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala, and former deputy Prime Minister and general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) Madhav Kumar Nepal. In fact, Koirala has been leading a movement to revive the dissolved Prati-

lost since the 1 June incident. He stated: "Now the people are incarnation of Lord Vishnu".

Significantly, divinity has not been attached to Nepalese monarchy since its inception; indeed it was contrived and added to this institution by one Rana Prime Minister (a hereditary post between 1846 and 1951) to suit the power and privilege of the office. It was the seventh Shah king, Prithvi Narayan Shah, who for the first time came to be known as "Shah Deva". It is only since then that the theory of the monarch being the incarnation of Vishnu also came to be known. The Ranas had, through this theory, made the Shah kings unapproachable to the people. In any case, the office of the hereditary Rana Prime Minister was made immensely strong at the cost of hereditary kingship.

Be that as it may, Girija Prasad Koirala does not want the government-Maoist talks to fail. Addressing a rally of workers and labourers on the 114th May Day in Kathmandu, Koirala warned both the government and the Maoists not to look for a cause for fleeing the negotiating table. UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, who, along with Koirala, is going to launch a "decisive and different" joint movement from 4 May, echoed similar warnings and sentiments.

On their part, the Maoists are not taking the talks casually. In an interview to an Indian daily only

recently, Baburam Bhattarai said: "We have not surrendered, the struggle is on: it is only a ceasefire". He stressed: "We don't want to go back to arms, but will be forced to do so if the monarchy doesn't have a helpful attitude". Indeed, a Catch-22 situation is developing.

On its part, HMG is not taking any chances. It has learnt from past experience. In fact, an agreement between HMG and the USA and the visit of the Indian Army chief to Nepal before the commencement of the bilateral talks had angered Bhattarai. On 25 April, Nepal and the USA signed a Memorandum of Intent formalising both nations' participation in anti-terrorism assistance programme. Nepal's home secretary Tika Dutta Niraula and US Ambassador to Nepal Michael Malinowski signed the agreement to allow further cooperation between both the states in their fight against terrorism.

Terrorism

The programme focuses on advanced investigative security, and counter-terrorism techniques with the idea of rooting out all forms of terrorism and deterring future terrorist acts, according to a statement issued by the US Embassy in Kathmandu. The five-year programme will adopt a multi-disciplinary approach, stress respect for human rights and employ subject experts from the US government agencies. Nepal is one of the 127 states that have taken part in this programme to combat terrorist activities.

The statement added that this agreement was a symbol of the special relationship that existed between the US and Nepal and their mutual interest in halting terrorism. The anti-terrorism programme started in 1988 by the US Congress provides training, consultation and equipment resource assistance to partner nations. In the past two years, over 200 Nepalese officers have received training in eight specialised areas.

The visit of the Indian army chief, Gen NC Vij, before the bilateral talks, was a coincidence in as much as his visits programme had been fixed well in advance. In any case, India has never hidden its predilections for a constitutional monarchy based on multi-party democracy. It has shown its unhappiness over the marginalisation of political parties. Nor has it ever hesitated in helping HMG in curbing terrorism. Indeed, many feel that the ceasefire came into existence because of India's dealing with the Maoists in its own territory.

Achieving a meaningful peace and institutionalising democracy in Nepal does not appear to be an easy affair. But Nepal's failure on this front would only make things difficult for every segment of society.

31 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

The author is Hon. Director, South Asian Studies Foundation, New Delhi.

Kathmandu logjam

NEPAL'S FLEDGLING democracy has remained in a jam for much too long. Since King Gyanendra threw out Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's government and assumed executive powers last October, the Maoist insurgents are the only ones to have made conspicuous gains. The palace could not suppress the rebels and was obliged to accede to their demand for a ceasefire and subsequent dialogue on how the country ought to be run. The agenda included the question of whether it was time to switch to a republican State from the constitutional monarchy that was in place until last October.

That dialogue officially began last Sunday with the main political parties boycotting it. Perhaps they do not wish to confer legitimacy on the King-Maoist equation by participating in discussions initiated entirely by these non-elected actors. The parties have instead sought to mount pressure to revive Parliament. They have not suc-

ceeded. In part, the failure is the result of the hopeless divisions in their ranks. They appear to have learned little from the inglorious episodes of May last year when the prime minister dissolved Parliament without consulting his party, the Nepali Congress, leading to a debilitating split in the NC. He was unable to hold elections in the stipulated six months because the Maoists threatened to disrupt the polls. The king chose the prime minister's inability to hold elections to send him packing.

Since then, the king has not only made no move toward fresh elections but is also in discussion with those who are opposed to the polls. He may be counting on outmanoeuvring the Maoists, but the dissidents are today much stronger than before. India needs to watch the situation so that its security concerns are not prejudiced. The insurgents have made no bones that they wish to overhaul Nepal's traditional ties with this country.

THINK IT OVER

Some headway in Nepal peace talks

51-2
Sudeshna Sarkar in Kathmandu

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29/4

April 28. — After three rounds of aborted talks and a postponement, when the Nepal government finally sat down for a fresh round of peace talks with Maoist rebels here, there was a third unseen presence at the dialogue — India's.

The Maoists had made three key political demands after the declaration of a ceasefire on 29 January. They want a roundtable conference which should be attended by all political parties, the government and the king, an interim government in place of the present Lokendra Bahadur Chand government, which they term unconstitutional, and a constituent assembly that will draw up a new constitution.

But yesterday, when the five-member Maoist dialogue team headed by the rebels' second-in-command, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, met the six-member ministerial team for four and a half-hour-long parley, there were more demands on their political agenda.

The Maoists want the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 to be scrapped since it is against Nepal's interests. They also want the government to regulate the open border between India and Nepal and stop accepting military assistance from foreign governments. These demands come in the wake of the USA on Friday signing a memorandum of intent with Nepal to strengthen both nations' participation in the Anti-terrorism Assistance programme. This would enable Nepal to get training and equipment assistance for investigative and counter-terrorism techniques.

The rebels have scaled down their 40-point demands to 24, which include the end of foreign monopoly in industry, trade and commerce and an end to foreign intervention in the name of operating NGOs. They have also demanded a stop to recruiting Gurkha soldiers to foreign armies, integrating the Royal Nepalese Army with their People's Liberation Army and making Nepal a secular nation.

29 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

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Welcome talks

Hopefully peace will return to Nepal

W.S.

Much bloodshed could have been avoided had the Nepal government and Maoist rebels realised earlier that prolonged confrontation was in neither's interest. Since February 1996 when the Maoists first struck, about 7,200 have reportedly died, most of them after the Emergency was declared in November 2001. The peace dialogue that began last week after almost three months of a declared truce will be widely welcomed and hopefully something positive will emerge, unlike the earlier occasion when disinterest led to Emergency. The Maoists came to the negotiating table at the instance of a human rights organisation and two facilitators. The Lokendra Bahadur Chand government paved the way by removing the terrorist tag on Maoists and withdrawing an Interpol Red Notice for the arrests of their top leaders. Details are not available but the Maoists' major demands include a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution and a secular republic.

The scenario is obscured by major parties refusing to recognise the interim Chand government and participate in talks. With King Gyanendra having to follow a purposeful policy, few can read his mind for he has not been transparent. Failure to quell Maoist activities despite the deployment of a special task force proves there is no alternative to talks. Nepal may need the help of international mediators as in the case of Sri Lanka. And being an immediate neighbour, India has a crucial role.

Nepal rebels, govt happy with first round of talks

Agence France Presse

KATHMANDU, April 27. — The Nepal government and Maoist rebels today said they were "satisfied" after their first round of peace talks, but the guerrillas demanded that the army be recalled to barracks within a week.

After five hours of closed-door talks at a Kathmandu hotel, chief rebel negotiator Mr Babu Ram Bhattarai said the Maoists also wanted insurgent prisoners released within 15 days. "The government should also immediately make public the whereabouts of Maoist activists who have disappeared," he told a press conference, adding an anti-terrorism law introduced last year should be scrapped. He did not however say what the rebels would do if their conditions were not met. At a separate press conference held jointly by the rebels and the government, minister for communications Mr Ramesh Nath Pandey said: "The talks were very satis-

factory and we are very much encouraged of a successful conclusion."

"We have concluded the meeting with better understanding and in order to move ahead we have appointed a monitoring committee," Maoist talks team member Mr KB Mahara said. The four-member committee will decide the date and venue of the next round of talks, Mr Mahara said, adding: "it will be very soon." The committee members will be Maoist negotiators Mr Mahara and Mr RB Thapa with Mr Pandey and Mr Narayan Singh Pun representing the government. Mr Mahara said the committee would consider the "political, social and economic proposals" put forward by the Maoists at the meeting. It will also make changes to the 22-point code of conduct (CoC) which was signed in March. "The CoC was not implemented to our satisfaction which created misunderstandings," Mr Mahara said.

The talks were preceded by handshakes between the two sides in front of the press at the talks venue.

28 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

Unofficial House revival plan in Nepal

BHARAT BHUSHAN

Kathmandu, April 24: When nothing seems to be going right, when parliament stands dissolved and elected politicians stand on the margins of the polity while those with guns stand centre-stage and steal the limelight along with the king, what can those who believe in democratic politics do? Revive democratic institutions at the popular level.

Sounds strange? But exercising "popular sovereignty" is exactly what a coalition of five major Nepalese political parties is attempting to do to break the political impasse in their country. They are planning to unofficially revive parliament, municipal bodies, district and village development committees and "operationalise" them.

Precisely how parliament and the local bodies would be "operationalised" is not clear. What is clear, however, is that politics in Nepal is going to heat up further once these bodies start meeting unofficially against the wishes of the government. This might precipitate another crisis in Nepal.

The unofficial "revival" of the dissolved parliament is likely to be attempted before May 4. On that day, the political parties will formally launch a mass movement for restoration of democratic rights in Nepal.

"We will revive parliament unofficially at the popular level by calling all those who were MPs in the dissolved House to attend. The Speaker is still there. He has not been sacked. The MPs will urge him to convene the House and find a suitable constitutional provision for doing so. Even if we have to hold our parliament on the roads of Kathmandu, we will do so," said a former MP and Nepali Congress leader.

But what would be the legitimacy of such a move? "The Maoists are seeking legitimacy because of their guns. The king seeks legitimacy by abrogating the Constitution. These two forces are holding peace talks and using the argument for the need for peace to de-legitimise the democratic forces."

Should that be accepted by everyone in the name of peace? "What is the legitimacy of keeping the country without a parliament for more than six months? Our Constitution does not permit this. We as MPs had a mandate from the people. We

still have that mandate and we will not give it up till there is a new mandate through a new election," the Nepali Congress leader replied.

For the time being, however, the political parties have taken a decision to unofficially "revive" only the municipalities, district development committees and the village development committees. They instructed local body chiefs owing allegiance to them to "operationalise" these institutions forthwith at a meeting today at Lalitpur, adjoining Kathmandu.

A majority of the local bodies in Nepal was controlled by the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) or the UML and the Nepali Congress.

They were dissolved by the erstwhile Sher Bahadur Deuba government because of its inability to hold elections to these bodies in the constitutionally stipulated timeframe because of the Maoist problem. The Deuba government itself was dismissed when King Gyanendra dissolved parliament on October 4, 2002.

The coalition of political parties agitating against the king received a boost today. Until Wednesday, the coalition comprised the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), the Mazdoor Kisan Party and the Samyukta Jan Morcha (itself a coalition of five Marxist groups in parliament). Today, it was joined by the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, representing the demands of the people of the Terai region.

All these parties had representation in the dissolved parliament which, in their view, was illegally dissolved. Essentially, this leaves out only the pro-Monarchist Rashtriya Prajatantrik Party and Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress (Democratic) which is opposed to the king.

The coalition of parties has not yet taken a formal decision to "revive" parliament but has been discussing this issue.

It was on the agenda of the last all-party meet convened by the UML at its headquarters — all-party meetings are organised under the rotating chairmanship of its constituents. Today's meet, organised by the Samyukta Jan Morcha, touched on the necessity of reviving parliament but did not take any decision on the issue.

Nepal bandh

DEEPAK THAPA

Kathmandu, April 20: Another strike stifled Nepal today, but it was called by student organisations allied to major political parties, not by Maoists, the usual enforcers.

The strike brought life to a standstill, with a few stray incidents of violence amidst tight security, as the students set out to enforce the bandh.

Today's strike was part of a three-day bandh, the next round being scheduled for April 28-29. The Himalayan kingdom, plagued by strikes and political unrest since last year — with the Maoist struggle on one hand and pro-democracy protests on the other — has been in the grip of a wave of student protests since early this year.

The student demonstrations, which initially began in response to the steep hike in fuel prices soon after the Iraq war, took a different turn after a protester was shot dead inside his campus on April 4, in the southwestern town of Butwal.

While a government probe into the shooting revealed that it was uncalled for, the protests had by then spun out of control.

On the political front, parties have chalked out their own plan of action against the king's takeover of executive authority of the state in October last year. Although this is the third time they have threatened joint action, the students' agitation may just provide it with the momentum to carry it through. The government seems at a loss about how

to control a situation slowly spiralling out of control. It is facing fire on three fronts: the students, the political parties and Maoists, who have declared the negotiations the latest 'front' in their 'people's war'.

NEPAL AT THE CROSSROADS

Democracy Or Dictatorship?

By SUDESHNA SARKAR

558 18/11
April is considered landmark time in the history of Nepal since 13 years ago, when a people's movement led by the National Congress Party and the United Left Front succeeded in overthrowing the repressive panchayat regime and installed multiparty democracy. The event is celebrated on 9-10 April as Jana Andolan Diwas, People's Movement Day.

This time too, the month is a crucial time with peace talks on the anvil between the government and the Maoist insurgents, who declared a truce on 29 January after seven years of guerrilla warfare that left over 7,200 people dead. In fact, the end of this week will see the ceasefire reaching its 73rd day, 48 hours longer than an earlier truce called in 2001.

The past

In 2001, the peace dialogues between the then Sher Bahadur Deuba government lasted for 71 days, from 30 August to 9 November, after which the Maoists broke off negotiations and attacked an army barrack. The attack triggered a draconian period of emergency clamped down by the government when rights violations were the norm, rather than the exception. As Informal Sector Service Centre, the largest human rights organisation in Nepal, estimated in its human rights year book, 3,847 people were killed during the period of emergency alone, which lasted from 26 November, 2001 to 28 August, 2002. The Maoists were responsible for 722 deaths while the state killed 3,125 people.

The past history is coming back to haunt Nepal with the momentum for holding peace talks having hit an inexplicable low. After the ceasefire, the Maoists named a five-member team of negotiators, who came out of hiding to try persuade the other major political parties to participate in the peace talks. The government, on its part, removed the terrorist tag on the outfit as well as the bounty on the heads of the party's top leaders. It also released several detained rebel cadre and with much fanfare, both sides agreed to a code of conduct for governing the dialogues.

But since then, there has been no further progress. The lull coincides with King Gyanendra's much-publicised pilgrimage to Indian holy sites for 10 days, lending credence to the speculation that it's the palace that is the other party to the peace talks and not the Lokendra Bahadur Chand

government. The government, since its installation on 4 October, is widely regarded as the "puppet" of King Gyanendra, who is also said to be controlling the army. Assumption of all executive powers by the monarch is not a new phenomenon in Nepal.

The present dynasty has been at the helm of real power since 1951, when King Tribhuwan, the present

and constitutional monarchy, as opposed to absolute monarchy.

Therefore, it was considered a grave violation of the constitution when on 4 October King Gyanendra unilaterally sacked the constitutionally elected government of Deuba and installed his own nominees, most of whom were not members of parliament. Since then, the king is said to have been



king's grandfather, won the political tussle with his once all-powerful Prime Minister Rana, the de facto dynastic ruler of Nepal, and abolished the prerogatives enjoyed by the puissant Rana clan since 1846. King Tribhuwan also promulgated the Interim Government of Nepal Act, 1951, giving all state rights to himself and his cabinet.

Constitution

His son king Mahendra suspended most of the articles of the 1959 constitution and promulgated a new one in 1962 with the help of his cabinet and a constitution drafting commission. In accordance with the laws of this constitution, a nationwide referendum was held in 1980 when the panchayat system came to power, trouncing multiparty democracy.

However, the regime, controlled by the king and royal favourites, proved as repressive as any dictatorship and was overthrown by a mass uprising in 1990 when the Nepali Congress came to power and a new constitution was drafted.

The new constitution, the result of the balance of power between the king, the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front, acknowledged people as the sovereign instead of the monarch and consolidated the parliamentary system

controlling the government and even efforts for the peace talks with the Maoists. Narayan Singh Pun, minister for physical planning and works, who is the government's representative for negotiating with the Maoists, is said to be actually an emissary of the monarch.

There were two interesting developments since the installation of the Chand government, leading further credence to the allegations of autocracy against King Gyanendra. The first was an ordinance introduced by the so-called "puppet" government.

The Royal Family Expenditure Management (1st amendment) Ordinance 2002 passed last year enables the king to increase and change at his discretion the facilities and allowances he and his family enjoy, a move that was criticised by the major parties.

The second was the Dipta Prakash Shah incident in September 2002. Shah, who was nominated to the the National Assembly, the upper house of Parliament, by King Gyanendra, made a statement to the media that the King would form an all-party government, which would include the Maoists as well. The comment created a furore, causing Shah to resign. The MP claimed the palace had forced him to quit. Though

protocol required him to submit his resignation to the chairman of the assembly, it was noted that Shah actually sent his to King Gyanendra, who accepted it the same day.

Consequently, it is not surprising that the image of the king has taken a battering in Nepal, if not outside as well. The major political parties of Nepal, including the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist-Leninist and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist have been calling him autocratic and power-grabbing.

Maoists

At his first public appearance in seven years, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, the Maoists' deputy leader, went on record as saying that the massacre in the palace in June 2001, when the entire family of the then King Birendra was wiped out, reportedly by the then crown prince who was said to be high on drugs, had put the present king under a cloud, especially in the eyes of the international community. Scathing whispers of a secret understanding with the king, Bhattarai also said it would be in the best interests of everyone if the king abdicated.

Finally, the Maoists, said Bhattarai, wanted not only a republic but a secular republic. If Nepal, known as the only Hindu nation in the world, were ever to become a secular nation, it would weaken the present dynasty's position, which is strengthened by the Hinduism factor.

To undermine the king's importance further, the Maoists are now trying to persuade other political parties, whose cadre they had targeted during the insurgency, to take part in the peace talks. They are even wooing the Nepali Congress, which during its 12 years in power marginalised and persecuted the rebels.

It is hoped that King Gyanendra's next move would be tempered by the Indian influence since the king's visit to India is regarded as an occasion to consult Indian leaders on the Maoist issue. As India knows an autocratic ruler in Nepal will not serve its interests, it has made clear it supports multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy in the Himalayan kingdom.

The lack of support both at home and abroad should drive home the choices to the king: either give up executive powers and survive as a constitutional monarch, like in Britain and Japan, or be prepared to be swept out of the palace by another mass uprising.

The author is The Statesman's Kathmandu-based correspondent

Maoists paint Kathmandu red

DEEPAK THAPA

Kathmandu, April 3: It was a scene inconceivable even two months ago: a mass meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) at the Open Air Theatre in the centre of Kathmandu.

Addressing a gathering not seen in the capital since the celebratory first few days after the restoration of democracy in 1990, Maoist leaders expounded on their vision of a Nepal for which they fought a bloody war against the state for seven years.

The occasion was to welcome the five-member negotiating team formed by the rebels after the January 29 ceasefire. In a sea of red flags emblazoned with the Maoist hammer and sickle symbol, the huge crowd stood in the dusty grounds of the theatre for more than two hours and

cheered as each of the five members of the team rose to speak.

Every speaker said the talks were only the latest "front" in the "ongoing people's war". They repeated their commitment to the formation of a constituent assembly, arguing that this was the only way to guarantee the sovereignty of the people.

The team coordinator, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, said: "It was seven years and four months ago I spoke from the same venue and warned the rulers of impending revolution. But they did not listen, and that is why we had to take up arms."

He said that the need for talks arose from the realisation that neither side was winning the war, and that the endless fighting would only give an opportunity for outside forces to become involved.

▶ 4 APR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Nepal, Maoists frame talks guidelines

Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU, March 13. — Nepalese government today signed a 22-point code of conduct with Maoist rebels setting the terms for talks to end their seven year old insurgency that has claimed more than 7,000 lives.

The agreement was signed this afternoon by Mr Narayan Singh Pun, minister of physical planning and Housing and Construction, who is the official coordinator for the talks and Mr Baburam Bhattarai, the talks-coordinator for the rebels.

Addressing a joint press conference after inking the document, the leaders said that the two sides had agreed to continue with the six-weeks old ceasefire and have decided to set up a monitoring committee to keep an eye on the implementation of the code.

Both the sides aired reconciliatory notes. While the Maoists said they did not have any official or person captive and would "release" them if they "came across" any such case, Mr Pun said the government had already initiated the legal process to free all Maoist detainees as the talks started.

While the exact date of the talks was not disclosed, Pun said that the formal talks would be preceded with a round of "goodwill talks", which would be held soon.

Another highlight of the code was that Maoists would get "equal opportunity" to use the state-owned media to disseminate its point of view. The rebels on their part promised to put an end to halt activities like abductions and extortions while the talks were in progress, said Mr Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a Maoist delegate to the talks.

Mr Maharao denied media reports that the Maoists had a meeting with King Gyanendra before agreeing to the ceasefire six weeks ago. "The Government's coordinator Pun is the only person with whom we have met," he said.

The parties have also agreed not to use any force or violent means to achieve their objectives. The government has agreed not to mobilise armed forces against the Maoists and the Maoists agreed not to use their 'People's army' against the other side.

"We want the people to feel real ceasefire while the talks move ahead," Mr Mahara said assuming that they were "sincere and serious" about concluding the peace talks in a fruitful manner.

Maoists ready to live with monarchy

GOPAL SHARMA

Kathmandu, March 14 (Reuters): A top Nepali Maoist leader said yesterday that the rebels would agree to keep the monarchy if people want, in what could mark a major breakthrough towards ending their deadly seven-year insurgency.

The Maoists have long made abolition of the monarchy a hugely popular institution in the poverty-racked Hindu nation, and the setting up of a Communist republic key demands for ending their revolt.

"A Communist republic is our ultimate goal," Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a member of the Maoists' negotiating team, said. But he said the Maoists, who struck an indefinite cease-fire in January with the government, were willing to discuss the future of the monarchy.

"Let us debate and talk about the monarchy," he said. "If the people accept the monarchy, there is no problem. If they reject it, it should go."

Mahara was chief of a three-member rebel team who held peace talks with the government in 2001. He walked out of the negotiations after the government refused to countenance the abolition of the monarchy.

The collapse of the talks led to a spiral in violence in the rebellion that has claimed more than 7,200 lives and deepened Nepal's economic woes by scaring off tourists and investors.

The government and the rebels have agreed to hold peace



Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara. (AFP)

negotiations and government negotiator Narayan Singh Pun said the talks, earlier slated to start this week, would begin soon.

He set no date, but in a signif-

icant step toward starting the dialogue, the government announced it would begin freeing Maoist rebels in its jails.

The government also agreed not to conduct searches for the rebels or detain them. In return, the Maoists agreed to drop their demand for the army — ordered out in 2001 by King Gyanendra to hunt them down — to return to barracks. Nepal has been beset by turmoil since a palace massacre in 2001 that vaulted King Gyanendra to the throne.

Last October, the king fired the elected Prime Minister for seeking to delay elections because of rebel violence and named a staunch monarchist in his place. The king has pledged new polls but set no date.

There had been speculation the Maoists had struck a deal with the king to drop their demand for an end to the monarchy in return for a slice of power but the rebels and the palace have denied any pact.

THE TELEGRAPH

15 MAR 2003

King Gyanendra urged to break political logjam

Kathmandu: Political parties in Nepal on Tuesday urged King Gyanendra to resolve the present political deadlock by "reinstating" the



constitution and parliamentary democracy instead of going for the constituent assembly elections as demanded by the Maoists.

Nepali Congress President G.P. Koirala, who met the king on an invitation, asked him to resolve all the issues, including the Maoist problem, by reinstating constitution and reinstalling the House of Representatives, party spokesman said. "Parliament is the only institution to deal with the present political crisis engulfing the country," Mr Koirala said during the meeting.

In a separate meeting, Nepal Communist Party-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal requested the king to "honour the present constitution and multi-party system instead of going for the constituent assembly elections demanded by the Maoists.

Gyanendra took up the initiative to hold consultations with leaders of the major parties to end the deadlock as his handpicked Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand failed to gain confidence of the parties to deal with the current political crisis.

"The solution to all problems lies in involving political parties in decision-making," Mr Nepal told the king and reiterated his party's demand of forming an all-party government to find a way out from the present political deadlock. PTI

9 Nepal Maoists held

Statesman News Service

PURULIA/KOLKATA/PATNA, Feb. 28. — Five Nepalese Maoists were arrested from Purulia railway station early today. In another incident, the Special Task Force of Bihar police held four Nepalese Maoist rebels from the Gandhi Maidan police station area in Patna yesterday and seized Rs 2.57 lakh in cash and Naxalite literature from them.

The Purulia SP, Mr Vivek Kumar Goyal, said: "They (Maoists) were distributing leaflets and trying to collect subscription for the MCC in Nepal." The suspects were remanded in police custody. Six others caught from Howrah since Wednesday, may have links with some militant outfits, as Peoples' War and KLO, operating in South and North Bengal, police officers said today.

The KLO and PW have been able to set up a network with the Nepalese living in several parts of the city and its adjoining areas, as Serampore and Howrah, the officials said.

The arrest of Nepalese Maoists from Howrah station since Wednesday has

surprised many railway police officers.

The accused are Bal Bahadur Beka Biswakarma, Nalin Singh Pun, Bhim Bahadur Beka Biswakarma, Harish Chandra Giri, Kuber Dangi and KP Timil Sinha. The last two were arrested last night, while the rest were arrested on Wednesday night, when they were distributing leaflets at Howrah station.

Railway police seized five gunny bags containing leaflets from the accused. Police identified at least two printing press in Serampore and Tiljala where they used to print leaflets. Those arrested in Bihar include Dilip Kumar Sah, central committee member of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and resident of Nepal's Sirha district, Rajnarayan Yadav, Prakash Kumar and Raushan Rai.

Serampore arrests

Four extremists allegedly having links with the banned "Jana Sangharsha Samity" of Nepal, were arrested from Serampore tonight. They are Gobinda Khanyal, Lal Bahadur Chetri, Rudra Bahadur Chetri and Bhupesh Keshi. They will be produced at Serampore court tomorrow.

F 1 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

CHANGES IN BHUTAN

A Remarkable Year Of Progress

By PARMANAND

2002 could be said to have been *annus mirabilis* for the small and beautiful Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. Sandwiched between India and China, Bhutan has geographically remained unchanged since time immemorial, and its cultural landscape (being a predominantly religious society) has also not changed much. However, on the political and economic fronts, the South Asian landlocked state has made remarkable progress.

Since the early 1980s, under the enlightened leadership of the fourth and present Wangchuck King, His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck (born 1955 and enthroned 1972), Bhutan has never looked back on democratisation, devolution and decentralisation. And remarkably, royal steps in these directions have been taken without any compulsion, let alone coercion. These have been steps of an enlightened king.

Constitution

On 9 December 2002, the fifth day of the 11th Bhutanese month, the first draft of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan was formally submitted to His Majesty by the Constitution Drafting Committee. For the first time, in 2002, Bhutan experienced elections based on universal adult franchise — true, not for the members of the unicameral Tshogdu (National Assembly) but for the gups (headmen of blocks or gewogs). Not less significantly, the ninth five-year plan was launched in July.

Locally known as Druk-yul, Bhutan thus far had been enjoying the status of a state without a codified constitution along with Britain, Israel, New Zealand, Oman and Saudi Arabia. But in November 2001, His Majesty appointed a 39-member drafting committee under the chairmanship of the chief justice of the High Court, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye.

In 1998, the King gave up his role as the head of government, leaving it to what subsequently emerged as the office of the Prime Minister. Between 1998 and the present, Bhutan has seen five prime ministers occupying the office by rotation. Unlike the President of Sri Lanka and the King of Nepal during the Panchayat days, the King of Bhutan does not participate in the weekly meetings of the cabinet. The cabinet decisions, however, are communicated to the monarch. King Jigme said in an

interview recently that by the time he reads the papers, things do change in accordance with the cabinet decisions.

In November 2001, when the King constituted the Constitution Draft Committee, he asserted: "The constitution should not be considered as a gift from me to the people. It is my duty to initiate the constitutional process". After several meetings, the 39-member committee submitted a 51-page document to the King. While accepting the draft, His Ma-

said that the constitutional monarchy has been sought to be institutionalised further. It is also believed that the existing unicameral legislature is sought to be converted into a bicameral legislature with a nominated upper house. Bhutan so far has not experienced universal adult franchise for its legislature. The draft is said to have suggested universal adult franchise for the lower house of the legislature. The cabinet, it is believed, has been sought to be made collectively responsible to the



gesty said: "I am accepting the draft from you in the faith that you have shared my belief that a constitution alone shapes the destiny of a nation". On this occasion, the Bhutanese King did not forget to repeat his oft-quoted remark that monarchy is "not the best form of government as it puts the nation's destiny in the hands of a single person".

Secret

No matter what King Jigme says, Bhutan's political culture still makes the people of almost all hues look to him for guidance — especially on crucial issues. The very image of the monarchy in Bhutan is not that of an usurper monarchy but that of a service monarchy. Unlike various other kings, King Jigme has always been in constant touch with the people.

The details of the constitution's draft are to remain a secret for the time being. They have first to be discussed by the cabinet and the royal advisory council and the National Assembly. Knowledgeable people, though, feel that discussion over the draft constitution would be a long-drawn affair. Various stories, though, are doing the rounds. It is

lower house of the legislature.

Throughout last year, the kingdom went through a novel experience of electing the gups on the principle of universal adult franchise. This has generated a great deal of confidence among the Bhutanese hoi polloi. Earlier the franchise was restricted to one person from a family — based on the importance of family bonds. Many analysts feel that the elections on universal adult franchise at the bloc level has generated a great deal of confidence among the candidates and the voters, apart from making them feel accountable. On the other hand, some sceptics feel that this would rather create divisions in Bhutanese society. Some also allege that various candidates for the gups' posts have used undesirable means to get elected.

The defects of democracy are often removed by more democracy. And democracy is based on the assumption that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people. There seems to be little doubt about the experience of universal franchise being exercised at the level of the national legislature. Bhutan may subsequently think of allowing the

participation of political parties and interest groups in the political processes.

On the economic front, Bhutan is doing exceedingly well. It has succeeded in planning and privatisation. According to the latest annual (2000-01) report of the Central Statistical Organisation, the gross domestic product grew by 6.6 per cent in 2001. The report attributes "good" economic growth to the commissioning of the Kurichhu and Basochhu projects, which contributed to 10.5 per cent to the GDP in 2001. Indeed, in 2001, the two power projects together generated additional power of 55 million units. Significantly, the hydro-power sector saw a growth rate of 7.3 per cent the same year.

Power

On the other hand, the "robust" construction sector contributed 15.1 per cent to the GDP primarily because of major power projects like Tala Hydropower, Chanjiji Housing and the Thimphu Express Highway. Of course, the agriculture sector remains the largest contributor to the GDP, even though its share declined from 42.7 per cent in 1991 to 34.3 per cent in 2001. Of the nine economic sectors, mining and quarrying sector registered the highest growth rate of 19.4 per cent in 2001 but since its share in GDP was only 1.6 per cent its highest growth rate had minimal impact on the overall economic growth.

India has been the most significant partner in Bhutan's overall progress. The first five-year plan in Bhutan was launched in 1961 with the help of the Indian Planning Commission. Various rounds of talks have already taken place on how and how much India could help during the ninth five-year plan. Apart from cooperating in the planning process, India has been the sole purchaser of its power. By integrating its economy very widely with India, Bhutan has shown how the small and the big can be useful for each other.

During his recent visit to the kingdom, Indian foreign secretary, Mr Kanwal Sibal, said in Thimphu: "Even at the risk of being misunderstood — I'll be willingly misunderstood — I'll say that the best relationship we have with any of our neighbours is with Bhutan". It was not for nothing that Yashwant Sinha chose Bhutan among the first few countries to visit after taking over as India's external affairs minister. A large number of Bhutanese National Assembly members visited India in November interacting with various MPs here.

Bhutan: racing towards democracy

By Wasbir Hussain

DURING MY first visit to Bhutan about a decade ago, Khandu Wangchuk, the suave chief of the Royal Civil Service Commission, explained how King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was striving to provide GNH or Gross National Happiness to his people. Years rolled by, and Khandu Wangchuk went on to become Bhutan's Head of Government or Prime Minister for a term. I now realise that here is a King with a difference, one who is not so much concerned about consolidating powers for himself, but is actually keen on devolving authority to his people.

On November 30, 2001, the King first spoke of his desire to transform Bhutan from a hereditary monarchy to a political democracy. He wanted a new Constitution drafted that would lay down the provisions for establishing a dynamic system of governance to safeguard the rights of the nation's 700,000 people and protect its sovereignty. Exactly a month later, work towards drafting of a new Constitution began. In other words, the King has set in motion the process for abdication of most of his powers.

What is unique is the fact that unlike other places where the monarchy has been overthrown only by massive mass uprisings, even bloodshed, the democratisation process in Bhutan has been launched entirely at the initiative of the King himself. The process has not begun overnight though. In 1981, the King decentralised development planning to the district level. This was extended to the village level ten years later. In 1998, he devolved all executive authority to an elected Council of Ministers under a set-up called the National Assembly or Parliament. Currently the head of state, the King himself gave the authority to the National Assembly to remove the monarch with a two-thirds vote — a move that was vehemently opposed by the common Bhutanese who were not prepared for the change. Two recent developments go a lot to show that governance in Bhutan was already changing. For the first time, in October last year, the Bhutanese elected as many as 201 village headmen, representing a cluster of hamlets across the country, through secret ballot. Earlier, village headmen were elected

by a broad consensus arrived at between prominent local leaders, including the National Assembly member representing the area. What is emerging is the people's participation in governance or decision-making itself, a role the King has been preparing his subjects to perform. Also for the first time in Bhutan's history, a public interest litigation (PIL) was filed before the nation's High Court. The PIL, against the Thimphu Municipal Corporation for alleged violation of laws was filed about seven months ago by the charismatic Dawa Tsering, for long Bhutan's Foreign

The 39-member Constitution Drafting committee, headed by the Supreme Court Chief Justice, Sonam Tobgye, has already completed its work. The draft will now be presented in the National Assembly and deliberated upon by the elected representatives as well as by the common people. Only then will it be accepted and finalised. "The basic purpose of the Constitution is to ensure the sovereignty and security of the nation and the well-being of the Bhutanese for all times to come," the King was quoted as saying. "The political system of the country must

weeks, Bhutan has been holding talks with India on the former's Ninth Plan assistance. New Delhi is likely to provide Rs. 10 billion to Thimphu for its programmes under the Ninth Plan. Will Thimphu's foreign policy remain unchanged once a particular political party comes to power there? Will its loyalty to New Delhi remain as unwavering as it has been all these years? What impact could the change in governments in Bhutan have on Indo-Bhutan ties? These are issues that are of concern to India, more than the Bhutanese.

Considering Bhutan's geo-strategic location — it is wedged between India and China — the security situation is another important area of concern. It has friendly relations with Beijing as well, despite the border dispute towards its north that the two sides are seeking to resolve. To its south, Bhutan shares a 265-km long, densely forested, border with Assam. To its east lies Arunachal Pradesh, and to the west and the south-west is the north Bengal area of West Bengal and Sikkim. The entire border that Bhutan shares with India is turbulent, being heavily infested with separatist rebels. In fact, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), two of Assam's most dreaded insurgent groups, have bases inside Bhutan and are engaged in trans-border operations. Another rebel group that is an ally of the ULFA and which has set up bases inside Bhutan is the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), which is active in North Bengal and western Assam. Therefore, the role of political parties vis-a-vis militancy in a new set-up of parliamentary democracy in Bhutan is to be watched with interest. Having said all this, there is no cause for alarm. Bhutan's biggest plus point is the smallness of its size and population. Unlike India, the nation does not comprise diverse people or cultures. Therefore, it should not be that difficult for it to withstand the impact of a transformation from an absolute monarchy to a political democracy. With his bold steps, King Wangchuck, educated in India and Britain, is certainly moving with the times.

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Minister. It was such an unprecedented move that even the monarch got to know of it. Moving against the Government or its agencies would have been unthinkable in the past. But today, the PIL has come to be accepted by all concerned as a routine legal process.

Monarchy in Bhutan dates back to 1907 when King Wangchuck's great grandfather, Ugyen Wangchuck, a battle-weary chieftain, was formally elected as the nation's first King under the patronage of the British who wanted a strong ruler in the then unstable country. Jigme Singye Wangchuck was enthroned in 1972 at age 17 after the death of his father, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Thirty years into ruling his country, King Wangchuck wants Bhutan to move ahead with the times. "What the King wants to do is not just bring about cosmetic changes in the system of governance. He is very serious about handing over power to his people," said Mr. Tsering, who is among the most respected leaders in the country today. The new Constitution, he said, was going to be 'most vibrant' with far reaching changes. It is said that the King wants parliamentary democracy in Bhutan with different political parties contesting for Parliament in national elections through adult franchise.

evolve so that the people would continue to enjoy peace and prosperity, justice and fundamental rights, which have always been enshrined in the Bhutanese system."

If a section in Bhutan is happy at the move to democratise the nation, there are others who are cautious to the extent of being worried. In fact, without adequate and effective control mechanisms in the new Constitution, transforming the strategically located land-locked kingdom with a distinctly traditional value system into a parliamentary democracy — with all its ills of multi-party political power play — could be disastrous, at least initially. Once the transformation comes about, the responsibility of the King would increase, for in his new role as a constitutional monarch, he would be required to keep the nation on the right track, besides reining in the political leaders if they were to go wrong, both in policy formulations or in their personal conduct. Another area that would be of particular interest to New Delhi will be Thimphu's foreign policy after the nation becomes a parliamentary democracy. So long, India has almost been taking Bhutan for granted on the ground that it has been its traditional ally. Bhutan's development programmes have been largely funded by India over the years. In recent

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