

Bhutan opens doors to bold political reform

■ **DRAFT** | Draft constitution provides 21 fundamental rights, fixes King retirement

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29



King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, who became king in 1972, has opted—by prevaient standards in his kingdom—for a fairly liberal approach through a Constitution that allows the monarch to proclaim emergency on the “written advice” of the Prime Minister. But this has to be cleared by

AS Nepal watches its king toss democracy out of the window, his next-door neighbour, the King of Bhutan, is pushing for political reform through the adoption of a Constitution that divests authority from the monarchy. It fixes 65 as the king's retirement age, provides for Parliament, a two-party system and 21 fundamental rights covering free speech, freedom of the press, the right to information and even the right to privacy.

The draft of the Consti-

tution—work started on it in 2001—was prepared by a 39-member committee headed by the Chief Justice. Bhutan does not have a written Constitution.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, who became king in 1972, has opted—by prevaient standards in his kingdom—for a fairly liberal approach through a Constitution that allows the monarch to proclaim emergency on the “written advice” of the Prime Minister. But this has to be cleared by

Is King Gyanendra watching?

- Under Bhutan's first draft Constitution:**
- 21 fundamental rights, including the right to information, right to privacy, freedom of press.
 - Govt to ensure a minimum of 60% forest cover to prevent degradation of the country's fragile ecosystem.
 - 2-party system to fill up 75-member National Assembly (lower house).
 - Greater powers for Leader of the Opposition
 - 65 is king's retirement age
 - King can declare emergency on “written advice” of Prime Minister but this has to be cleared by two-thirds majority of Parliament.
 - King can be removed if he flouts the Constitution but motion has to be passed by a three-fourths majority in a joint session of Parliament.

The Constitution also caters for a process to remove a monarch. However,

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this can be done only if the King is perceived to have flouted the Constitution or suffers from any permanent mental disability. He is otherwise exempt from being answerable in any court of law as his actions and person shall be "sacrosanct".

On any of the two grounds for removal of the king, a motion has to be passed by a three-fourths majority in a joint session of Parliament. This will be followed by a national referendum where the resolution must obtain a simple majority for the King to abdicate in favour of the heir apparent.

The draft Constitution makes it clear that the "Golden Throne" of Bhutan will vest with the descendants of Ugyen Wangchuk, the great grandfather of the present King. It also provides for a princess to become queen of Bhutan though a prince would take precedence.

There is, however, the condition that the crown will not pass on to a prince or princess who marries a non-Bhutanese. A crown prince will be eligible to become king on attaining the age of 21 while a sitting monarch will have to retire at the age of 65. Wangchuk is now 50. However, the monarch can continue if the royal heir has not come of age.

The Constitution lists 21 fundamental rights, including the right to information, right to privacy, freedom of press, radio and television and other forms electronic dissemination of information. It also gives the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion while identifying Buddhism as the "spiritual heritage" of Bhutan.

This apart, there is list of fundamental duties as well as a set of Principles of State Policy in Article 9. The latter interestingly mentions that the

state will "encourage" and "foster" private sector development through "fair market competition".

As a unique feature, Article 5 of the draft Constitution is devoted to environment and makes it mandatory on the government to ensure that a minimum of 60 per cent of Bhutan's total land should be under forest cover at any given time to prevent degradation of the country's fragile ecosystem.

The Bhutan King will be the supreme commander of the armed forces while the police will come under the Home Ministry. The Constitution has left it open for the parliament to enact a law making it mandatory for all adults to serve a certain period in the military.

Bhutan has opted for a two-party system to fill up its 75-member National Assembly (lower house). However, the draft Constitution sug-

gests two rounds of elections. In the primary elections, any registered political party can contest but only the top two parties will qualify for the general election. While the party with the majority gets to form the government, the other will play the role of the opposition.

The two-party system translates into greater powers for the Leader of the Opposition who will be part of important bodies like the regency council and the select group of officials who are empowered to recommend names for the posts of chief election commissioner, auditor general and other key constitutional offices.

The National Council (upper house) will have a strength of 25, a representative from each of the 20 districts and five nominated by the king. These members are not supposed to have any political affiliation.

120 held as protests sweep Nepal

KATHMANDU, MARCH 28. Police on Monday arrested about 120 anti-government activists across Nepal as they defied a ban on protests to show their anger at last month's seizure of power by the King.

In a daring defiance of the ban on demonstrations against the King and the royal government, many of the protesters marched outside the capital's Central Secretariat, which houses the Prime Minister's Office and several Ministries and government offices.

"Down with autocracy. We want democracy," the demonstrators said as they threw fliers in the streets urging people to join their movement.

They arrived in a public bus, quickly pulled out party flags and raised anti-government slogans, surprising the police. They were able to block traffic for a few minutes before being dragged away by the police, loaded into vans and taken away.

Nearly 50 persons were arrested in front of the government offices in Kathmandu and another 72 persons were detained in demonstrations in nine other cities in what Nepal's banned political parties described as a nationwide protest.

Protesters charged

Officials said the protesters in Kathmandu were detained at the police station and charged with violating government orders.

It was the first time since King Gyanendra's February 1 takeover and suspension of civil liberties that protesters have been able to demonstrate so close to the main government offices.

In taking absolute power and declaring a state of emergency, the King said he needed to defeat an escalating anti-monarchy communist insurgency and

root out endemic corruption among politicians.

Since the King's power grab, many politicians have been detained or driven underground. The new monarchist government has released some Opposition figures in recent weeks. Sporadic rallies to demand the return of democracy have failed to attract large numbers and have been quickly broken up by police.

Still, the main political parties vowed to hold nationwide protests on April 8 to mark the 15th anniversary of mass pro-democracy demonstrations that ended autocratic rule by Kings.

"We are working on strategies to bring out the mass protest next week. It will be joint rallies organised by the five major political parties," said Kashinath Adhikari of the Communist Party of Nepal, the second largest party.

Pakistan's aid offer

The Government has been under pressure from the international community to lift the state of emergency and restore civil liberties.

Britain and India have suspended military aid while the U.S. has said it is considering stopping aid that Nepal needs to fight the militants.

However, a Pakistani official hinted on Monday that his nation could offer military assistance to Nepal.

The Pakistani Junior Minister for Economic Affairs, Hina Rabhani Khar, said Pakistan had pledged \$5 millions in economic assistance to Nepal.

"The whole thing is for industrial procurement but it can possibly cover arms and ammunition," Mr. Khar told reporters on arrival in Kathmandu on Monday.

"It is up to Nepalese Government to decide." — AP

Bhutan king takes democracy route

Draft statute up for debate

Associated Press
Guwahati, March 27

AT A time the king of Nepal has dismissed the government and usurped all executive powers, the bordering Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has taken a big step towards democracy.

Bhutan's king is circulating a draft Constitution aimed at establishing a multi-party democracy that would end almost 100 years of monarchical rule in the tiny Buddhist nation, the editor of a government-run newspaper said on Sunday.

The draft Constitution, which has been in the making since 2001, provides for two Houses of Parliament — a 75-member National Assembly and a 25-member National Council.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuk would become head of state, but Parliament would have the power to impeach him by a two-thirds vote, said Kinley Dorji, editor of *Kuensel*. The draft Constitution was circulated on Saturday across Bhutan's 20 districts for debate among the nation's 700,000 people.

No date has been set for adoption of the Constitution. "Like every Bhutanese, I am excited as the new form of government will change the way of life in my country," Dorji said. The drafting committee, set up by the king, has suggested a system different from those in India and Bangladesh.

A primary round of elec-



Jigme Singye Wangchuk

Monarchy is born Bhutan became a monarchy in 1907 with Ugyen Wangchuk as the first king. In 1910 Bhutan became a British protectorate
Independence Bhutan became independent in 1949
World stage After years in isolation, it gained UN recognition in 1971

tions would be held to choose two parties which would contest the general elections for the National Assembly. The winners would run the government and the losers sit in the Opposition. Dorji said the king told district officials last week that the Election Commission would conduct the voting and fund the political parties.

"The people will now read and debate the provisions of the draft Constitution. Later, the king will tour the nation for consultations before the document is adopted," Dorji said.

Bhutan unveils Constitution, Indian imprint shows

DEVIRUPA MITRA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 26. — It is a tale of two monarchs in south Asia. One who had annexed all powers and the other who is planning to abdicate some of his powers. Bhutan monarch Jigme Singye Wangchuk made the country's draft Constitution public today, while his neighbour King Gyanendra continues to keep top political leaders under house arrest after dismissing the democratic government in a "royal coup".

Bhutan's draft Constitution, which was in the making since 2001 before being unveiled today, has 34 articles, including 21 fundamental rights 11 fundamental duties. While the King has extensive powers, the Parliament will have the power to impeach the King by a two-thirds majority.

Wary of the constant bickering among political parties in Nepal, the Bhutan Constitution has evolved an interesting solution. First a primary round of elections will be held to select only two political parties to contest the general elections. The party with the highest number of votes will be the ruling party, while the second party will act as the opposition.

Interestingly, the 39-member Bhutan Constitution Drafting Committee, chaired by a Chief Justice had come to India quite a



Two-party system has been proposed to replace King's rule

number of times in the last two years to consult with experts here.

Perhaps, the most important Indian contribution has been of senior Supreme Court advocate, K K Venugopal, who was appointed an advisor to the committee. He had even visited Bhutan and met the King in November 2003.

When contacted, Mr Venugopal however, refused to talk about his specific contribution as they were "confidential".

At an institutional level, the Lok Sabha Secretariat has been helping in advising on rules of procedures and other aspects of parliamentary functioning. Former chief election commissioner, Mr James P Lyngdoh had met the Drafting Committee in September 2003.

The most recent visit was of the Lok Sabha secretary-general, Mr G C Malhotra in November last year. Speaking to **The Statesman**, Mr Malhotra said that India is the only

country with which Bhutan has had extensive interaction over the drafting of the Constitution. "It is my impression that... they are largely dependent on India," he said.

The draft Constitution has some similarity to the Indian Constitution — for example, it proposes a bicameral system, a National Assembly and a National Council of 75 and 25 members each.

Recently, Bhutan has requested India to send a senior officer to assist in parliamentary duties, like in drafting legislation. "We received the letter recently from Bhutan. Since, the Parliament session is going on currently, we may send an officer to Bhutan in May, depending on circumstances," said Mr Malhotra.

Besides, the Bureau of Parliamentary training and institutions will be training officials and elected representatives of Bhutan in their legislative rules.

Interestingly, Bhutan has also asked for assistance in building an hostel for members of the proposed National Assembly who travel to capital Thimpu from remote areas. "It has been a problem for the members of the Parliament to find accommodation, as they mostly live in far-off places. They have asked for assistance, but it is for the ministry of external affairs to consider it," said Mr Malhotra.

THE STATESMAN

26 MAR 2005

Nepal scribes evade censors with blogs

New Delhi, March 23 (Reuters): Journalists in Nepal are going hi-tech to sidestep tight censorship imposed after last month's royal coup.

Outspoken web logs, or blogs, are springing up and being widely quoted and linked to in the "blogosphere" — the mushrooming cyberworld rapidly establishing a place for itself as an alternative source of news and information.

"I feel that our very own survival, intellectually and mentally, depends on freedom," says Dinesh Wagle, a newspaper journalist who runs United We Blog! (www.blog.com.np).

"I don't want to live like a dead soul. So these days I am blogging for a peaceful and democratic Nepal," he said in an e-mail interview. King Gyanendra seized power on February 1, arresting government and political leaders, rights activists and journalists.

He also banned media criticism of his move, which he said was aimed at ending a nine-year Maoist revolt that has killed 11,000 people and shattered the tourism and aid-dependent economy.

But United We Blog! and

another popular blog, the anonymous Radio Free Nepal

(freenepal.blogspot.com), publish interviews with arrested political leaders and news about anti-king protests that the mainstream media cannot.

"I am blogging the truth as I see and as I think," says the print journalist running Radio Free Nepal.

"I am telling my audience there are pro-monarch rallies and the true story behind them (compulsory participation) ... and also that there is not much participation in anti-monarch rallies, along with my feelings that there should be democracy and the king should step down," he said by e-mail.

Wagle, who coordinates the art and style section for *Kantipur*, the leading Nepali language daily, is a former information technology reporter. He has his own website (www.wagle.com.np) and along with several friends and colleagues has been blogging since 2003. But United We Blog! turned political after Gyanendra seized power.

In the beginning, the UWB team was quite anxious about blogging political mat-

ter. But I was determined to blog politics and everyone was convinced."

Hits have rocketed: from fewer than 13,000 in January to 65,000 in February and more than 80,000 in the first three weeks of March.

Nepal is one of the world's poorest 10 countries and few people have computers. Fewer still know about blogs. Instead, United We Blog! and Radio Free Nepal are aimed at highlighting the country's plights to the outside world.

The postings have been picked up, linked to and referred to by scores of other blogs around the world, including the Online Journalism Review (www.ojr.org) published by the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication.

Up the creek

Gyanendra must drop fixation

India cannot support King Gyanendra's bid to create political instability; this was made clear to the Nepalese foreign minister, Ramesh Nath Pandey, who came calling early this month. Delhi's stand is clear — the King must take an "early initiative" to restore power to the people. Unless the government comes to terms with political parties and Maoists, the mountain country will go to the dogs. The King might seek the help of human rights organisations and activists who played a role in bringing the two sides to the conference table two years ago. To make it purposeful, there must be a mutually acceptable agenda or a national consensus. A round table conference involving all parties is another worthwhile suggestion. On the face of it, Maoists are neither terrorists nor followers of Mao Zedong; it was the former foreign minister Jaswant Singh who first called them terrorists. They are a deprived or depraved lot born of feuding parties' failure to govern themselves. A change of 14 governments in as many years carries its own commentary.

It is becoming clear that ongoing army action to crush Maoists is unlikely to be decisive. The release of former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and 19 others from house arrest just before the United Nations Human Rights Commission met in Geneva, is an eyewash. Continued house arrest of Nepali Congress and Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) chiefs GP Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nepal, respectively, confirms the King is not prepared to change his tune. But change he must, if he is to perpetuate the monarchy in a democratic system. Koirala was once quoted as saying that "those who oppose the monarch will be opposed by the soil" — a tribute reserved exclusively for King Birendra, who not only gave the country a new constitution but also ensured a smooth transfer from autocracy to multi-party democracy and an effective constitutional monarchy. Gyanendra can still hope to deserve that compliment.

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2005

UK suspends financial aid to Nepal

HT Correspondent
London, March 21

THE BRITISH government will no longer provide aid to support Nepal's police, prison services and the Prime Minister's Office, following King Gyanendra's dismissal of the government last month.

Britain had committed to an aid of £2.4 million. But £1.3 million remains unspent and will now be cancelled, according to the UK's international development minister, Gareth Thomas.

Thomas informed that his government had taken the decision after an assessment of the political situation in Nepal as well as the UK's partnership with the kingdom on issues related to development.

Said Thomas, "Our assistance will continue to be reviewed. In the present environment, we consider it inappropriate to continue to support the police, prison services and the Prime Minister's Office."

The UK will review its assistance to Nepal in the light of its ability to make an effective contribution towards the millennium development goals and the safety and security of staff. Thomas made it clear that the security of people working in welfare programmes is of "paramount importance" and the UK would abandon any such programme in Nepal "in the face of increased and unacceptable risk."

"We need to ensure that our programmes continue to benefit the poor and underprivileged people in Nepal," Thomas remarked, adding, "It is vital that the government of Nepal maintains mutually agreed financial allocations for essential development services such as health, education, etc, and not divert them for other purposes. The announcement also addressed the sensitive issue of human rights in Nepal. "We are deeply concerned about human rights in Nepal and will encourage democracy," Thomas stated.

22 MAR 2005

Nepal warns all donor countries

'Keep away from pro-democracy parties'

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, March 20

EVEN AS it keenly looks forward to the March 31 visit of Chinese foreign minister Li Zhaoxing, Nepal has formally asked India and other donor countries to keep away from pro-democracy parties.

In a Note Verbale recently handed over to the Indian mission, Kathmandu described foreign diplomats' meetings with politicians as a violation of the Vienna Convention. This followed after Indian and American diplomats met some key leaders after their release from custody.

Nepal is cut up with India, the US and Britain particularly after they put their military assistance to it on

hold in the wake of the February 1 royal coup. On Thursday, Tulsi Giri, King Gyanendra's senior most deputy in the council of ministers, also fired a broadside against these three countries for their support to multi-party democracy and human rights in Nepal.

Raj Parishad (Royal Privy Council) member and ex-army chief Sachit Shumsher Rana has made public Nepal's willingness to procure arms from China to fight Maoist insurgents. Quoting him, the *Kathmandu Post* on Sunday said, "China has offered military cooperation to combat terrorism...In case, Britain, America, and India completely stop their military aid, we will have to take the

Chinese offer."

So far, Beijing has not made any statement on its reported plans to supply weapons to Kathmandu. In case, it agrees to send arms to Nepal, it will mark a departure from its earlier stand on helping Kathmandu only with non-military assistance in its anti-Maoist campaign. Beijing prefers to describe Nepalese Maoists as "anti-government forces", while countries like India call them "terrorists."

Meanwhile, continuing its operations against the anti-King movement, police arrested at least a dozen Nepali Congress leaders and activists when they tried to stage a pro-democracy demonstration here on Sunday.

No arms supply: China

Nilova Roy Chaudhury
New Delhi, March 20

CONTRARY TO the Nepalese monarch's expectations, even China has rebuffed requests for Beijing to step in to fill the arms supply deficit being faced by the Royal Nepal Army in its war against the Maoists.

According to diplomatic sources, Chinese Prime minister Wen Jiabao has refused to visit Kathmandu during his forthcoming visit to South Asia in April, despite Nepalese requests. Such a visit would have lent a degree of acceptability to the royal takeover and made India's position more difficult.

Faced with a monarch who refuses to even meet the Indian envoy, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, or listen to 'fraternal' Indian advice, New Delhi's options have been limited to steadfastly adhering to the pro-democracy line.

There has been no rethink, official sources indicated, at all levels of government, on suspending military aid to Nepal until the emergency is revoked and multi-party democracy is restored.

While the rest of the international community, including India, have firmly refused to accept King Gyanendra's reasons for assuming absolute power on February

1, Kathmandu had banked on possible Chinese and Pakistani support, after outgoing Pakistani ambassador, Zamir Akram, said Islamabad would be happy to fill the arms supply gap.

But after US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "completely concurred" with India's position, that democracy and civil liberties must first be restored in Nepal, Kathmandu's options are increasingly limited, leading to "outbursts of frustration" against India and other like-minded countries from people like Tulsi Giri.

The King has dug a hole for himself and dismissing the government will backfire, with serious consequences for the future of the monarchy in Nepal.

Among the positives likely to emerge from this move is that the political parties will unite among themselves, and probably get the Maoists on board against the monarchy.

The removal of the monarchy has been among the major demands of the Maoist insurgents and Gyanendra has provided them a platform to ratchet up that demand.

This is unless the King Gyanendra can quickly get a ceasefire on track and persuade the Maoists to come to the negotiation table, which observers say is very unlikely.

Parties reject Nepal govt's offer of talks

International screws tighten further on Kathmandu and its King

Kathmandu: Rejecting the royal government's offer of a dialogue, major political parties in Nepal have said there was no question of holding talks until democratic rights were restored and emergency lifted in the kingdom.

"Until and unless the King withdraws the February 1 proclamation by lifting emergency and restoring fundamental democratic rights, there is no question of holding dialogue with the royal government," said Keshav Baral, standing committee member of the Communist Party of Nepal-UML, the largest communist party which has launched an anti-king agitation. "There is no point in talking when the political parties are virtually banned and all top leaders are in jail," he said. PTI

By Rashmee Roshan Lall/TNN

London: In a further tightening of the screws on Kathmandu, Britain has said it will no longer pay for Nepal's police, prison services and the office of its royalist Prime Minister. Britain's peremptory withdrawal of more than one-million of the total £2.4 million it had committed is expected to hit Nepalese budget-keeping hard.

But commentators said it might help concentrate the mind of King Gyanendra, who remains defiant about his February 1 bloodless coup.

The British monetary rebuff came as international pressure on Kathmandu built up on Friday, with the UN, European Union and nine Western aid agencies criticising the accelerating pace of the conflict between Nepalese security forces and Maoist rebels who want to overthrow the monarchy and replace it with a Communist state.

Meanwhile, a new report by the Geneva-based International Committee of Jurists urgently called specifically on India, the UK and US to work together at the ongoing UN Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva to "demand a return to the rule of law and respect for human rights."

On Friday, in a quickening pace of international censure of Kathmandu, the International Committee of Jurists presented first-hand evidence gleaned by its secretary general Nicholas Howen in Nepal at the Human Rights meeting, devastatingly describing the mountainous kingdom as "a void in human rights monitoring and protection."

The UK's international development minister Gareth Thomas said

late on Friday that it was "inappropriate" to pay for a political and security system which caused "deep concern about human rights".

The joint UN, EU and aid agency statement said the accelerating conflict had left civilians and refugees caught up in the struggle exposed and cut off from aid supplies and medical help.

The ICJ's Howen, who has returned to Geneva from Kathmandu, is only the second representative of a leading human rights organisation to gain entry into the tiny Himalayan kingdom that is all but closed to the world under the King's state of emergency. Howen said it was clear during his visit that "human rights defenders face a suffocating atmosphere of intimidation."

Doubts over Maoist ouster

SNS & PTI

KATHMANDU/NEW DELHI, March 15. — The Maoists have expelled their second most senior leader Dr Baburam Bhattarai and his wife, Ms Hisila Yami from the party, Nepal's state media reported today.

The state-owned Rising Nepal daily today carried a report quoting Dr Bhattarai, the deputy chief of the Maoists, as saying he and Ms Yami have been expelled by the party's central committee. The daily said it had received the news from the army. But Maoists denied called the

report as "baseless".

Army sources said the couple was expelled about two months ago.

A high-level Nepalese delegation led by former prime minister, Mr GP Koirala, today called on Union home minister Mr Shivraj Patil to thank him for the tough pro-democracy stand taken by India.

The Centre has imposed certain restrictions on interviewing imprisoned Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) member Chandra Prakash Gajurel, lodged in Chennai Central Jail here since August 2003, in view of his political background.

Nepal parties take to streets

Subhendu Ray
in Kakarvitta

March 14. — While you want to replace autocracy by democracy, you would have to fight without any compromise. Nepalese political parties did the same at this Indo-Nepal border town today. It was the day to launch a nationwide protest against the royal coup by King Gynendra.

Despite a 'royal' security arrangement, political leaders hit the roads to protest against the monarchy. Other than the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist), almost all the political parties joined hands for the purpose. Rallies were organised in at least 50 places throughout the country.

Scribe manhandled

Photojournalist of a Bengali daily, Mr Rupak De Chowdhury, who also contributes for an international media group, was harassed by the Nepal police here today. As he started clicking pictures, he was beaten all black and blue by the cops.

THE STATESMAN

15 MAR 2005

Maoists losing support

SUPPORT IS fast waning for both the king and Maoist rebels, as the fate of democracy in Nepal hangs in limbo.

When King Gyanendra seized power and declared emergency on February 1, many Nepalese thought the move would salvage their country from political chaos and end a festering Maoist rebellion that has claimed more than 10,500 lives. More than a month after the royal takeover, the king is losing ground. Even royalist politicians want the monarch to retreat.

Support for the Maoist rebels has not grown either. Die-hard communists, who once sympathised with them, are becoming wary of the rebels. "Violence gets you nowhere. If the Maoists were to succeed they would have done it by now," said Mohan Chandra Adhikari, once hailed as Nepal's Nelson Mandela.

The rebels, Adhikari said, would never win their war, nor would they ever lose it to the king. "Though they call themselves Maoists, they have long deviated from Mao's ideals and even techniques," Adhikari



A file photo of RNA troops scanning Jabang for Maoists.

said, pointing to the rebels' hit-and-run guerrilla warfare that failed communist insurgents in Latin American countries.

The Maoists have called a series of strikes and economic blockades beginning from Monday. Five mainstream parties have decided to begin their anti-palace stir the same day. Rebel chief Pushpakamal Dahal said the stir will be followed by a Nepal-wide 11-day bandh from April 2.

AP, Kathmandu

Deuba seeks coup rollback, rebel talks

Kathmandu, March 12 (Reuters): Nepal's sacked Prime Minister, just freed from house arrest, urged King Gyanendra on Saturday to begin talks with political parties to solve the nation's crisis following his power grab last month.

Sher Bahadur Deuba, 58, was sacked and placed under house arrest on February 1 by the king, who said the Prime Minister had failed to control an increasingly deadly Maoist revolt that has killed thousands of people.

In the first comments after being freed on Friday, Deuba

asked the king to remain only as a constitutional monarch.

"The king should enter into dialogue with political parties and give all executive powers to a new multi-party government," Deuba said in an interview at his red brick house.

"That government should hold talks with the Maoists to end violence which is key to fresh national elections," said Deuba, sitting cross-legged on a sofa and drinking lemon tea.

Already faced with a long running Maoist revolt, Nepal plunged into turmoil after Gyanendra assumed powers,

detained politicians and suspended civil liberties.

He said the steps were necessary to crush the Maoists who have been fighting since 1996, to replace the monarchy with a communist republic in the Hindu kingdom.

The king's move to fire Deuba came after the rebels refused talks to end their revolt.

In the past they have demanded an assembly to draft a new constitution to decide the future of the monarchy before a vote, in the nation where many still consider the king an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

The rebels have also refused to talk to the king and sponsored a nationwide blockade last month, disrupting supplies and travel for two weeks.

A cheerful Deuba said the Maoists, who deserted talks in 2003, could return to the negotiating table if Gyanendra and mainstream parties agreed to discuss their demand.

"If there is a national consensus for a conditional constituent assembly the Maoists might agree to negotiations," the bespectacled leader said without elaborating. Deuba said the king could not crush

the revolt without help from political parties pitched against the monarch now.

"All warring political parties should forge unity and launch a peaceful agitation for the restoration of democracy. The king must also release the chiefs of other political parties from house arrest and free all detained activists immediately."

Party officials said the chief of the Nepali Congress party and former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and the head of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), Madh-

av Kumar Nepal, were still under house arrest and hundreds were in detention or on the run. The government has not given their number but has freed nearly 50 activists amid pressure from the international community.

Deuba's phone line has not been restored and he has been unable to contact other party leaders on the crisis.

Big protests have not been possible due to heavy security and police have crushed smaller rallies. "But I will personally participate in the ongoing protests," Deuba said.

Nepal parties to step up agitation

KATHMANDU, MARCH 11. Nepal lifted the house arrest of the former Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, on Friday and freed 18 political detenus, an official said.

The decision came hours after Nepal's top political parties urged their members to come out of hiding and step up their defiance of the King's February 1 power grab by holding widespread peaceful rallies.

Top leaders of many political parties were put under house arrest and more than 500 politicians and activists were detained after the constitutional monarch dismissed Mr. Deuba and seized power.

House arrest

Top leaders from the main political parties, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal, were still under house arrest.

Mr. Deuba heads a splinter group which broke away from the Nepali Congress. Soon after his release, he said all political leaders should be freed.

"Our party would work with others toward a peaceful movement for full restoration of democracy in Nepal," he told The Associated Press. "We are open to a dialogue with the king so that a multiparty government is restored and elections are held."

A key politician dismissed the Government action as a mere ploy in the face of mounting international pressure on King Gyanendra to allow political activity.

The release also came two days before the Foreign Minister, Ramesh Nath Pandey, was to leave for Switzerland to attend a U. N. meeting on human rights. — AP

12 MAR 2005

THE HINDU

Pakistan "ready" to arm Nepal

KATHMANDU, MARCH 11. Pakistan was ready to supply arms Nepal needs to fight Maoist rebels, it's envoy to Kathmandu said today.

India and Britain stopped military aid to Nepal's poorly equipped forces after King Gyanendra sacked the Government saying political leaders had failed to end the Maoist revolt and restore peace.

"We have offered possibilities of training. We are also ready to provide arms if that is required by Nepal," the outgoing Pakistani Ambassador, Zamir Akram, told state-run *The Rising Nepal* daily. Mr. Akram did not give details of arms Islamabad was willing to give Nepal— Reuters

Nepal bows to pressure, releases Deuba, others

J. HEMANTH

Kathmandu, March 11: In a development ostensibly aimed at appeasing the international community including India, the Nepal government today released former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba along with 20 other leaders and cadres of various political parties.

The release took place two days after foreign minister Rameshnath Pandey returned to Kathmandu after a two-day official visit to New Delhi.

Among those released were former home minister Purna Bahadur Khadka, spokesperson of the Nepali Congress (Democratic) Minendra Rijal, former lawmaker of the Nepali Congress Hari Bhakta Adhikari and his party colleague Haribol Bhatrai.

India, the US and Britain have set several pre-conditions for resuming military

aid to Nepal. Topping the list is the release of political prisoners and restoration of fundamental rights.

Deuba was sacked by King Gyanendra by a royal proclamation on February 1 and immediately placed under house arrest. However, Communist Party (UML) general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala and People's Front Nepal president Amik Sherchan continue to remain under house arrest.

Talking briefly to the press after his release, Deuba said he was against the royal takeover and asked the government to release other detained leaders as well. He also backed the five-party alliance's protest programmes.

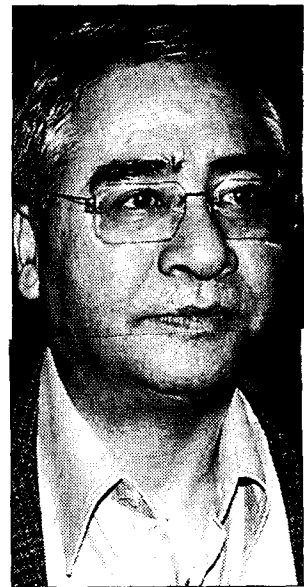
Deuba is scheduled to hold a press conference at his residence tomorrow.

Minendra Rijal said he was released by the 1st battalion of the Armed Police Force, Naxal, in central Kathmandu while 17 more leaders and cadres of various parties, including Hari Bhakta Adhikari, were released from Kharipati in eastern Kathmandu.

Nepali Congress (Democratic) acting president Gopal Man Shrestha welcomed the release of his party's leader and said that this was a step forward in finding a solution to the present crisis.

Pak aid

Pakistan was ready to supply arms Nepal needs to fight Maoist rebels, it's envoy to Kathmandu said today, a move that could upset India and Britain who have stopped military supplies to the Himalayan nation.



Sher Bahadur Deuba in Kathmandu after his release. (AFP)

THE TELEGRAPH

12 MAR 2005

Pak offers arms & training to Nepal

Nepali Congress-led alliance to launch oust-Gyanendra stir

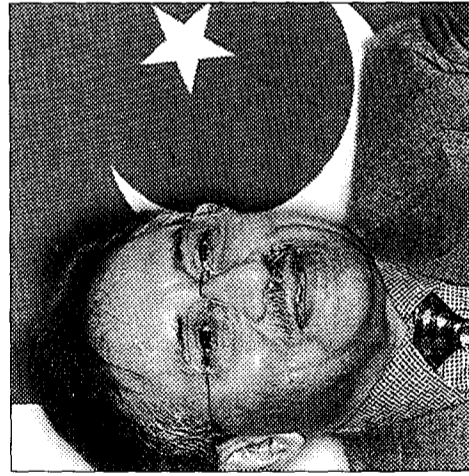
Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, March 11

COINCIDING WITH five pro-democracy Nepalese parties' decision to take King Gyanendra head-on from Monday, Islamabad has offered the new dispensation in Kathmandu arms and training to help it fight the Maoist insurgency.

Earlier, India, the United States and Britain had suspended their support to the monarch, asking him to restore democracy and human rights.

In a seven-column front-page interview, the state-controlled *Rising Nepal* daily quoted Pakistani ambassador to Nepal Zamir Akram as saying, "We have offered possibilities of training. We are ready to provide arms if Nepal requires them. We are ready to help in whatever way we can." His offer also included sharing of Pakistan's expertise in tackling terrorism with Nepal.

"Pakistan is also facing terrorist threat on her western border and we have developed some kind of expertise, especially in the use of equipment by terrorists, which we are ready to share with Nepal," Akram added. Reiterating Islamabad's view that the developments in Nepal are her internal affairs, he said, "We believe in non-interference."



Pervez Musharraf *Eastern interests*

Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world that have endorsed the suspension of democracy in Nepal. Significantly, Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was the first head of government to call Gyanendra soon after the latter took direct control of Nepal on February 1.

On Thursday, another state-run publica-

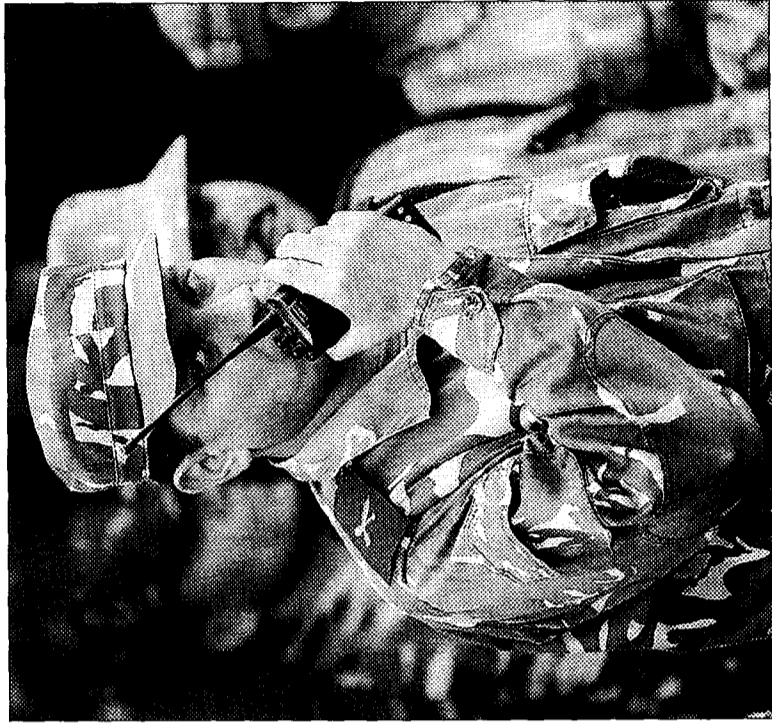
tion, *Gorkhapatra*, had described as "mature diplomacy" Pakistan, China and Russia's decision to treat the coup as "Nepal's internal affair".

The king has decided to send foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey to Geneva on Saturday to attend a human rights meet as well as mollify European countries that are unhappy with his decision.

Meanwhile, the G.P. Koirala-headed Nepali Congress said it would fight against the Gyanendra's absolute rule openly and from within Nepal. Senior party leader Ram Sharan Mahat said, "We will neither go underground nor take shelter outside Nepal. We will face arrest."

At present, a number of party leaders, including Koirala's daughter Sujata and nephew Shekhar, are taking shelter in India. The two Nepali Congress factions, along with the mainline Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist), the Jan Morcha and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandi Devi), comprise the alliance.

India reacts: The Indian mission was tightlipped on the Pakistani offer, but gave hints about the possibility of New Delhi taking up the issue with Kathmandu separately. Democratic parties described it as a move by Islamabad to find space for itself in Nepal.



AFP

A cop keeps vigil in Kathmandu on Friday.

After India, Nepal looks to China

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, March 10

NEPAL ON Thursday made a fresh bid to win international support for the February 1 royal coup. This comes amid news reports about King Gyanendra's possible visit to China in April and a day after New Delhi returned Nepalese foreign minister Rameshnath Pandey virtually empty-handed.

In continuation of its desperate campaign for international aid, Kathmandu now seemed to be ready to put India and China on an equal footing. Speaking at a function hosted by the Nepal Council of World Affairs, Pandey said Nepal was looking forward to a fruitful interaction and strong economic ties with China in 2005 that marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

Pandey added that Kathmandu sought "independence, security, peace and development" in its ties with India and China based on "goodwill and mutual cooperation."

In the presence of a host of diplomats, he expressed the hope that New Delhi would help the king in his efforts to restore peace and hold elections. He expressed concern at a possible nexus between Nepalese Maoists and Indian outfits who share a common ideology.

The monarch is expected to tour China after Chinese minister for foreign affairs Li Zhao visits Nepal later in March. The state-run Gorkhapatra daily on

Cartoon to the rescue

NEPAL'S NEWSPAPERS have found a way to beat media censorship. Cartoonist Rajesh K.C. is among a handful trying to illustrate what cannot be said in words. He works for the country's largest daily *Kantipur*. One cartoon showed three top leaders, under house arrest for weeks, trying to find a barber to trim their increasingly long hair.

AP, Kathmandu

Thursday described as "mature diplomacy" China, Pakistan and Russia's decision to treat the royal takeover as "Nepal's internal affair." At the same time, it obliquely tried to rake up the controversy over the genesis of Tamil extremism in Sri Lanka.

Pandey said Nepal attached a lot of importance to its ties with Japan, the US and the EU. (Like India, the latter two have linked their aid to democracy and basic rights). He spent sizeable time explaining how deeply Kathmandu is devoted to multi-party democracy and human rights.

Meanwhile, concerned over the situation in Nepal, the US has asked the Nepalese government to refrain from arresting political activists and ensure a rapid return of multi-party democracy.

"We have seen media reports about additional arrests but cannot confirm them. We remain concerned about continuing cur-

bs on civil liberties and reports of further arrests in Nepal," US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

He said the US had repeatedly called on the government of Nepal to promptly release detainees, end house arrests, restore civil liberties and freedom of the media all in the context of a rapid return to multiparty democracy.

"The way forward to defeat the Maoist insurgency is clear: a political process open to all who wish to participate peacefully, combined with a determined effort to bring to justice those that use terror or violence to advance their goals," he added.

The US' reaction follows reports that Nepalese authorities arrested 300 activists during anti-king protests on Thursday.

World Bank halts aid

THE WORLD Bank has halted its proposed US\$ 70 million loan assistance to Nepal. The agreed reform actions have not been completed and the bank does not intend to process the loan during the current fiscal year, country director Ken Ohashi told the board of executive directors. The board expressed concern about security and the implementability of projects, Ohashi said and added the bank will watch whether Gyanendra demonstrates commitment to the country's development visit.

The bank said it will consult closely with other development partners in assessing the progress the government makes in reform implementation.

Himalayan blunders!

King in danger of being castled

Will King Gyanendra succeed in quelling the Maoist rebellion when democratically-elected governments and two pro-palace ministries have failed? More importantly, what good can come from prolonging the standoff? Since the King stepped in, the political crisis has deepened and it was only to be expected he would call the shots to bring about a semblance of political peace. But by extending the house arrests of top political leaders by a month and slapping a fresh ban on newspapers from reporting on army action against the Maoists — and there is no guarantee that these are short term measures — he seems bent on suppressing legitimate dissent. Admittedly, the Maoists' refusal to talk has strengthened the case for firm military action but little could the people have imagined the King using helicopters to hunt rebel forces widely blamed for the present chaos. That more than 120 rebels have been killed in less than five weeks, 54 in a single day, is evidence of the frightening scale of counter-insurgency. Now with most foreign benefactors and the World Bank temporarily putting aid on hold, it is doubtful whether palace troops can maintain the momentum for long.

Instead of considering the impact on Nepal's economy, the King shot his bolt by asking donor countries to explain their "agendas" in suspending aid when he was "fighting" against terrorism and in aid of democracy. He has missed the message: he must restore democracy. No donor country would like to see its funds diverted to buy weapons to use against a native population. Time is running out and Gyanendra must consider the spectre of being a king without a country.

THE STATESMAN

09 MAR 2005

Nepal army marks festival with usual pomp

By Suman Pradhan

Kathmandu: Up to late 2001 when it was not fighting Nepal's Maoist rebels, the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) was known more for its ceremonial pomp and grandeur than its fighting abilities. The RNA regularly held parades and ceremonies marking various religious and royal functions and earned the monicker "a ceremonial army."

That tradition has continued even four years after being pressed into battle against the Maoist insurgents. While a significant chunk of the RNA's 78000-man army is out either fighting the rebels or corralling democratic politicians to obey the new royal regime, a tiny portion held a gala ceremony to mark, of all things, Shivaratri, one of Hindu's holiest festivals.

Helicopter gunships swirled overhead and troops marched and galloped on horsebacks as a bevy of royals, including King Gyanendra, and dignitaries which included the entire diplomatic corps and senior government officers, attended the annual ceremony.

And as they do every year, the choppers staged a mock military offensive against tiny huts erected overnight on the vast parade grounds, disgorging commandoes rappelling down ropes and shooting the hut to smithereens. A tiny aircraft flew overhead, disgorging more paratroopers showing their parachuting skills.

As crowds of onlookers watched from the periphery of the parade grounds, something un-routine occurred. RNA soldiers hauled



Female Nepalese soldiers march in Tundhikhel during the army day function on Tuesday

Minister caught criticising diplomatic failure

Kathmandu: A newly appointed Nepalese minister has been caught on the wrong foot, publicly admitting lapses on the part of the administration at a time any criticism of the king, direct or indirect, is banned. Education and sports minister Radhakrishna Mainali on Monday said that Nepal's "weak diplomatic mechanism" was to blame for the failure of the government to convince the international community that the Feb 1 royal takeover was needed to combat the escalating Maoist insurgency.

Speaking at a media interaction organised by Reporters' Club, a Kathmandu-

based forum for journalists, Kainali said: "It is our own weakness that we are not effective in convincing some of our foreign friends regarding the current crisis and need for a state of emergency to safeguard democracy."

The minister, who was earlier a member of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist that is opposed to King Gyanendra, deviated from the state line by calling the Maoist insurgency "a political activity" that should be "resolved politically from within the constitutional framework of multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy". IANS

in heavy equipment, including anti-aircraft guns acquired from China in the late 1980s, and freshly acquired white armoured troop carriers from UN peace-keeping missions. These weapons were rarely

shown before, but were out on parade today. Remarked one astute observer, "in the old days, the ceremony appeared to be aimed at frightening Kathmandu residents into submission. But today, it looks more like the RNA

wants to showcase its UN peace-keeping abilities by parading the big white armoured carriers acquired in front of diplomats."

The remark hits straight at the struggle for the RNA's soul. Criticised stridently by

domestic and international groups for human rights abuses in the Maoist war, the RNA is keen to maintain its lucrative contribution to UN peace-keeping missions abroad. RNA contingents are currently helping keep the peace in Sierra Leone and the Congo, and have also served in the West Asia and the Balkans. Such missions not only bring fame and prestige, but also military hardware and much needed cash for Nepal's fighting forces.

The UN peace-keeping missions have been a source of pride for this tiny nation, but continued rights abuses could jeopardise the assignments. The UN Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, during a visit to

Kathmandu in January, explicitly linked the RNA's human rights record to future peace-keeping missions. And that was before the royal putsh. After King Gyanendra seized power on February 1, Nepal's regime and its army's rights record have come under increasing international scrutiny.

"We all want RNA to continue with its contribution to peace-keeping missions," says an editor of a leading newspaper who declined to be identified. "But it will have to impress donors with its rights record, not just Kathmandu-based diplomats."

Meanwhile, Kanakmani Dixit, publisher and editor of a Nepali language fortnightly Himal Khabarpatrika, who was arrested for criticising the emergency, was released after a brief detention on Monday night. Dixit, a senior journalist, was arrested from his house at 8 pm.

TOKYO PLEDGES GRANTS TO KING'S REGIME

Boost to Gyanendra

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, March 7. — Nepal's new regime headed by King Gyanendra got its first shot in the arm from abroad today with Japan, one of its biggest donors, pledging two grants totalling 3,301 million yen (over \$31 million) for economic adjustments and social development.

Japan's ambassador to Nepal Mr Tsutomu Hirao-ka signed two separate agreements with Nepalese finance secretary Mr Bhanu Prasad Acharya here today, including a \$14 million grant assistance for Nepal's economic adjustment efforts and to help it

overcome economic difficulties, particularly indebtedness, and \$17 million for socio-economic development, a food production increase programme.

The Japanese aid is the first fresh assistance to come in since the 1 February takeover of power by the king. The royal coup resulted in the majority of donor countries suspending assistance to Nepal, preferring to assess the developments first.

Besides, military assistance has also been hit with India and the UK suspending aid to the Royal Nepalese Army and the US still mulling its decision. Though India says its economic cooperation will

continue and last week two projects in the education and health sectors got off the ground, no new India-aided project has been announced since 1 February.

Koirala's kin worried

Octogenarian Opposition leader Mr Girija Prasad Koirala, who is under house arrest since last month, has been denied access to his doctors and relatives, family sources said, adds PTI. The former Prime Minister suffers from heart problems, hypertension and asthma. Mr Koirala's nephew Shashank and his wife Suphatra, both doctors, are also not allowed to meet him.

NEPAL AND THE WORLD-II

Following Pressures, The King Will Do Well To Retrace His Steps

By PARMANAND

India also lost no time in expressing concern over the safety of arrested political leaders in the kingdom and asked for their early release. This step obviously showed India's concern for democratic forces in the kingdom was not concealed but clearly articulated. After all, many of them had maintained excellent relations with Indian leaders for a relatively long time.

The Indian ambassador to Nepal, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, when approached by the chief of the staff of the Royal Nepal Army, Gen Pyar Jung Thapa, for seeking an assurance on continuance of arms supply to Nepal, remained non-committal. Instead, the Indian ambassador chose the occasion to convey India's concern over developments in Nepal.

Invitation to COAS

Earlier also, the Indian ambassador had conveyed his views to the new Nepal foreign minister, Ramesh Nath Pandey. General JJ Singh, who was invited to Nepal, almost immediately after assuming the post of COAS in India, declined the invite. Significantly, the COAS of India holds the rank of an honorary general in the RNA and vice-versa. Obviously, his visit to Nepal at this juncture would have been construed as India's acquiescence in all the happenings.

Not less significantly, India prevented Nepal from gaining political legitimacy — regional or international — in the wake of the developments on 1 and 2 February. One of the first announcements that King Gyanendra made was that he would attend the 13th Saarc summit at Dhaka slated to commence on 6 February.

After all, now he is both the head of state and government: either position empowers him to attend the Saarc summit. Earlier, though, the Nepali monarch had established links between the changes at home and the Saarc summits by not attending the summits since 1990 when the fifth summit was held in Male, capital of Maldives. In any case, it would have been the maiden presence of Gyanendra at any Saarc summit.

Indeed, India lost no time - by citing the reason of security scene in Dhaka and political developments in Nepal — in announcing its decision not to participate in the summit. Needless to stress, these developments should not have left anyone in

ment and people of India, but they did not lag behind in expressing themselves on the developments. Some rather expressed themselves strongly.

The US state department's condemnation was virtually identical to India's reaction.



doubt on the way in which the Indian diplomacy was moving. India has been, from the outset, insisting that Nepal should not deviate from the system of constitutional monarchy based on multiparty democracy.

Original interpretations

King Gyanendra, though, had his own and original interpretations of "constitutional monarchy". Whereas the whole rational world interprets "constitutional monarchy" as "limited", "titular" or "ornamental" monarchy, to King Gyanendra it was nothing sort of "active", "pro-active" or "constructive" monarchy and by showing his allergy to political parties, he had rarely left anyone in doubt that he wanted to be a power-concentrating monarch — and that too in the 21st century or the new millennium.

Maybe other states having diplomatic relations with Nepal or helping Nepal economically and militarily in a variety of ways and manners did not feel the impact as did the Indian govern-

Spokesman Richard Boucher said: "Nepal should make an immediate move towards the restoration of multiparty democratic institutions under the constitutional monarchy. We continue to urge the Maoists to abandon their armed struggle and to join the political mainstream through dialogue".

Not less significantly, the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, expressed grave concern and called for the restoration of democratic freedom. The Secretary General's spokesperson stated: "The Secretary General views these actions as a serious setback for the country. He does not believe that they will bring lasting peace and stability in Nepal. Steps should be taken to restore democratic freedoms". Not lagging behind, Britain threatened to withdraw economic assistance to Nepal in view of the state of emergency. Stressing restoration of democracy, British foreign office minister Douglas Alexander summoned the Nepalese ambassador in London to convey the

UK government's grave concern about political developments in Nepal.

Nepal's northern neighbour, China, which happens to enjoy that status only because of the latter's usurpation of Tibet in the 1950s, was more cautious in its comment. It was apparently intriguing in the light of the overall reaction of the international community. But then China has been changing its postures vis-a-vis Nepal.

Arms supplier

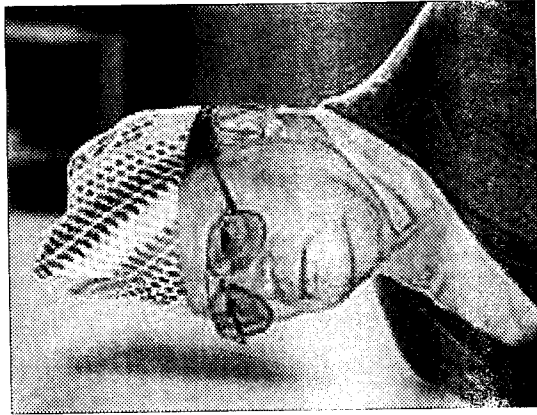
This time around, China said it was an "internal" affair. Fears, indeed, loom large in Nepal and international diplomatic circles ask whether China would step in to fill the gap as an arms supplier. Various stories are doing the rounds that Nepal's Crown Prince Paras, during his recent visit to China, had shown keen interest in arms manufactured there. On its part, India has begun to engage China on Nepal. Analysts, in any case, have to walk a tightrope for the present.

Russia's reaction was most original. On 2 February, it expressed the hope that Nepal would cope with its problems itself, and not at the expense of democracy. Russian foreign ministry said that Moscow was watching the developments closely. It stated: "Russia and Nepal are linked to long-standing relations, based on mutual sympathy and cooperation. It is to be hoped that friendly Nepal will be able to resolve its problems itself and the realisation of stability and security will go hand in hand with the strengthening of democracy, social and economic progress".

The international community, through its skilled and effective diplomacy has, by and large, not only disapproved of King Gyanendra's steps, but also, in the given framework, spelt out what steps it might take. The comments of states like China, Pakistan and Bangladesh do not seem to be finding supporters or sympathisers. King Gyanendra would do well to retrace his steps at the earliest — if for nothing else, then at least to make a last-ditch effort to save the office that he holds.

(Concluded)

Compulsion of the king



Nepalese foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey tells SUDESHNA SARKAR that the royal takeover was a necessity and that he is confident of continued international support

WITH India and the UK having announced suspension of military assistance to Nepal and the USA expected to come to a decision soon, Nepal's foreign policy stands at a very critical stage. However, while trying to make the international community see its point of view – that the royal coup was necessary to combat the Maoist insurgents – the new regime headed by King Gyanendra has also made it clear that though “some have expressed dissatisfaction and some have welcomed the move, they must say what they must and we must do what we must.”

Nepal's new foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey says he is confident of continued international support. “I am confident the ambassadors of our friendly countries will come back with reassurance of their respective governments to support our efforts to restore peace and security and hold elections so that we can bring multiparty democracy back to track,” he says. “I am confident that our friendly countries have understood the compulsion of the king to take this decision.”

According to Pandey, the royal takeover was necessitated by the growing Maoist insurgency and the political parties' failure to combat it unitedly. “It is not only Nepal's peace and security that is at stake,” the minister says, “but peace and future of the entire region and eventually the world. Stability and democracy in South Asia will be safeguarded if Nepal is successful in implementing its public commitment to restore peace and security... Nepal paid a heavy price to learn the lesson that without the restoration of peace and security there can be no elections and without elections, there can be no multiparty democracy. The international community should appreciate that instead of wasting time.”

The foreign minister sees a pragmatic relationship with neighbour India and progress in Indo-Nepal projects. “Fifty years of Indo-Nepal relations is a story of wasted opportunity,” he says. “We call for frankness and transparency. The government is very serious

enjoying peace after an exceptionally long time. If the international community continues its support, other districts will also see restoration of peace and security.”

The royalist minister says the king wants to work in tandem with the political parties. “The king has said it is the obligation of all political parties, the intelligentsia and members of civil society to work unitedly to protect multiparty democracy from the threat of terrorism. So there is a meeting point of minds between the international community (who are supporting multiparty democracy in Nepal) and the king on the basic issues of peace, security and democracy.”

What about the state of emergency with the suspension of fundamental rights and media censorship? When will the political leaders held under detention from 1 February be released? “Relaxations (of restrictions) started within 36 hours of the imposition of emergency,” Pandey says. “If the situation continues to be encouraging, other relaxations will follow soon.”

(The author is the Kathmandu-based Correspondent of The Statesman.)

Isn't that an attempt to needle India?

“The king did not call Aziz, it was the Pakistani PM who called him,” Pandey says. “And that too as the chairman of Saarc, of which Nepal and India are members.”

Government policy regarding the insurgency, he says, is clear. “The king has publicly appealed to the Maoists to join mainstream politics. His condition is that the meeting point should be patriotism. They should agree on the values of multiparty democracy. If they join the mainstream, they will get the same rights and opportunities as others. Once they get the people's mandate, they can do what the mandate authorises them to.”

Should the rebels continue their aggression, Pandey cautions there will be no winners. “In case of a civil war, no one will win – the nation will lose. We have to prove our seriousness and maturity and resolve all difficulties through negotiations.”

Regarding the Maoist blockade that began on 13 February, Pandey says the government has restored security in Kathmandu, and that it will be extended to other districts soon. “We have just begun and the beginning is encouraging. The people of Kathmandu are

about its commitments with India.”

Regarding Nepal's political leaders fleeing to India and starting anti-king protests there, Pandey says Indo-Nepal relations are so wide and open that free travels by each other's citizens is a very normal phenomenon. “But as far as political considerations are concerned,” he adds, “our government's standing policy is not to allow Nepal's soil to be used against any of its neighbours. We are confident that our friendly neighbours will reciprocate.” After King Gyanendra sacked the Sher Bahadur Deuba government and assumed executive powers, there were reports in the local media of Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz speaking to the monarch on the phone and assuring him of Islamabad's support. Like China and Russia, Pakistan too calls the royal coup an internal matter of Nepal. A statement from the Pakistani Embassy in Kathmandu, highlighting that Aziz was the first foreign leader to speak with the king after the takeover, also emphasised the fact that Pakistan shared Nepal's disappointment at the postponement of the Saarc summit due to India's pullout.

NEPAL AND THE WORLD-I

International Community Becomes Active

By PARMANAND

518 917
The actions of King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal on 1 and 2 February — which included dismissal of the broad-based four-party coalition of Sher Bahadur Deuba, imposition of emergency, suspension of fundamental human and civil rights, including the right to private property, imposition of censorship on the Press, snapping of communications with the outside world and, above all, assuming direct and all executive powers in his hands for no less than three years — almost immediately made the international community and international diplomacy immensely active and effective.

Landlocked

It was not unnatural. Nepal is no longer living in the socio-political and economic isolation of the 18th and 19th centuries. Nepal's economy remains hugely dependent on foreign aid. Even as an internationally recognised sovereign independent state, the landlocked mountain kingdom is member of various international and regional organisations like the UN, Nam, Saarc, WTO and BIMSTEC. True, Nepal is not a member of the Commonwealth, for it was never technically colonised. It is altogether a different matter that its permanently non-colonised status was mainly due to its incapacity of getting economically exploited.

And, in any case, the British, the then colonial master of neighbouring India, had forced Nepal to supply Gorkhas to its troops through the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli. Indeed, during the first war of India's independence (1857), the First (1914-1918) and Second (1939-45) World Wars as many as 45,000 young Gorkhas were killed and 40,000 incapacitated. It underlined, in practical

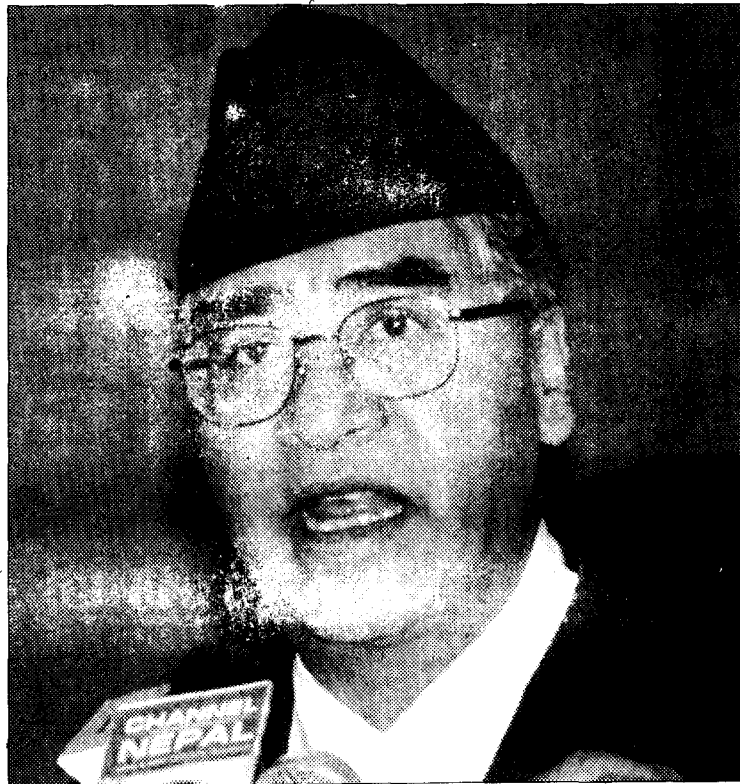
The author is Hon. Director, South Asian Studies Foundation, New Delhi

terms, how sovereign and independent Nepal had been.

India was the first country to react on the happenings in Nepal. In fact, India was quite aware of what had been happening and what was brewing. Its

immemorial. And the people-to-people relations have always been strong, notwithstanding differences in perceptions on various occasions.

The Cabinet Committee on Security met under the Prime



interest in Nepal's affairs is natural: it's one of the only two direct neighbours of the mountain kingdom, the other being China. As India borders Nepal in the south, east and the west, the latter is also known as an India-locked state. India's security is, inter alia, highly dependent on various happenings in Nepal.

Confrontation

The huge and open border between the two countries — where travel takes place without paper requirements like passport and visa — has constantly facilitated interaction between Indians and Nepalis since time

Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's chairmanship on 1 February to discuss the impact of the Nepal's development on the region. In a fairly lengthy statement by the ministry of external affairs, it was stated on 1 February: "These developments constitute a serious setback to the cause of democracy in Nepal and cannot but be a cause of grave concern to India". India also took the position that the King had "violated" the principle of multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy by forming a government under his chairmanship.

The MEA statement also said that the developments bring the

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monarchy and the mainstream political parties in "direct confrontation" with each other. Quite significantly, it also said: "This can only benefit the force that not only wish to undermine democracy but the institution of monarchy as well".

Indian political parties of various hues did not lag behind. After all, very many of them are related in various democratic activities to some political parties in India's northern neighbourhood. Terming King Gyanendra's step as "anti-democratic", the CPI-M Politburo said in a statement that the Nepal King took the step at a time when "his credibility as a constitutional monarchy itself has not been established among the people". The secretary of the CPI, D Raja, said that it was a "retrograde step in a neighbouring country".

Democracy

The All India Forward Bloc general secretary, Debabrata Biswas, described the 1 February developments as "dangerous for democracy". Biswas, significantly, also said that ultra Leftists should realise that their attempts against democracy had ended in power going to the monarchy. The Revolutionary Socialist Party of India called the developments "a brutal murder of democracy" and "a great setback to democratic forces".

The Bharatiya Janata Party, the most important constituent of the opposition National Democratic Alliance, seemed to be in line with the mainstream political parties' and people's feelings — of course, in a guarded manner. Its general secretary, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said: "We have always believed in democracy and multiparty system. The developments in Nepal are a matter of concern and we are keeping a watch on the situation".

(To be concluded)

India, US ties deepen over Nepal

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

MORE than a month after the King seized power in Kathmandu, India and US have closed ranks on Nepal, allowing very little space for Gyanendra to manoeuvre.

Sources said not a day passes without a meeting between senior Indian and US officials at Kathmandu, New Delhi or Washington to exchange notes on the situation. The gradual realignment in ties is showing results — it played out effectively during tsunami relief operations, has been

working well in Afghanistan, and now Nepal.

Last week, US Ambassador to Nepal James Moriarty made a brief stopover in New Delhi on his way back to Kathmandu after being recalled for consultations in Washington. He met Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and shared with him the US assessment on the situation and held informal discussions with former Indian officials with expertise on Nepal.

Likewise, when Indian envoy to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee was here for consultations, sources said he met US Ambassador to India David Mulford and apprised him of the latest. This is besides

all the interaction that goes on daily in the three capitals.

Donald Camp, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for

REALIGNMENT

Not a day passes without a meeting between Indian and US officials at Kathmandu, Delhi or Washington on the situation

South Asia, told a Congressional committee on Wednesday while making a case for a budget request that India was

the "pre-eminent power in the region" with whom the US was "consulting closely" on ways to help Nepal resolve its political crisis.

The convergence on the positions held by both sides is best reflected in the three broad objectives Camp outlined before a Congressional sub-committee investigating the Nepal political crisis:

- King Gyanendra needs to move quickly to reinstate and protect civil and human rights
- Release those detained under the state of emergency.

- Begin dialogue with political parties to restore multi-party democratic institutions under constitutional monarchy.

Washington does face a dilemma over a decision on the \$2 million security assistance to Nepal. While India and UK have suspended military aid since February 1, US has still not taken a public position on this. Sources, however, confirmed that on ground, no US military supplies have reached Nepal since the King declared emergency.

The Indian position has not been too different, with New Delhi constantly pointing out that aid to Nepal is under "constant review". India has also made its priorities clear, beginning with the release of politicians detained after February 1.

Royal jail gesture brews

Pressure tells on Nepal king

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, March 3: King Gyanendra may take the first step towards restoring normality to Nepal with the release of political leaders in the next few days.

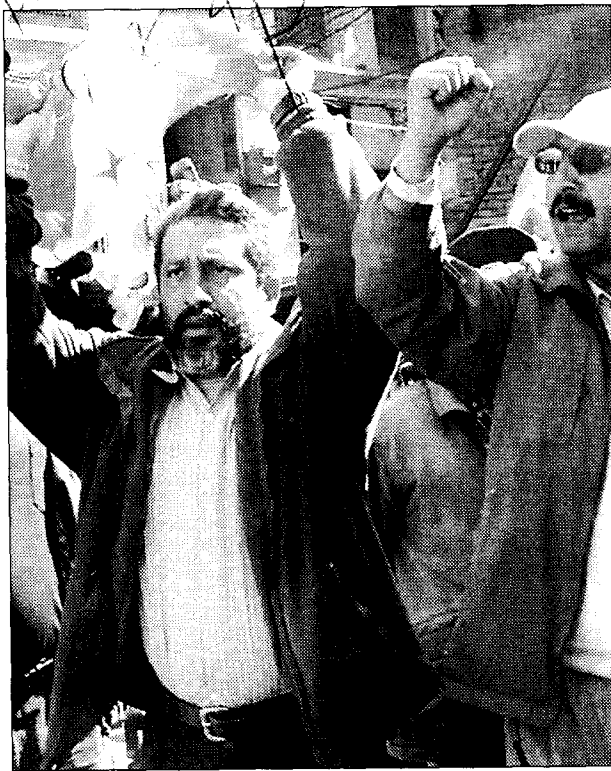
Sources said indications from Kathmandu are that the king, who has been facing mounting pressure from India and the international community — particularly the US and the European Union — may start releasing the democratic party leaders by next week.

Gyanendra had taken them into custody since February 1 when he dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba government and declared emergency.

He may still be dragging his feet on giving time to Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee for a meeting, but the signs show that the king has started wilting under pressure.

Foreign minister K. Natwar Singh is scheduled to make a statement in Parliament soon, clarifying India's stand on Nepal's "political turmoil" and, probably, stressing the need for immediate restoration of democracy there.

India wants Gyanendra to release all political leaders, lift emergency, start talks with democratic leaders for a permanent solution to the Maoist



Nepali Congress Party activists protest against King Gyanendra in Kathmandu on Thursday. (AFP)

problem, and strengthen democracy.

India has withheld arms supplies to Nepal since February 1, which the palace sees as Delhi's attempt to mount pressure on the king.

But Delhi has felt encouraged by the strong statements emerging from the West, particularly the US and the European Union, and the World Bank's decision to withhold development aid to Kathmandu.

Singh's scheduled statement may re-emphasise the Indian call for democracy in Nepal.

Mukherjee was sent back there over a week ago with a

strong message for Gyanendra, asking him to take immediate steps to restore democracy. Since then, the king has not given the ambassador time for a meeting. This is unusual for a Nepal monarch as he rarely keeps an Indian ambassador waiting for more than a week for an "audience".

South Block sees Gyanendra's decision as an attempt to register his protest against Delhi's refusal to support him. But he may now be inclined to look for a way out of the tight corner he has pushed himself into and may meet the Indian ambassador to accomplish this.

Stock pile-up on fresh fear

J. HEMANTH

Kathmandu, March 3: The government, anticipating reimposition of the Maoists' nationwide blockade, launched a major exercise to stockpile essential commodities in the Kathmandu valley even as security forces arrested students for demonstrating against the February 1 royal coup.

The authorities today asked several prominent traders who import essential commodities from India to stock up enough in their warehouses. Some were told that the government would provide storage facilities, including godowns, if needed.

State-owned Nepal Oil Corporation, the sole importer of petroleum products from India, has been asked to shift enough stock from its depot near Birgunj on the India-Nepal border. "We want to ensure that Kathmandu is not starved of any supplies. We plan to stock up supplies to last at least two months," a security source said.

State-run newspapers quoted commerce ministry and Nepal Food Corporation officials as saying that truckloads of additional supplies had begun arriving in the valley since yesterday. They also claimed that the government was increasing storage capacity by requisitioning private warehouses and creating new ones.



Girija Prasad Koirala

Detained Koirala renews protest call

J. HEMANTH

Kathmandu, Feb. 28: Former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress chief Girija Prasad Koirala today renewed his call for nationwide street protests to force King Gyanendra to reverse his February 1 takeover.

In a statement issued from detention, Koirala said the monarch was using the army to quell dissent and stifle all forms of political activity.

He said the king was adopting double standards to dupe the international community. "While the king tells the world that he is committed to constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy, in practice he is ruling the country with the might of the army", he said. Koirala's call comes after the party's failure to mobilise the people against the royal takeover.

With most of the Nepali Congress leadership under detention, the movement launched on February 18 evoked very little response.

Today, only a dozen Nepali Congress workers took part in a protest before they were arrested by security forces for violating prohibitory orders that were enforced after the takeover. Koirala, who has been under house arrest since the royal coup, also renewed his demand for the restoration of the House of Representatives as part of the greater agenda for safeguarding parliamentary democracy.

"The Nepali Congress still considers that the revival of the House of Representatives is a must if we are to defend parliamentary democracy," he said.

02 MAR 2005

Nepal warns of 'Communist' takeover

KATHMANDU, MARCH 1. More than 70 Maoists have been killed in a fierce clash with Nepal's army, an official said on Tuesday as the Foreign Minister warned the world to accept the King's power grab or watch a Communist takeover.

Four members of the security forces were also killed in the clash on Monday night at Ganeshpur in Bardiya district, 500 km southwest of Kathmandu, said an army spokesman Brigadier-General, Dipak Gurung.

"So far the security forces have recovered the bodies of at least 70 Maoists killed in the clash," he said. The rebels had carried away others of their dead, he added.

Another officer, Colonel Yagya Rajauria of the mid-western army division, said the situation in the area was now under control. "However, we are very cautious," he added. "The Maoists started firing at security force personnel patrolling the area but another army team trapped them from behind so they suffered heavy casualties," he added. "It was a fierce encounter which lasted several hours."

No confirmation

There was no immediate independent confirmation of the

toll. The reported death toll is the highest of any clash since King Gyanendra a month ago seized absolute power and declared emergency rule.

Soon after his power grab he offered to hold unconditional talks with the Maoists, who have been fighting to overthrow the monarchy since 1996 at a cost of about 11,000 lives.

The Maoists, who branded the King a "national betrayer" for his February takeover, have not responded to his call, despite warnings by the pro-royalist government appointed by the King. The army was poised to launch a wave of offensives.

The Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey, meanwhile, warned in a television interview late on Monday the world had to choose between supporting the monarch and an eventual return to democracy or allowing Nepal to be taken over by Communists.

In the interview, state-run news agency RSS reported on Tuesday, Mr. Pandey defended the King's seizure of power, saying it had been done at the express wish of the population because the politicians were squabbling among themselves and were not dealing with the Maoist insurgency. AED

THE HINDU

02 MAR 2005

Nepal protest call and bloodshed

Kathmandu, Feb. 27 (Agencies): Five major political parties in Nepal announced a peaceful agitation from next month even as fresh violence claimed around 15 people, including 10 security personnel, a day after the Maoists' economic blockade was lifted.

"We demand that the royal proclamation be immediately withdrawn, emergency lifted, people's rights restored and all political prisoners and journalists released," the parties said in a joint statement that declared an agitation from March 8, coinciding with international women's day.

The Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, Nepali Congress (Democratic), Janamorcha Nepal and Nepal Sadbhavana Party (A) also urged the Maoist rebels to end the violence and resume peace talks.

Their landmine attack today, however, killed three soldiers and five policemen in Bara, about 200 km south of Kathmandu, army sources said. Another ambush at Solokh-

umbu killed a soldier and a policeman. "Ten (other) security personnel wounded in both incidents have been brought to Kathmandu for treatment," an army statement said.

Elsewhere, soldiers gunned down three rebels overnight in separate clashes.

The violence notwithstanding, buses returned on the roads and food supplies resumed after the Maoist chief Prachanda called off yesterday the fortnight-long blockade, imposed in protest against the royal coup, citing "a deep sense of responsibility to the people". He, however, threatened an indefinite strike if Gyanendra did not backtrack.

"It is nice to have everything normal. Buses are running after 15 days," said Arjun Adhikary of Nepalgunj, near the rebels' heartland in western Nepal.

The blockade — marked by tree-trunk and mine-laden roadblocks, ditches dug on highways, blazing vehicles and fatal attacks — had crip-

pled transport of essential supplies as vehicular movement reduced to a trickle.

Backchannel talks

Sharad Chandra Shah, advisor to King Gyanendra, briefed foreign secretary Shyam Saran on Sunday about the situation in Nepal and sought India's "appreciation" of the palace's compulsions, reports our special correspondent.

Shah's visit to New Delhi, ostensibly for a private occasion, follows India's official announcement that it was not supplying military hardware to Nepal after the February 1 royal coup.

Saran is understood to have emphasised that the king should reverse the coup and restore a civilian government.

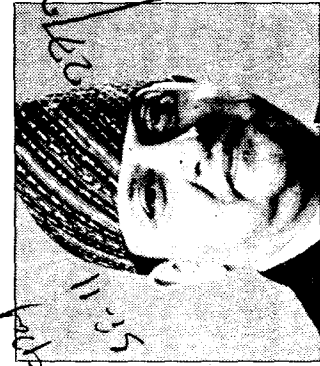
Shah also met BJP leaders, seeking their "understanding". They told him their party supported Delhi's official position that backs constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy in Nepal.

WB snubs King, Singhal backs him

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KATHMANDU, Feb. 26. — While the World Bank has decided to suspend a \$70 million budgetary assistance to Nepal for the current fiscal year, swelling the ranks of international donors imposing curbs on aid to punish King Gyanendra for dismissing the Sher Bahadur Deuba government on 1 February, the king's old ally, Mr Ashok Singhal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, has vowed public support for the beleaguered monarch, advocating the destruction of Pakistan to restore peace to Nepal.

Though Nepal's newly appointed finance minister Madhukar Shumshere JB Rana had earlier this week expressed confidence that multilateral donors would continue their support even if



King Gyanendra & Mr Singhal

bilateral ones like India and the UK have halted military assistance, the media reported on Saturday that the World Bank chief in Nepal, Mr Ken Ohashi, met Rana to inform him about the assistance.

The bank has decided to stop assistance in view of the failure of the dismissed Deuba govern-

ment to honour conditions, like taking strong action against wilful defaulters, speedy reforms in governance and enacting flexible labour laws.

The *Kathmandu Post* daily quoted WB spokesman Rajiv Upadhyay as saying that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit programme will be put on

hold due to "extremely slow implementation of agreed reform measures".

With the European Union and the US expected to follow the Indian and British lead and announce further cuts in aid, the only public support for the king this week has come from Mr Singhal, who arrived in Kathmandu on Thursday and paid a courtesy call to the monarch the day after.

The VHP, close to the Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh of Nepal, has expressed support for the royal coup as well as the emergency.

Mr Singhal said Maoist insurgency in Nepal was an onslaught against Hinduism with the guerrillas forcing thousands of Hindus to flee their homes and country. However, Maoist terrorism, he said, had not spread to Nepal from India. "Three forces

are behind this terrorism," he told the media in Kathmandu on Saturday. "They are the communists, the church and Islamic militants, including Pakistan's ISI." Mr Singhal accused India and the US of doublespeak for criticising the royal coup.

"The Indian government mandated KPS Gill to kill 12,000 Khalistanis during the Khalistan movement and wipe it out," he said.

Strike called off

Meanwhile, Maoist rebels today called off a 14-day-old nationwide transport blockade staged to protest King Gyanendra's seizure of power, saying they wanted to show "responsibility toward the public," a statement signed by guerrilla leader Prachanda said.

27 FEB 2005

STILL NOT TOO LATE

Gyanendra can make amends

THE Nepalese look upon their king as Vishnu's re-incarnation and his picture adorns every home. When he falls ill the nation sinks into gloom. The last to justify this adulation was King Birendra, whose entire family was wiped out in 2001. As a constitutional monarch, he endeared himself to his people because he could adjust with the changing times. His rule saw the smooth changeover from panchayati raj to multiparty democracy in 1990. The king may not play a direct role, but the constitutional monarch system suited Nepal pretty well. If democratic forces failed to govern, the monarch was the binding force, the protector of the constitution. With King Birendra's tragic death one can safely say the monarchy as such is dead. However well King Gyanendra may handle the chaotic situation in the aftermath of the 2001 palace massacre, he is turning out to be set on reviving an absolute monarchy. Had the former Chogyal of Sikkim listened to his well-wishers advice to rule as a constitutional head, he might not have died unsung and alone.

The writing is on the wall — if King Gyanendra denies the people their constitutional rights, the tide will turn against him. Repressive measures like, putting political party activists under house arrest, suppressing dissent by brute force and muzzling the press are all too reminiscent of the old kind of democracy — a system that did not work properly, with leaders constantly falling out among themselves. India has put Indo-Nepalese relations at risk by freezing arms sales to Nepal but this clearly shows it is with the Nepalese. Have geopolitical compulsions prompted King Gyanendra to hint at seeking a northern neighbour's help through his recent induction of two elderly panchayat loyalists with a pro-China tilt into the royal cabinet? With the Maoists now stepping up activities to block roads and cut off essential supplies to Kathmandu valley, the King must find a way to extricate his mountain country from the chaos of his own making.

THE STATESMAN

27 FEB 2005

Maoists call off blockade in Nepal, WB stops aid

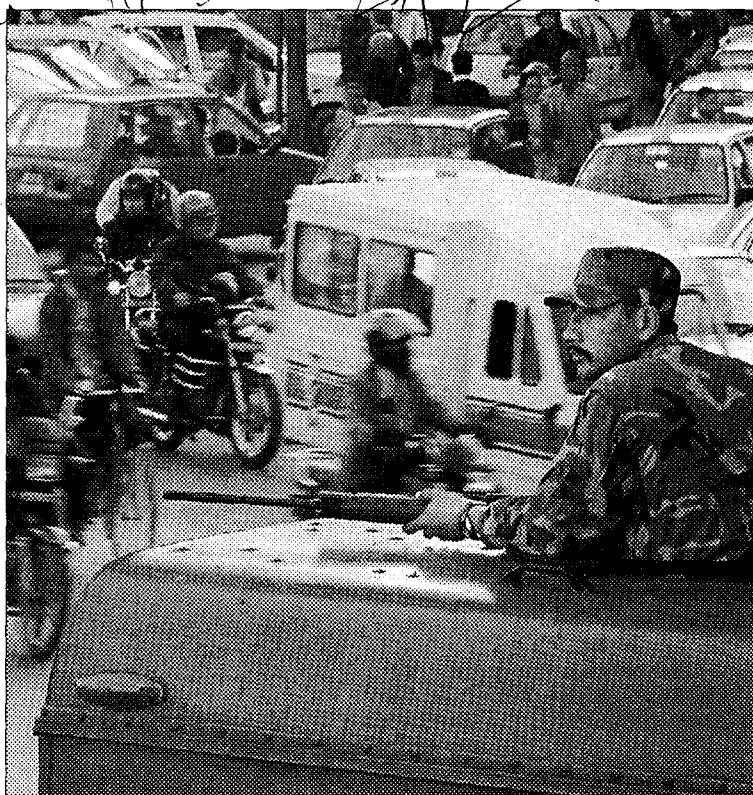
Agencies
Kathmandu, February 26

Nepal's Maoist rebels on Saturday called off a 14-day-old nationwide transport blockade staged to protest King Gyanendra's seizure of power, saying they wanted to show "responsibility towards the public," a statement signed by guerrilla leader Prachanda said.

"To show our greater responsibility towards the general public, we have decided to call off the ongoing nationwide indefinite transport blockade as of now," the statement said. However, Prachanda also sounded off a warning to the king. "If there are no changes (in the political situation) our party will be obliged to observe an indefinite nationwide strike from next month," he concluded.

Meanwhile, heavily-armed Maoists torched and bombed a regional station of the state-run Nepal Television, causing damage worth over Rs 4 crore and disrupting the broadcast indefinitely even as the security forces gunned down 10 rebels and lost four of their own men in a clash in the west of the kingdom.

The regional station of Nepal Television (NTV), at Kohalpur in the Banke district of mid-western Nepal, was torched and bombed by hundreds of Maoists, NTV sources said. The regional broadcast of the NTV has been disrupted indefinitely. The Maoists also looted seven cameras and several other equipment from the station. However, no one was injured in the incident, the sources said. In another incident, Nepalese security forces shot dead 10 rebels and lost four of their own men in Bادهपुर area on the East-West Highway in Dhangadhi district, media reports said. The fight broke out after the rebels opened fire at security personnel, who were clearing barricades placed by Maoists on the highway.



A policeman guards a busy street in Kathmandu on Saturday.

AP

An blast at the Kopeche jungle area in the Siraha district killed four children, The Kathmandu Post reported. They injured were admitted to the local hospital for treatment.

However, the worst strike was inflicted by the World Bank when it suspended the \$70-million aid to Nepal for the current fiscal year under the Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit phase-two, citing extremely slow improvement in the situation. However, the worst strike was inflicted by the World Bank (WB) when it suspended the aid to Nepal for the current fiscal year under the Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit phase-two, cit-

ing extremely slow implementation of agreed reform measures.

Annan briefed on emergency

As pressure mounted on Nepal's new regime to restore democracy in the Himalayan Kingdom, the government told United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan that failure on the part of political parties to perform has forced it to impose emergency. The government has justified its move by blaming political parties for failing to work, emphasising that national sovereignty and democracy is under threat, a UN spokesman said.

Of kings, coups, and censorship

By Laxmi Murthy

Nepal's King and his men have targeted the country's thriving independent media, which have fought back using satire.

DOES IT need a state of emergency to clear the garbage on the streets? Can only a complete clampdown on the independent media ensure that there are no long queues at petrol pumps? Is widespread detention of journalists, political leaders and human rights activists the only way to guarantee the citizens of Nepal adequate food, water, electricity, health and education?

It would appear so, if one were to believe the middle and upper class residents of the Kathmandu Valley. Eerily reminiscent of the Indian emergency in 1975, where trains running on time and availability of parking space were offered as justification for the brutal onslaught on fundamental rights, one can only hope that Nepal will not have to suffer for two years before it can break the stranglehold.

Nepal's fledgling democracy of barely a decade and a half is in danger of being grounded even before it can learn to fly. And what better symbol to crush than the free press? Nepal's thriving independent media, rather than being allowed to move towards more professionalism, has been corered into defending the rights that it savoured for about 15 years following the establishment of multi-party democracy, however faulty.

Since the royal coup on February 1, when King Gyanendra dismissed the Government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and assumed executive powers, he and the army have throttled the media by directly enforcing censorship through armed military intervention and indirectly fostering a climate of fear and self-censorship. As a result of this control, independent news has been stifled, six journalists are known to be under detention, media organisations have been shut down, and almost 1000 journalists rendered jobless. No less important, the public has been deprived of its right to know.

The control was crude to begin with. Journalists watched in horror when, even before the king's address ended, at about 10.15 am, armed personnel barged into media houses, TV and radio stations and demanded that work be stopped. Phone and internet lines were totally cut for three days, and intermittently and arbitrarily turned on and off for a few hours at random. Mobile phone connections continue to be cut off. For about four days, armed security personnel sat in the newsrooms and went through the copy. Editors and senior journalists of the country's largest circulating Nepali daily were

summoned and told in no uncertain terms that if they did not follow the official directives, "no one could guarantee their safety."

The government-owned publication *Gorkhapatra* on February 3 published a notice that "considering the nation and national interest, His Majesty's Government has banned for six months any interview, article, news, notice, view or personal opinion that goes against the letter and spirit of the Royal Proclamation on 1 Feb 2005 and that directly or indirectly supports destruction and terrorism." And to show that the King meant business, any dissidents were summarily dealt with. Tara Nath Dahal, President of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), the umbrella body of journalists in the country, on February 2 came out with a strong statement against the coup and has been hounded by security personnel ever since. Bishnu Nisuthuri, Secretary General of the FNJ, was picked up two days later, taken to an army camp and blindfolded for almost a day. Despite a *habeas corpus* petition in the Supreme Court, he was held for nearly two weeks and released finally on February 25.

On February 7 the local administration in the mid-western town of Nepalgunj issued a set of rigorous conditions against publishers of local newspapers. Newspapers were prohibited from publishing news that "could have negative impact upon the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and the law and order." Nothing that may "undermine in any way the institution of monarchy and the Royal proclamation of Feb 1" could be published. News relating to bandhs (strikes) called by Maoists, and the loss of life and property caused by the Maoists against the security forces and government agencies was prohibited, while reporting civilian loss due to Maoist activities was permitted. In a clampdown on exposing official corruption, reporting irregularities on the part of any government agencies and their weaknesses could only be published after "careful examination" and could not "demoralise" civil servants. To rub salt in the wounds, it was mandatory for newspapers to send a copy of the published newspaper free-of-cost to the monitoring team!

Even as crude control gave way to "self censorship," and gun-toting army censors were replaced by fresh faced military intelligence "boys" in

civil dress, the Nepali media launched a subversive resistance. Satire was replete in the tongue-in-cheek comebacks. For instance, *The Kathmandu Post*, Nepal's largest circulating English-language daily, ran an absurd editorial titled "Socks in Society" — on how socks without holes are a prestige symbol in a poor country like Nepal! The weekly *Nepali Times* ran an editorial criticising the rise in tree felling — trees being the symbol of not only democracy, but the Nepali Congress Party as well, whose leaders had been arrested. The *Nepali Times* and *Himal Khabarpatrika*, for instance, left blank spaces where the copy had been censored, encouraging the reader to read between the gaping holes. Another tactic was a pointed silence, as if to say, "Alright, you want to silence us, we will be quiet," weeklies like *Deshantar*, *Bimarsh* and *Sanghu* have been leaving a blank space where editorials usually appear. This has led the Chief District Officer of Kathmandu to summon five editors and interrogate them for over two hours. They were freed only after signing a statement undertaking to report to the authorities whenever summoned.

Some publications chose to demonstrate their resistance visually. When informed that the *Nepali Times* could not carry a certain "provocative" column, nor could the space be left blank, the editors were forced to fill up the space. So there appeared a picture of a bawling, grimacing infant born on February 1, with the ironic caption "10 days old." Another form of subversion was by an Editor of a Nepali weekly who simply deleted his name where it should have appeared as "Editor and Publisher". "I am no longer the editor of my own publication," he said. "If the security personnel who censor my copy would reveal their names, I'd put them down as the 'true' editors," he said wryly.

Starting with Radio Sagarmatha, one of Nepal's most popular independent radio stations, all FM radio stations have been prohibited from broadcasting news forcing up to 800 radio journalists out of work. There are 56 registered FM stations in Nepal, with 47 in actual operation. They have a wide outreach, and their listeners in remote areas have no other form of news. With a widespread non-literate population, radio is an excellent — sometimes the only —

means of communication. By cutting off the access to FM news, the King is denying the Nepali public of a vital source of independent news. The BBC Nepali news service is now the only source of news, and since its transmission on FM is banned, scores of people, desperate for information, are queuing up to buy short wave radios.

And what, ultimately, is the purpose of this clampdown? The state of emergency and virtual martial law is ostensibly aimed at decimating the Maoist movement. But even casual observation in Kathmandu will reveal that the military seems rather preoccupied in controlling the media, arresting protesters, tailing journalists, and monitoring human rights activists and harmless gatherings of anxious citizens lamenting the state of society, to actually be dealing effectively with the Maoists.

Reports filtering in reveal that, contrary to government propaganda, the Maoist-imposed economic blockade in protest over the Kings' takeover, launched on February 13, the 10th anniversary of the "People's War" continued to disrupt vehicular movement on most of the highways in Nepal. Though some passenger buses and trucks loaded with essential goods have been escorted by the army on the highways, media reports reveal that thousands of goods and passengers vehicles are stranded along the highways due to obstructions placed by the rebels at various points on the highways connecting Kathmandu. Prices of vegetables, fruits and salt are soaring as the supply of food items from the Terai area has been completely halted. Telephone lines connecting Kathmandu with some outside districts are suspended at random. On "Democracy Day" on February 18, the residents of Kathmandu woke to find the phone lines cut — to prevent any mass mobilisation against the King. The lack of reliable independent news perforce encourages rumours and misinformation. Reports of bombing of schools, bridges and roads by Maoists are often unable to be confirmed.

"Aha," say some media watchers, "Now journalists can talk about 'real' issues like poverty and underdevelopment, than be preoccupied with the shenanigans of political parties." But surely it does not need state censorship on news to encourage development journalism and get journalists reporting about social issues, the environment, gender and development?

(The author was recently in Nepal on a mission of the International Federation of Journalists.)

THE HINDU

26 FEB 2005

'Didn't it happen in Emergency?'

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 24. — They wouldn't commit when the Nepalese citizen would cast his next vote, nor say if the Press could have total freedom. "There has to be some control over the Press at times like this. Didn't this happen in India when Indira Gandhi declared Emergency?"

But, even through their best efforts to boost Nepal's image as a tourists' paradise, a motley crew of the King's envoys couldn't stop one message from coming out loud and clear

not everything is in order in the Himalayan kingdom.

In the city to attend the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC), Mr Buddhi Raj Bajracharya, Nepal's minister of culture, tourism and civil aviation, invited the Press to an "interactive" session.

"The Nepalese Army has managed to control the Maoist rebels and the mountain kingdom is now safe for Indian tourists to explore", he said — an hour after about 50 members of the CPI-ML (Liberation) had returned

after shouting slogans against King Gyanendra outside the gates of the Nepalese Consulate in Alipore. The agitators had more than 20 minutes all to themselves to cry for democracy in Nepal.

How does the Nepalese sovereign react to Delhi's decision to stop military supplies to the country?

"Oh! I also read it in the newspapers. I was here you see. Let me go back and find out", explained the member of the Raj Parishad in Nepalese.



King questions aid freeze

J. HEMANTH

just report G-8

Kathmandu, Feb. 24: Three weeks after the royal coup, King Gyanendra sought to justify his actions by claiming that he had assumed charge to fight terrorism and prevent Nepal from sliding into anarchy.

In an interaction with editors of prominent dailies inside Narayanhiti Palace here today, Gyanendra claimed that the people of the Himalayan kingdom had set the agenda for him and his government. "The nation itself has chosen its own agenda that terrorism is no more accepted," he said.

During the first interaction of its kind since he dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba government and assumed power, Gyanendra said he was fighting against terrorism to uphold

democracy. "Our basic objective is to restore peace and prosperity in our country," he said.

Gyanendra used the occasion to hit out against India, the US and the UK — without naming them — for suspending military aid to the Royal Nepal Army.

"Now, clearly the message is some of our friends have decided to suspend aid, that, too, military aid, and Nepali people want to know what their message is. Are they telling us that we should not fight against terrorism, that we should put our democracy into jeopardy?" he asked.

The king said his people wanted to know what these nations were thinking. "We want our friends to help us by word of mouth and by deed. If that is not the agenda they want to go along (with), then they should tell us



Gyanendra: Terror plea

going to meet somewhere. But we have chosen, maybe, different paths in attaining that objective," he said.

Gyanendra chose to play the China card by hinting that Nepal's northern neighbour preferred not to criticise his takeover. "We expect our friends to understand that we are moving in that path. We should not be surprised that some of our friends have expressed dissatisfaction with our move but some of our friends have welcomed it."

"They must say what they must say and we must do what we must do," he added.

On political parties that have been effectively stifled since the February 1 takeover, Gyanendra said all prominent politicians placed under house arrest were being taken good care of. But he did not say when they would be released.

what their agenda is."

"When we have chosen to uphold democracy and fight against terrorism, why are they shying away from helping us?" he asked.

"I can see one thing clearly emerging out of it. Our objectives are the same. We are

Rebels face rebellion

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Kapilavastu (Nepal), Feb. 23: His men call him Tiger and the last time he roared, 32 Maoists fell.

That was on February 19 and the Royal Nepal Army, which is yet to penetrate the rural belt in its mission against the Maoist rebels, said the massacre was an expression of "people's spontaneous anger".

"There is a limit to people's tolerance. They have found themselves at the end of the tether," said Teg Bahadur Rajoure, who is leading an army drive in Nepalganj, 600 km west of Kathmandu.

The army officer was alluding to years of Maoist attacks on residents of the Terai region where farmers are relatively affluent. The placid countryside hides the face of Maoist terror. But visits to areas along the main roads tell a different tale: razed shops, markets and blackened houses.

Near the seat of power, ministers in the king's commission hailed the "Kapilavastu counter-attack" by villagers of Bhagwanpur and Sigri, which border India, as a model, while home minister Dan Bahadur Shahi urged villagers to close ranks against the Maoists.

But behind the rhetoric lies the grim story of the rise of a private army which is trying to whip up local anger against the Maoist rebels. And the man behind it is Pritam Pandey, a 42-year-old university graduate and a former mem-

ber of the Nepali Congress.

For Pritam, the massacre was also sweet revenge. Two years ago, he was abducted by Maoists along with five villagers, shot and dumped in the paddy fields. But Pritam survived and vowed revenge.

Pritam — a Madese, a term for people of Indian origin settled in the Terai — began organising farmers and, with the money collected from them, bought sophisticated weapons. "The ferocity of Maoist attacks, especially targeting the Madese people, provoked anger and I had to use this to defend the people here," he said.

On February 19, Tiger's men heard that over 300 rebels had gathered in a nearby village. A 500-strong force launched an attack, killing 32 rebels. The rest retreated, he said.

The incident has made villagers in Bhagwanpur, Sigri, Belbharua and Muksuba more confident. "We will not die like pigs when they fire bullets. We have learnt to retaliate," said Ratnesh Gupta, a villager.

The Maoists suspect the hand of "Indian elements" in Pritam's rise. In a leaflet, Bala Thapa, the local Maoist commander, said: "Pritam's is a reactionary force out to work for the poor. People will take care of him."

If the Maoists are hated for their ferocity, the villagers too have at times exceeded the limit. Last night, villagers in Sheopur burnt at least 350 houses of hill settlers suspecting them of harbouring Maoists.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 FEB 2004

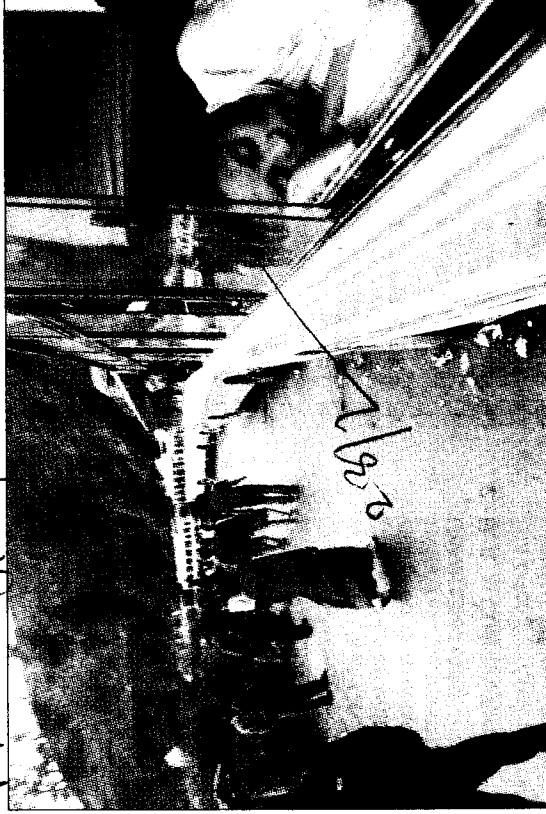
Nepal's economy bleeding to death

By Anand Soondas/TNN

Kathmandu: Political turmoil in Nepal is increasingly pushing the nation, already tottering under a bloody decade-old insurgency, to the brink of an economic disaster. And that is bad news for India, which could see a traffic of hungry, out-of-job Nepalese shoot up like never before. The statistics are both telling and tragic.

Binod Bahadur Shrestha, president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, says businesses are working at just 50% of their capacity. Capital is shifting out of Nepal with businessmen, mostly those of Indian descent, planning to set up base in the country's biggest money earners, has been hit hard as has been the textiles, transport and manufacturing industries.

"We are bleeding," said a top Kathmandu-based businessman with interests in aviation and tourism. "Almost



An unwell passenger takes a nap as vehicles wait for an army convoy to escort them through Maoist-dominated areas on Prithvi highway on Tuesday

Delhi's message

India has asked Nepal not to target its joint ventures in the kingdom under the garb of emergency and demanded lifting of all press curbs, including those on Indian news channels. New Delhi has also suspended military aid to Nepal since February 1 when King Gyanendra seized power and declared emergency in the country. Agencies

every industry catering to local demands has suffered because of the frequent curb on movement by the Maoists. A huge number of Nepalese people have shifted from villages to towns, confounding and upsetting the demand-supply equilibrium. There is largescale displacement and loss of employment. The situation here has reached boiling point...the dam may burst any moment."

Further descent into lawlessness in Nepal

By A Special Correspondent

SEVENTEEN DAYS after King Gyanendra assumed direct rule in Nepal and declared a state of emergency that suspended most fundamental freedoms, he has issued an order setting up a body that nullifies the most significant principles of the rule of law embedded in the Constitution of 1990. In setting up the Royal Commission on Corruption Control, the King has created an agency to subdue critics of his February 1 takeover, threaten members of constitutional bodies, including judges of the Supreme Court, and paralyse existing institutions meant to tackle corruption within legal boundaries.

The King has acted under Article 115 (7) of the 1990 Constitution, which is meant to allow for short-term measures required to enforce a state of emergency. The Article should not be used to go beyond the strict requirements of enforcing an emergency, nor is it meant to weaken existing constitutional institutions and practices.

The royal order flies in the face of the fundamental principle of law, that investigating and prosecuting bodies must be separate from the adjudicating authority. The prosecutor cannot be judge, but King Gyanendra has concentrated all functions within the Commission, giving it powers beyond the pale of what civilised societies grant such entities. The principle of fair trial evaporates under the

weight of today's royal action.

The constitution and operation of the Royal Commission is designed to paralyse the existing bodies for investigation into corruption — the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and the Special Court meant to consider the CIAA's prosecutions. In the name of battling corruption, King Gyanendra has made defunct existing mechanisms

The order forbids any criticism of the Commission, provides for punishment, and has a provision for "excuse" of those who dare to disparage the Commission. This is nothing but an attempt to stifle criticism of the Royal Commission as it begins work. There is also a provision that prohibits anyone from protesting an investigation being conducted by the Commission and providing for puni-

Movement of 1990, and the person found to be the most culpable by the respected Maalik Commission. Other members are Raghu Chandra Bahadur Singh, a retired Army General, pilot and royal relative; Hari Babu Chaudhary, former head of the Department of Intelligence; Sambhu Prasad Khanal, a retired official from the Revenue Service; and Prem Bahadur Khati, whose antecedents are not clear. The only person with judicial experience is Sambhu Bahadur Khadka, who has been appointed secretary. Rather than being from the Supreme Court or the many Appellate Courts, he is a relative junior in the judicial service and a sitting judge of the Kaski District Court. This subordinate's appointment to a position where he can pointedly even prosecute the Supreme Court flies in the face of judicial practice and is seen as a blatant message to the bench of the highest court. In an emergency meeting this evening, the Nepal Bar Association has condemned the royal order as one that contravenes the 1990 Constitution, goes against rule of law, and undermines the independence of the judiciary.

We now wait for other jurists and constitutional experts in the country and internationally to weigh in on King Gyanendra's decision. On the day that he has announced the Royal Commission, however, this looks like one more action by a monarch bent on a descent into lawlessness.

King Gyanendra's order, setting up the Royal Commission on Corruption Control, flies in the face of the fundamental principle of law, that investigating and prosecuting bodies must be separate from the adjudicating authority.

set up constitutionally for that very purpose. Rather than setting up a royal commission with near-total powers to prosecute anyone without limitation, if the goal was really to battle corruption, King Gyanendra could have further empowered the existing institutions and backed the action with a political commitment that was often lacking in the past.

At a time when Parliament is only a memory and the entire media sector (press, radio and television) is shackled under censorship edicts, this action is also seen as a blow against what little independence there remains of the judiciary.

shment. Such a stricture goes against the rights to effective representation and proper hearing, and intimidates all concerned, including the very persons prosecuted.

While there is provision for appeal to the Supreme Court within 35 days of a decision by the Commission, the current status of judicial and constitutional bodies in Nepal, as well as the general atmosphere of fear and intimidation, makes it unlikely that this recourse will be utilised effectively. The Commission is chaired by Bhakta Bahadur Koirala. Mr. Koirala was the Secretary of Home Affairs during the repression of the People's

Nepal crackdown on Democracy Day

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Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 18

IT'S A kind of celebration of royal ironies that the Nepalese may not forget easily. On Friday, King Gyanendra celebrated Nepal's 55th Democracy Day and Queen Komal's 55th birthday by cutting off telephone lines and unleashing security forces on democrats who took to the streets for democracy and basic rights.

On this day in 1950, the Nepali Congress (NC) and King Tribhuvan had together ended the 104-year Rana oligarchy to usher in an era of constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy—a system that the late monarch's son, Mahendra, and grandson, Gyanendra, overturned twice in 1960 and 2005, respectively. The day also marks the birth anniversary of King Tribhuvan. Fearing mass protests against the February 1 coup, the government disconnected telephones in the Kathmandu valley from Thursday night, putting tens of thousands of people in difficulty. (Mobile phone services have been suspended since February 1).

Heavily armed security personnel had turned the capital almost into an impregnable fortress. They pounced upon NC, Jan Morcha and Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) supporters every time they came out in small groups to stage pro-democra-



Nepalese policemen arrest a Nepali Congress activist as others raise anti-King slogans in Kathmandu on Friday.

AP

cy rallies. Over 20 protesters, including NC women cell president Meena Pandey, were detained. There were reports about the arrest of a dozen pro-democracy supporters in Janakpur, near the Bihar border.

All this while, the King and the Queen sat through a colourful Democracy Day ceremony at Tudilkhel (Army parade ground). At

the function, Raj Parishad (privy council) chairman P.N. Chaudhury hailed the King as "a lover of democracy". Monarchists and students marched through streets decorated with giant portraits of the royal couple, Nepalese flags and streamers.

The King also used the occasion to project himself as a champion of multi-party

democracy—an exercise he paradoxically began while taking direct control of governance earlier. In a message broadcast by the official media, he said, "The 21st Century is the century of multi-party democracy. It's the duty of all those who have faith in democracy to ensure a vibrant multi-party democracy through impartial elections.

India, UK mount pressure on King

Agencies
New Delhi, February 18

MOUNTING PRESSURE for "urgent" restoration of democracy in Nepal, India will send a "message" to King Gyanendra through its envoy this weekend, while Britain, on Friday, said it was "actively" considering suspension of military aid to the Himalayan kingdom.

The developments in Nepal figured prominently in the wide-ranging talks between external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh and his British counterpart, Jack Straw, here, with both emphasising the "urgent need for restoration of normal democratic processes, release of political prisoners and lifting of censorship on media" in that country.

"We noted that the international community has strongly deplored the recent developments in Nepal, which constitute a serious setback to the cause of democracy in that country and are a cause of grave concern to us all", Singh told a joint Press interaction with Straw.

India was watching the

situation in Nepal "very, very carefully" to see "what we can do if the situation doesn't change", Singh said, adding that ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee would return to Kathmandu on Sunday with a "verbal message" for the King, who seized power on February 1.

Singh said New Delhi hoped that the King would "sooner—rather than later restore all processes of democracy, allowing political parties to get together, so leading to elections.

Asked about the demand of Amnesty International for suspension of military aid to Nepal, Straw said it was under the "active consideration" of Britain.

Britain has been providing military assistance worth 6 million pounds (approximately Rs 45 crore), including helicopters, to Nepal annually.

Singh said India and Britain would continue to be in "close touch" with each other on further developments in that country. He made it clear that India did not want to hurt the people of Nepal while considering steps against that country's regime.

Nepal snaps phone lines on D-Day

Noted Child
 19/2 Activist (M)
 Arrested, 150
 Prisoners Freed

Kathmandu: Nearly three weeks after King Gyanendra assumed absolute power, Nepal on Friday marked Democracy Day with political activists holding anti-government demonstrations even as authorities once again cut telephone lines in an apparent bid to scuttle the protests.

At least 14 people were arrested when over a hundred protestors held demonstrations chanting slogans against authoritarian rule and absolute monarchy and demanding restoration of democracy and fundamental rights in the kingdom. Those arrested included former Nepali Congress MPs Hari Bhakta Adhikari, Mina Pandey and Mukti Prasad Sharma, party sources said.



Nepalese policemen arrest a Nepali Congress activist after he raised anti-monarchy slogans in Kathmandu on Friday

The government disconnected plain cloth policemen, the demonstrations could not take place in a massive scale as planned by major political parties, including Nepali Congress, Nepal Communist Party-UML, Nepali Congress (Democratic), Janamorcha Nepal and Nepa Sadbhavana Party (A).

The government freed 150 prisoners on the occasion even as it arrested a prominent child rights activist. The prisoners, from differ-

ent jails across the country, were given a royal pardon and released.

Nepalese child rights activist Gauri Pradhan was arrested on Thursday night at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport while returning from a conference in Europe. Pradhan is founder president of Child Workers in Nepal—a Kathmandu-based NGO working for the welfare of street children and child workers.

In a message to the nation, King Gyanendra said he took over power in order to save the country's democracy and talked about holding impartial elections in the kingdom in an environment of peace and security. "Terrorist activities coupled with politics far removed from the common man, gave a fillip to instability in the nation, putting democracy at risk adding to the growing disillusionment with democracy itself," he said. "It is clear to our countrymen that we ourselves had to take steps to extricate the country and multi-party democracy from this morass," he said in his second message to the nation after the February 1 royal proclamation. Agencies

Phones cut to break Nepal protests

GOPAL SHARMA
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 18

NEPAL'S King Gyanendra said on Friday he took power to protect democracy from Maoist rebels and political instability, as political workers were detained and telephone lines cut in a bid to scuttle anti-king protests.

The Nepali Congress party, one of the country's biggest political parties, had planned to mark the traditional National Democracy Day by staging a demonstration against Gyanendra's decision to detain political leaders and suspend civil liberties.

Riot police hauled at least six people into vans as they emerged from a maze of lanes in the old quarter of Kathmandu, demanding withdrawal of the royal move. The protestors came in

twos and threes to avoid detection, but were quickly taken away.

Residents said phone lines, which were cut when Gyanendra assumed power on February 1, went down again early on Friday to stop the politicians from organising the protest.

"This is too much. You cannot just snap telephones at will," said a Kathmandu resident. But Gyanendra, who attended a democracy day rally ringed by armed soldiers, said Nepal had to be pulled out of instability.

"Terrorist activities coupled with politics far removed from the common man gave a fillip to instability in the nation and put democracy at risk," Gyanendra said in his message read over state radio and television.

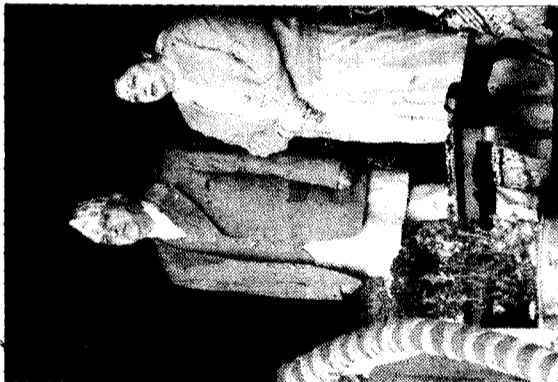
"It is clear to our countrymen that we ourselves had to take the steps to extricate the country and multiparty democracy from this morass," the 58-

year-old king said.

Gyanendra's actions have drawn mixed reactions in Nepal, where many people say they are fed up with corrupt and incompetent politicians and support the king. The Army and police are believed to be solidly behind the monarch, and analysts say the military planned the power grab.

Nepal marks the democracy day to commemorate the anniversary on which King Tribhuvan, Gyanendra's grandfather, returned from exile in India in 1951 to oust the Rana oligarchy that had imprisoned the royal family for a century.

Hundreds of troops guarded the Army ground where Gyanendra made his first major public appearance since his takeover, to mark the democracy day. Two Army helicopters showered flower petals on the ground, a short distance from the royal palace. —Reuters



Gyanendra says at a rally that his February 1 takeover was to protect democracy. AP/PTI

গণতন্ত্র ফেরাতে মার্কিন অনুদান বন্ধের হুমকি, ক্ষমতা দখলে সাফাই জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের

কাঠমান্ডু, ১৮ ফেব্রুয়ারি: ৫৫ বছর আগে আজকের দিনটিতেই তাঁর পিতামহ রাজা ত্রিভুবন নেপালে গণতন্ত্রের প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছিলেন। আর ৫৫ বছর পরে দেশ জুড়ে প্রতিবাদীদের কণ্ঠ রোপ করে আজ রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র জানালেন গণতন্ত্রকে রক্ষা ও মাওবাদীদের দমন করতেই তিনি ক্ষমতা নিজের হাতে তুলে নিয়েছেন। ৩১ জানুয়ারি নেপালের নির্বাচিত সরকারকে বরখাস্ত করার পর আজই প্রথম সাধারণ মানুষের সামনে এলেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র, নেপালের ৫৫ তম গণতন্ত্র দিবস পালন করতে।

রাজপ্রাসাদের অদূরে এক অনুষ্ঠানে সেনা প্রহরায় বাইরে আসেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। রেডিও ও টিভিতে প্রচারিত এক বিবৃতিতে তিনি বলেন,

“জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ বেড়ে যাওয়ায় নেপালের গণতন্ত্র বিপদের মুখে। তাকে রক্ষা করতে আমাদেরই ব্যবস্থা নিতে হবে।” যদিও আমেরিকা কালই রাজাকে স্পষ্ট জানিয়েছে ১০০ দিনের মধ্যে গণতন্ত্র না ফেরালে নেপালকে মার্কিন অনুদান বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হবে। আজ দিল্লিতে ব্রিটেনের বিদেশমন্ত্রী জ্যাক স্ট্র-ও জ্ঞানেন্দ্রকে কড়া ভাষায় আক্রমণ করেছেন।

এ দিকে, আজই দেশ জুড়ে প্রতিবাদ মিছিল ও জনসভা করার চেষ্টা করেছিল নেপালের রাজনৈতিক দলগুলি। কিন্তু টেলিফোন লাইন কেটে, যানবাহন বন্ধ করে, নেতাদের গ্রেফতার করে ও কড়া সেনা ও পুলিশি প্রহরায় রাজধানী ছেয়ে ফেলে সেই প্রচেষ্টা ব্যর্থ করতে চেয়েছেন রাজা। তবে বিরোধীদের প্রতিবাদ পুরো স্তব্ধ করতে পারেননি রাজা। কাঠমান্ডুতে কয়েকটি প্রতিবাদ সমাবেশে গ্রেফতার হয়েছেন ১৪ জন। এ খবর সংবাদসংস্থার।

ওয়শিংটন থেকে নিজস্ব প্রতিনিধি জানাচ্ছেন, জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের প্রতি কড়া মনোভাব



গণতন্ত্র দিবসে বিক্ষোভকারী গ্রেফতার। — এ এফ পি

নিয়েছে বৃশ্ব শ্রীশঙ্কর ১০০ দিনের মধ্যে রাজা গণতন্ত্র না ফেরালে ও মাওবাদীদের মোকাবিলা না করলে মার্কিন অনুদান বন্ধ করে দেওয়ার হুমকি দিয়েছে হোয়াইট হাউস। কত নেপালে মার্কিন রাষ্ট্রদূত জেমস মারিয়াটি বলেন, কথোড়িয়ায় পড়া খটের রাজার ১৯ ভয়ঙ্কর পরিবেশ তোর হয়েছিল নেপালেও তাই করতে চলেছেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। অভ্যুত্থানের পরেই ভারত, ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন ও ব্রিটেনের মতো আমেরিকাও রাষ্ট্রদূতকে ফিরিয়ে আনছে।

মারিয়াটি জানান, গত সপ্তাহে কাঠমান্ডুতে জ্ঞানেন্দ্র দ্রুত গণতন্ত্র ফেরানোর আশ্বাস দেন। নেপালে যে ভাবে বিরোধীদের কণ্ঠরোধ করা হচ্ছে তা বন্ধ করতেও চাপ দিচ্ছে আমেরিকা।

মারিয়াটি বলেছেন, মাওবাদীরা যদি ক্ষমতা দখল করে নেয় তবে রাজার সামনে দু'টি রাস্তা খোলা থাকবে, ভারতে আশ্রয় নেওয়া বা বিপ্লবীদের হাতে বুন হওয়া।

দিল্লি থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানাচ্ছেন, নেপালের পারাস্থাততে উদ্বিগ্ন ব্রিটেনের বিদেশমন্ত্রী জ্যাক স্ট্র বলেছেন, “আমোরকা, এবং ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়নের মতো ব্রিটেনও নেপালকে জানিয়ে দিতে চায় যে প্রতিনির্ধিক্তমূলক পরবর্তী ফিরিয়ে আনার প্রসঙ্গে আমরা একজোট।” স্ট্রয়ের বক্তব্য নেপালের পারাস্থাত গুণ্ডু ভারতেরই সমস্যা নয়, বিষয়টি ইংল্যান্ডেরও দৃশ্চস্তার কারণ। এর জেমে পত্রাসবাদ উস্কানি পাবে, উন্নয়ন থমকে যাবে, একটি বিস্তীর্ণ এলাকার অনিশ্চয়তা ছড়াবে। স্ট্র বলেন, নেপালে ‘সুস্থির বহুদলীয় গণতান্ত্রিক ব্যবস্থায় পৌঁছানোর লক্ষ্যে মানবাধিকারের প্রতি সম্মান ও শান্তিপ্রয়াস শুরু হচ্ছে এটাই দেখতে চাই।

দিল্লিতে আজ স্ট্র বৈঠক করেন ভারতের বিদেশমন্ত্রী জাতায়ানরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা, কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে।

'No increase in Maoist infiltration'

Rajnish Sharma
New Delhi, February 17

THERE HAS been no perceptible increase in Maoist infiltration into India since imposition of emergency in Nepal earlier this month.

The issue was discussed at length on Thursday during a briefing on Nepal's security scenario by Indian envoy to Kathmandu, Shiv Shanker Mukherjee, to the Union home minister, Shivraj Patil.

In fact, home ministry sources said, the reason for no "sharp increase" in Maoist infiltration was equally interesting. Immedi-

ately after the dismissal of the elected government in Nepal, the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) intensified its patrolling particularly along the Indo-Nepal border. Though this was essentially to check crossing over of political leaders, it did have an impact on the Maoist movement along the border.

Mukherjee, sources added, conveyed to the home minister the RNA's intention of continuing the increased patrolling, especially along the "porous points" on the border.

Earlier, both the Sashasthra Seema Bal (SSB), which

is responsible for patrolling on the Indo-Nepal border and the Intelligence Bureau have submitted a similar report to the home ministry.

Even the Prime Minister's Office, sources added, along with MHA was keeping a close watch on movement of Maoist rebels as it has a direct bearing on the country's Naxal problem.

"So far no government agency has given any report indicating an alarming increase in crossing over of Maoist leaders from Nepal," a senior home ministry official said. However, a high alert is being maintained

along the Indo-Nepal border keeping in view attempts by Naxal outfits to build a Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ) right from the border down to Tamil Nadu.

Another crucial issue that was discussed at the meeting was the attempt being made by the present dispensation in Kathmandu to rope in Maoists outfits for a dialogue. Back channel efforts, sources said, were being made by the "monarchy in Nepal" to bring these groups to the negotiating table. Mukherjee briefed the home minister on the efforts being made in this regard.

Clout in Nepal

Gyanendra stirring muddied waters

King Gyanendra is apparently undaunted by the universal condemnation of his butchering of Nepal's fledgling multiparty democracy, stripping the press and political parties of their freedom to operate and suppressing civil rights. It is all too reflective of the depths he has sunk in his so-called commitment to bring the country back to normalcy in three years. If he does not correct himself sooner rather than later, he will only be furthering the end of a centuries-old monarchy. Maoist leaders who earlier preferred direct talks with the King have done a turnaround and rejected the offer of a dialogue. By inducting into his new cabinet, two former panchayat democracy elements, former Prime Ministers Tulsī Giri and Kirtinidhi Bist, both known for their pro-China tilt, the King has deftly conveyed the message to countries supplying military aid, particularly India, that even they if they stop deliveries to pressure him into restoring democratic rights, he hopes to rely on the northern neighbour.

During the two former leaders' stewardship, Sino-Nepalese relations were at their best even as the two adhered to the policy of keeping equidistant from India and China. Delhi cannot look at this new development in isolation since political stability there is in India's interest, as well as the region's as a whole. The King is isolating himself from his people. His determination to crush the Maoist rebellion with an iron hand is contrary to earlier assessment that there could be no military solution to a problem born of neglect and poverty, and that the challenge would be met "by winning minds and hearts". The King should stop strong-arm tactics to deal with dissent and elaborate, just a little, to spell out measures he has in mind to hand back power to his people.

18 FEB 2005

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GYANENDRA MOOTS ANTI-GRAFT PANEL Nepal King tightens grip on power

Stateaman News Service

Amnesty appeal to India

KATHMANDU, Feb. 17. — Till last year, King Gyanendra was a constitutional monarch whose role on 18 February — when Nepal celebrates Democracy Day to mark the curb in the power of the autocratic Rana prime ministers — was to send a message to the nation. However, this time he will take the place of the elected prime minister and attend the official programmes that earlier were the prerogative of the parliamentary head.

The state media said the King would make a state address tomorrow, the second time in 18 days, the first being on 1 February when he dismissed Prime Minister Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba and assumed executive powers.

In what is being seen as a populist measure, the King has announced the formation of a six-member probe commission that will report to him. The Corruption Control Royal Commission will investigate charges related to smuggling, tax evasion, involvement in illegal contracts and other activities.

It can take action against anyone guilty of contempt of the commission by slapping down a NRS 10,000 fine or six-month jail sentence or both.

It can also sentence anyone it thinks is obstructing its functioning to six months in jail or a fine of NRS 5,000 or both. To be based in Kathmandu, the commission will have the power to confiscate the property of those found guilty.

However, appeals against the decision of the commission can be made in the Supreme Court.

Interestingly, the local media this week reported that the Supreme Court had asked three foreign fertiliser companies based in Thailand, the USA and

KATHMANDU, Feb. 17. — Amnesty International has wound up its visit to Nepal with an appeal to international donors, especially India, USA and UK, to stop military assistance to Nepal's new regime headed by King Gyanendra, saying a human rights catastrophe was looming over the Himalayan kingdom following the declaration of emergency. A delegation headed by Amnesty's secretary-general Ms Irene Khan, which had visited Nepal from 10 to 16 February on a fact-finding mission, disclosed its findings in New Delhi today. Ms Khan was given a private audience by the King as well as Chief Justice Mr Hari Prasad Sharma and army chief Gen. Pyar Jung Thapa. According to Khan, these countries "have been outspoken about the restoration of democracy. They need to give equal importance to ensuring the Nepalese government guarantees respect for human rights. Given the alliance between the palace and the military, the role of the security forces in restricting and violating human rights, and their increased significance during the state of emergency — donors should suspend all military assistance to the government as a means of pressurising it to change its human rights policies," Ms Khan said. — SNS

India respectively, to appear before it in a case filed by another graft watchdog, the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority. Current home minister Mr Dan Bahadur Shahi is one of the defendants, the *Kathmandu Post* daily reported.

The CIAA has alleged that Shahi who was a secretary at the ministry of agriculture about nine years ago and Padma Sundar Lawati, a member of the royalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party, were involved in embezzling an amount of about NRS 67 million while importing fertilisers.

King gags Nepal protests

Harvard honour
for Manmohan

Agencies
New Delhi, February 16

No elections to local bodies for 3 years

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 16

NEPALESE SECURITY forces on Wednesday afternoon cracked down on Nepali Congress (NC) leaders who were preparing to start a mass agitation against the February 1 royal coup from Friday that happens to be Queen Komal's 55th birthday and as well as Nepal's 55th Democracy Day.

This follows a day after King Gyanendra authorised civil servants to run local self-government units for the next three years, thereby indicating his desire to remain an absolute ruler for as many years despite mounting pressure from home and abroad. Nepal has over 4000 development committees at district, town, city and village levels whose elections are pending for some time.

Showing total disregard for the freedom of expression, police arrested NC spokesman Arjun Narsingh shortly after he met the media at his party headquarters that had opened for the first time since the royal takeover. In the evening, Narsingh's daughter, Anjana, said, "We are still trying to meet my father. I hear that Meena Pandey, another NC leader, has also been taken into custody."

Prior to his arrest, Narsingh said, "Major parties like the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), the Nepali Congress (Democratic), the Jan Morcha, the Nepal Mazdoor Kisan Party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Masal), the Communist Party of Nepal (United) and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandidevi) have agreed

to launch a joint movement with us." He warned, "We will fight till we end the king's authoritarian rule."

Narsingh complained about security forces keeping NC president G.P. Koirala (82) in virtual solitary confinement. He alleged: "They have cut off his phone and TV connections and do not allow him to read newspapers. Nor do they allow anyone to meet him." In a clandestinely sent message, Koirala, under house arrest since February 1, appealed to the Nepalese people to jointly fight for democracy.

UML, central committee leader Kashinath Adhikary said the parties would come out with a joint statement by Thursday. He said, "The king has usurped state power using the Maoist crisis as a pretext. He will have to pay dearly for this mistake. Our fight may even end up having a perfect democracy without an interfering king."

But, both the NC and the UML made it clear that they would not align with Maoist insurgents, at least for now. Narsingh said, "We cannot accept anyone who uses violence as a political tool." UML politburo member K.F. Oli, who was one of the founders of the Naxalite movement in Nepal in the Seventies, remarked, "There will be no room for ultra-Leftists or ultra-rightists in the proposed agitation."

Gyanendra ascended the throne after a palace coup in June 2001, in which King Birendra and almost his entire family was wiped out by Crown Prince Dipendra, who then shot himself. It was said a drunk Dipendra had opened fire after a dispute with his parents over marrying Pashupati Rana's daughter.



A policeman arrests Arjun Narsingh (centre), spokesperson for the Nepali Congress, after raiding the party office in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

AP

AFTER OXFORD University, now Harvard University has decided to honour Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with a doctorate degree.

Harvard's decision to confer an honorary doctorate of law on Singh was conveyed to him last week, a PMO spokesman said here on Wednesday.

The American University has also invited him to deliver a special lecture. The Prime Minister has accepted the offer but dates for conferring the honour have to be worked out.

PMO sources said the trip is likely to take place around the middle of the year and may coincide with an official visit to the US.

Earlier, the Oxford University had decided to confer an honorary degree of doctor of civil law on Singh.

Singh, who did his higher studies at Cambridge and Oxford where he completed D.Phil. in Economics, is among 10 leading international figures due to receive an honorary degree this year.

Kings and Commies

What the Govt Should Do About Nepal

By Anand K Sahay

Recent history suggests that Nepal's monarchs and its feudal establishment are prone to naked ruthlessness, unless they are pushed the other way. Not surprisingly, this decadent ruling elite continues to occupy the upper echelons of the army. After King Gyanendra's February 1 grab for power, the question is who will, or can, do the pushing.

About 50 years ago, it was essentially India's quiet diplomatic intervention that had led to Nepal's early moves towards republicanism. This resulted in the country's first general election. It did not take long for that initial republican phase to be thwarted.

Towards the end of 1950, Nehru had to warn Britain that it might be impossible for him to attend the Commonwealth conference in January 1951 if London recognised the boy-king in Kathmandu, whom the autocratic Ranas had enthroned in place of his grandfather. Britain, which favoured the hereditary Rana prime ministers, was inclined to do just that. King Tribhuvan had fallen foul of the traditional warrior-aristocrats who ran the show and had been obliged to take refuge in the Indian embassy, from where he was flown out to Delhi. Fortunately the Indian pressure worked, and Britain retreated from its course of supporting the Ranas. King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu. India's intervention was meant to ensure that the restored monarchy would create the space for democratic forces.

Thus ended the brief interlude of the boy-king, none other than the present King Gyanendra, who on later reflection would have found little reason to be solicitous towards India. In 1952, King Tribhuvan was succeeded by his son, Mahendra, who allowed the nascent political reform process to continue for some time. Mahendra even allowed the country's first democratic election in 1959.

But a year later, Mahendra struck, in a way that is eerily reminiscent of what his son has just done. Democracy was cast into the wilderness for the next 30 years. With China claiming India's diplomatic, and later military, attention, Nehru was no longer able to exert as strong an influence on Nepal's politics. However, a clamorous round of popular agitations made King Birendra, King Mahendra's heir and brother of Gyanendra, bend to make way for a constitutional monarchy in 1990. Unfortunately since then, there has been only a flawed procedural democracy. This hollow democracy has, ironically, revealed the fecklessness of the key parties in the system. This has eroded the confidence of the people in a multiparty system. In popular perception, Nepal's parties survive only to snatch office from one another, leaving the population of the poor and socially backward

mountainous country to fend for itself.

The Maoists have systematically moved into the space once created for democratic politics. The palace massacre of 2001 brought forth Gyanendra as king for the second time. He was easily tempted to reassert executive control for the monarchy. From the beginning he had claimed that he would not be a "quiet" king. Thus, he prepared the ground for the power grab of February 1. Since then, he has outlawed all legitimate politics, avenues of dissent, closed Nepal to communications, shackled the media and set himself up for a confrontation between the palace and Maoists.

It had been Nehru's endeavour in the 1950s that there should be no confrontation between popular elements and the army loyal to the king. His administration believed that such a face-off would have an unsettling effect on India's security, given the open border and the intricate closeness of the people-level ties between the two countries.

That is the policy successive Indian governments have followed, in the process strengthening Nepal's small armed forces with support and arms. However, the confrontation between Nepal's royal military and the people of that country that Nehru tried to avoid, might have been precipitated by Gyanendra's coup.

Thanks to the king's grab for power, Nepal's political parties have been virtually placed out of court. Part, but only a part, of the blame for this banishment lies in their own misguided actions. They are also victims of protracted machinations against them of the insurgents and the Kathmandu palace, both of which seek to establish their hegemony

through fear. The king wants to rule through the armed forces and the insurgents with clandestinely-acquired firepower.

In New Delhi, assertions are heard that any upper hand for Nepal's Maoists would prejudice India's security. This implies the king is a safer bet despite his predilections, and arms transfers to his government should continue, though even the fig-leaf of popular support for the monarchy is now gone. This argument rests on unsound premises. The king's disposition towards India is suspect.

Gyanendra has been trying to cultivate the US and China ever since he returned to the throne. He apparently believes he can trump the insurgents with American or Chinese support. Soon after 9/11, he declared the Maoists "terrorists" in the hope of winning Washington's sympathy. The US, too, has been forthcoming in its response in the name of fighting a communist rebellion. China's refusal to condemn the palace coup gives rise to suspicion. If US and Chinese moves can be nullified, just as Nehru handled the British in the 1950s, it will be easier for India to leverage the king and the Maoists.



WHITHER NEPAL?

Serious Questions For The Monarchy

By PARMANAND

The happenings in Nepal bring into sharp focus the fact that the most important personality in the hapless kingdom is King Gyanendra. He is unique in a variety of ways. He came to occupy the throne not once but twice: first in 1950 (when he was only three) and next in 2001 (when he was 54). On both occasions, his kingship, by a strange coincidence, became controversial and questionable.

In 1950, he was installed as the king by the then Rana prime minister (the real centre and source of political power), Mohan Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana. It was done against the background of the fleeing of the entire royal family of King Tribhuvan (1911-55) to India. The Indian deputy prime Minister and home minister Sardar Vallabhai Patel made a very strong statement in Parliament refusing to recognise the Nepal prime Minister's action. Countries like the USA and the UK followed suit. Eventually, King Tribhuvan returned to his kingdom assuming a new and powerful political role — indeed, by becoming the real source and centre of political power.

Behind the curtain

The Ranas, though, had acted quickly, and had also issued coins showing Gyanendra as the King. This had for long proved, as the stories go, very handy to Gyanendra to show to his elder brother King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (1972-2001) to prove his importance. Various stories do the rounds that Gyanendra would, by showing some coins, impress upon Birendra that the former had become king much earlier than the latter had. This mental make-up, it is widely believed, proved enduring.

It is said that during the entire reign of King Birendra, Gyanendra, behind the curtain, endeavoured to make the monarchy stronger and stronger so that he could use the fruits for his own benefit. It is altogether a different matter that after 1990 up to his assassination on 1 June 2001, King Birendra left no one in doubt that he was tremendously enjoying the status of a constitutional (ornamental, titular, limited and symbolic) monarch.

It is against this backdrop that King Gyanendra came to assume the throne in June 2001 — after both the King and the Crown Prince (who was enthroned for mysterious reasons for a couple of days) died. He lost no time in making it obvious that he wanted to concentrate more and more political and economic powers in his hands. He began to give all kinds of interviews to the media (both print and electronic, both national and international) which had almost been abandoned by King Birendra in his role as a constitutional monarch. In all such interviews, Gyanendra would emphasise the King was active and constructive.

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The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), known popularly as Maobadis, had emerged in February 1996 as a significant and violent force to challenge the very system of constitutional monarchy and seeking to replace it by a system of one-party republic. The Maobadis succeeded in showing to various political

party and intra-party politics being played in Nepal left no significant parliamentary political party immune from split. And no split ever was ideology-based. There were several rumours that the palace had played significant roles in effecting splits in the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (Uni-



forces within the kingdom and to the outside world that they had significant grassroots support.

Their base, though created through terrorist tactics, went on increasing throughout Nepal. And by now, some 11,000 people — army personnel, policemen, political leaders and activists, Maobadis themselves and innocent Nepalis — have lost their lives in the state's fight against Maoist insurgency and vice versa. Earlier, various stories had done the rounds that Maobadis had been an indirect creation of King Gyanendra to challenge both the political parties and the then king, Birendra. It is a different matter that, with time, Maobadis became too big for Gyanendra.

'National betrayer'

The same Maoist leadership, which had at one point of time stated that it could only talk to the king and not his prime minister (who did not have any real power), has described King Gyanendra after 1 February as "the national betrayer". Maobadis have refused to talk to King Gyanendra and have intensified their agitational politics. They have even urged parliamentary political parties to work together to uproot the arrangement that came into force on 1 February.

In the era of multi-party democracy, particularly after the 1994 resignation of Girija Prasad Koirala and the second parliamentary polls in that year, Nepal did not witness political stability. Strange and undesirable inter-

fied Marxist-Leninist), the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party and the Nepal Sadbhawana Party.

Indeed, rumours had also surfaced that Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai, the two main leaders of the CPN (Maoist) had parted company. Political parties hardly gave a good account of themselves. To them, government formation — and not its running — was of utmost importance. To make matters worse, political parties began to vie with each other in the game of commissions and corruptions. "Pajero culture", in which most of political leaders would show a keenness for riding and owning Pajero cars, became a prominent phrase. All this resulted in the disenchantment of the people with their leaders.

It was against this backdrop that the King sought to concentrate more and more powers in his own hands. The first opportunity came to him in the form of the recommendation of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to dissolve the Pratinidhi Sabha (the lower and popular house of the bicameral Nepali parliament) in May 2002. He allowed Deuba to occupy the prime ministerial chair in the Singh Durbar (the Central Secretariat of Nepal) for some time. But on 4 October 2002 he dismissed Deuba and assumed all executive powers.

After Deuba's removal, he indulged in another kind of politics. He appointed two prime ministers of the panchayat era in

succession (Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa). While Chand had always proved to be more loyal than the king himself, he was never known for his efficiency, Thapa was known as a relatively good administrator who had never shown any fondness for Gyanendra. When Thapa was removed from the prime ministership in the partyless panchayat days of 1983, he had without naming Gyanendra used sarcastic words for the latter. Gyanendra probably sought to show that he could tolerate Thapa if the latter could help solve the Maoist problem.

Power-grabbing Acts

By the time of the second removal of Deuba, King Gyanendra had become bolder. By this time, he had probably become overconfident. One wonders why he took three years to hold elections if he could not allow Deuba even a year's time. In his address to the nation on 1 February, King Gyanendra stressed this commitment to constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. But he has done so intriguingly by making the monarchy absolute and multi-party non-existent in the choice of his 10-member ministry constituted under his own chairmanship. King Gyanendra has been indulging in various power-concentrating acts under Article 127 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990, which reads: "If any difficulty arises in bringing this Constitution into force, His Majesty may issue necessary orders to remove these difficulties. The orders so issued shall be placed in Parliament". He lost no time in dissolving Parliament's lower house in May 2002. He made it a prestige point not to revive it despite demands from mainstream political parties. Worse, he never allowed any session of the Rashtriya Sabha, the upper and permanent house of the bicameral parliament.

What King Gyanendra has been doing has unified all democratic elements within Nepal. Besides, all democracy-loving people and governments are speaking in almost the same language. His throttling of the fundamental human rights have united all freedom-loving people within and outside Nepal. Worse, the Royal Nepal Army, with whose help King Gyanendra wishes to run the kingdom, has never given the impression of being an efficient and disciplined body. Indoctrination efforts by the Maobadis have made many of them politically conscious on ethnic, caste and regional lines.

King Gyanendra's actions have put serious question marks before the institution of monarchy itself. The number of supporters of the republican form of government is on the increase. The history of the monarchy in Nepal itself has not been that of a service and welfare-oriented institution. Many, indeed, feel King Gyanendra is hastening the end of monarchy in Nepal.

King balances India, China equations

हिंदू रिपोर्टर
 16-3-72

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 15

A DEBATE is on whether King Gyanendra was trying to maintain a balance between India and China when he named ex-Rashtriya Swamishankar Sangh instructor Tulsigiri and prominent politician Kirtinidhi Bisht as his deputies on Monday.

In fact, the repeated announcements by the state-controlled media about



AP
 Nepalese soldiers in armoured vehicles rehearse in Kathmandu, on Tuesday, for the Nepalese Democracy Day on Friday.

Giri's RSS links has added more credence to the belief that the monarch was imitating his father, King Mahendra's policy of equidistance vis-a-vis India and China.

Giri (78) had worked as an RSS instructor in Darbhanga (where he studied medicine) and Kolkata between 1942 and 1947. He is said to have visited RSS chief M.S. Golwalkar in the Sixties when India opposed King Mahendra's coup against the B.P. Koirala government.

A Vishva Hindu Mahasabha official said, "Giri does not have any links with the RSS now. But his long association with India may come in handy for Nepal to promote its interests in India."

(The VHP is affiliated to the mahasabha, of which the monarch is the chief patron.) Giri, who has been living in Bangalore since the Eighties, came to Kathmandu a few days before the February 1 coup, apparently to attend the wedding of a friend's daughter. He had reportedly met the king in Pokhara during last Dussehra.

On the other hand, Bisht, who served King Mahendra and King Birendra as Prime Minister in the Sixties and Seventies, is often credited with bringing King Mahendra close to China at a time when Indo-Nepal ties were strained over various issues.

The US and UK, EU nations have also summoned their ambassadors to Nepal for "consultations."

Eye on Left, Nepal parties join hands

SHIV AROOR
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 14

THE United Front, an amalgam of political parties from Nepal which grouped today in New Delhi, will be looking to the Left to garner "moral and political support" for their mission in restoring democracy in Kathmandu.

Leader of the front, Nepali Congress' Shekhar Koirala hoped the coalition's concerns would be raised at the multi-party national conference spearheaded by the Left on restoration of democracy to be held in the Capital on February 24. China has been silent on the issue so far.

CPI(M) leader in the Rajya Sabha Nilotpal Basu told *The Indian Express*: "We have already met once last week and made our views known. That they have approached us is part of the overall

international understanding. When it comes up during the session, the government and our party will make our statements. We will also be addressing this issue in Parliament."

Traditional rivals in their country, the six leaders fled to India over the past few days under threat of arrest by the Royal Nepal Army. Asked if their starkly different political leanings would hinder a common purpose, the leaders said they were yet to "sit down and discuss the actual course of action".

Koirala said contact had been established with Maoists in Nepal but indicated that they had not yet decided whether to join cause on the rebels' call for abolition of monarchy. He, however, said, the front had not ruled out joining hands with the Maoists.

Leader of Nepali Congress (Democratic) Pradeep Giri, however, said the Maoists were not



United Front's immediate demand: India must 'completely' halt weapons supply to Kathmandu

mentioned in their first press release issued today and therefore there was no question.

"When we came to India and met people here, they said India would not be in a position to help

ally, and will be communicating with them collectively from tomorrow," Koirala added.

The five other Nepalese leaders are Gobind Koirala from UML, Pradeep Giri from the Nepali Congress (Democratic), Rajendra Mhaato from Sadbhavna Party, Chitra Bahadur K.C. from Ekta Kendra Mashal and Chandra Devi Joshi from CPN United.

"What has happened in Nepal is no way to fight the Maoist menace...It can happen only by reinforcing democracy. Strong-arm tactics like this are counter-productive," CPI(M) leader Basu added.

Koirala indicated that their immediate demand was for complete halt of weapons supply to Nepal from India — Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said this afternoon that the supply of weapons to Kathmandu was constantly under review.

unless the political parties of Nepal were united in their cause," said Koirala. "We have contacted some leaders (Chandrashekhar, George Fernandes and Sitaram Yechury) individu-

Arms for Nepal

4/8
Pragmatism is the key 15/2

A pragmatic, appreciation of ground realities, underlies the Indian decision to maintain supplies of arms and ammunition to the Nepal army — that is the upshot of defence minister's response to their request to continue existing arrangements. It would have been all too easy for New Delhi to have played to the gallery and suspended supplies in a bid to pressure the palace in Kathmandu to restore a popular government. More so when the army is being used in exercise of the king's authority, but the Maoist factor has had its influence. Any dilution of the Nepal army's drive against left-wing insurgents would imply adverse implications for India's security. Only a few days ago, there were reports that ammunition was low. Should the shortage have become critical, an alternative source might have been tapped — China. No need to speculate on possible consequences.

India, however, would have to consider doing a bit more than providing the Royal Nepal Army with munitions. Since the drive against Maoists is likely to be stepped up, there is every possibility of some of them crossing into India and trying to establish themselves in the porous borders from where they could launch strikes. This must not be permitted, they are not to be confused with seeking political asylum, formal or otherwise. Having suffered because neighbouring countries have not cracked down on anti-India militants, we must not permit our territory to be similarly misused. It must also be borne in mind that the major political parties in Nepal have rejected the Maoists' overtures to make common cause against the palace. Maoists must not be allowed to gain even a veneer of legitimacy. India walks a tightrope. It has done well to lead in condemning what the palace has done and must continue for what it calls democracy. Yet it must also continue to engage the palace, not push it into a corner. Applying pressure for restoration of democracy while assisting in keeping insurgents under pressure must be the basis of a twin-track policy. Which is distinct from double-speak.

THE STATESMAN 15 FEB 2005

Nepal rival camps fortify ranks

King gathers loyalists

J. HEMANTH

Kathmandu, Feb. 14: King Gyanendra named two former royalist Prime Ministers as deputies in a move to further strengthen his position even as six leading political parties joined hands for a campaign to restore multiparty democracy in Nepal.

Gyanendra pulled out 80-year-old Kirti Nidhi Bista from virtual oblivion and appointed him vice-chairman in charge of crucial portfolios like industry, commerce, agriculture and health.

The US said on Monday it was calling its ambassador to Nepal home for consultations. The envoy would return to Nepal after about a week, the state department said.

European Union member states, including Britain, have also recalled their ambassadors from Kathmandu for consultations.

Analysts interpreted the move as a pro-China posturing. Bista had vociferously advocated a China tilt during his tenure in the late 1960s. Last year, he headed a three-member delegation to China to attend a conference. The appointment came amid reports that Delhi had stopped military aid to the Royal Nepal Army.

The appointment of Tulsi Giri is also significant. During his two stints as Prime Minister under Gyanendra's father

King Mahendra in the 1960s, Giri worked towards banning all political activity.

The hardcore loyalist has been given the portfolios of law, justice and parliamentary affairs; water resources, land and transport management; forest and soil conservation; and science and technology. The 79-year old, who had migrated to Sri Lanka a few years ago, was called by the palace for discussions three weeks ago and had been camping in a five-star hotel since.

While the king moved to tighten his grip, six parties led by the Nepali Congress came together to launch a campaign for restoring democracy. Addressing a news conference, Nepali Congress leader Shekhar Koirala said the move was aimed at putting up a united front against the "autocratic and repressive regime of King Gyanendra".

Besides the Nepali Congress, the front includes the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist-Leninist), Nepal Sadbhavana Party (A), Nepal Communist Party (United), Nepali Congress (Democratic) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Mashaal).

Koirala, who was flanked by representatives of all the parties who escaped the crack-down following the February 1 coup, urged the international community, especially India, to support their crusade. He also said all the parties were looking at the possibility of co-operating with the Maoist rebels to restore democracy.



Giri (left) and Bista (centre) take the oath of office in Kathmandu on Monday. (Reuters)

Delhi walks tightrope

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 14: India did a balancing act on Nepal today, reaffirming its commitment to democracy but also making it clear that it has no choice but to work with "whichever government is exercising power" in Kathmandu.

Foreign secretary Shyam Saran said: "While democracy remains India's abiding conviction, the importance of our neighbourhood requires that we remain engaged with whichever government is exercising authority in any country in our neighbourhood." Saran did not mention Nepal but it was clear

which "neighbourhood" country he had in mind.

"Abandonment of democracy" by King Gyanendra is not the solution to the problems in Nepal, but the country's stability and progress also depends on the "two pillars" of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, Delhi felt.

Saran was ambiguous when asked whether India was contemplating suspension of arms supply to the Royal Nepal Army.

"The issue was under continuous review," is all he would say.

On a day of diplomatic parleys, foreign minister Natwar Singh held discussions

with Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu, and Nepalese ambassador in Delhi Karna Dhoj Adhikary.

The meeting between Singh and Mukherjee was the first between the two after the Indian envoy's meeting with the king. The details were not made public.

Singh is said to have told him that Delhi wanted restoration of democracy, freedom of press and immediate steps to release political leaders, rights activists and scribes.

To discuss Nepal among other things, British foreign secretary Jack Straw would arrive in India on Friday.

Army training to continue

SUJAN DUTTA

New Delhi, Feb. 14: India will continue to train officers and personnel of the Royal Nepal Army despite calls for a suspension of military aid to Kathmandu after King Gyanendra's coup, a top defence ministry source said here today.

Nepal's army relies heavily on international military training — chiefly by India, the UK and the US — for its officer cadre. The UK, which like India wants restoration of parliament in Nepal, suspended military training for Nepali army officers in its academy at Sandhurst shortly after the coup in Kathmandu.

Cadets for the RNA are routinely admitted to the National Defence Academy in Khadakvasla and the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun. RNA officers also undergo courses of the Indian Army at the staff college and in the college of combat. Last year, about seven companies from the RNA were trained at the Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Vairangte, Mizoram.

"Their (Nepal's) officers are being trained here not being asked to go back or that all military to military relations have been cut off," a defence ministry official said. "We are not asking them to go. We are not even thinking of doing so."

The official was speaking just after the foreign secretary Shyam Saran said that India's military aid to Nepal was "under continuous review".

THE TELEGRAPH 15 FEB 2005

King appoints father's loyalists as deputies

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, Feb. 14. — Following in the foot steps of King Mahendra, King Gyanendra today appointed two of his late father's favourites as his deputies. Veteran politicians Dr Tulsī Giri and Mr Kirtimidhi Bista, both three time former prime ministers of Nepal during a period of absolute and direct rule imposed by King Mahendra, were appointed vice-chairmen to the 10-member council of ministers headed by Gyanendra.

While Dr Giri was assigned

the portfolios of law, justice and parliamentary affairs among others, Mr Bista was given industry, commerce and supplies among other portfolios.

As Prime Minister in 1969, Mr Bista had denounced defence agreements with India. Both the new appointees are close to China. The new appointment means a new lease of political life for Dr Giri, who was living in virtual political exile with his wife Sarah, a sign language trainer, in Bangalore. He flew in soon after Gyanendra's assumption of power and had been campaigning in the five-star Yak and Yeti

hotel in Kathmandu since then. Mr Bista, a member of the Raj Parishad, Nepal's Privy Council, that since last year had been overstepping its constitutional duties and organizing conferences in Nepal that extolled monarchy as the only power that could unite the country and combat the Maoists.

In another development, the Indian, US and British ambassadors to Nepal left Kathmandu for an unspecified period. The Indian embassy issued a statement saying Mr Shiv Shankar Mukherjee has been called back to Delhi for consultations.

Common front

NEW DELHI, Feb. 14. — Six main political parties of Nepal today said they will form a common front to fight for the restoration of democracy. Representatives of the Nepali United Front called upon the world to stop all assistance to the government of King Gyanendra. A joint statement by the leaders here also said: "We call upon all Nepalese to close their ranks and throng to the streets to thwart the personal ambitions of King Gyanendra." — SNS



Gyanendra: Like father, like son

Another Koirala kin flees

Agencies
New Delhi, February 13

AFTER FORMER Nepal Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's daughter Sujatha, it was the turn of his nephew, Shekhar, to flee to India.

Shekhar Koirala, reaching Delhi from Koiralas' hometown Viratnagar near Indo-Nepal border town Jogbani, told that the people are "feeling scared and insecure." He, however, said he plans to go back to Nepal soon to organise people against the king.

"I won't stay here for long. I want to go back to Nepal as soon as possible. I feel that I should be there. Most of the people had not experienced such atrocities like what happened during the 1960 onslaught on democracy," Sekhar, son of G. P. Koirala's younger brother Keshav, said. "There is an overwhelming presence of police and intelligence personnel everywhere which disturbs everyday life," Shekhar, also a prominent Nepal Congress leader, said.

He said three working committee members of Nepal Congress are also planning to cross over to India in the coming days. "The people are shaken and shocked. We need to boost their morale and convince them for fighting," he added. There is "nothing great in simply getting arrested," he said adding "the situation is getting worse and it is becoming difficult to operate from Nepal."

Working Committee members Krishna Situala and Ramvardhan Yadav will be crossing over to India. Yadav, who can also speak Benali, will tour West Bengal and Bihar," Sekhar said adding the administration is after the Nepali Congress leadership to crush any uprisings.



Nepalese King Gyanendra greets Cabinet ministers as he arrives to attend a festival at the Hanuman Dhoka temple in Kathmandu on Sunday.

Capital under siege

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 13

MAOISTS ON Sunday put Kathmandu in danger of getting cut off from the rest of Nepal. Their call for an indefinite kingdom-wide transport blockade against the February 1 royal coup heavily disrupted traffic on two major routes, through which the 1.5 million residents of the city get their supplies from the Nepalese lowlands, India and China.

The blockade comes amid fresh refusal by the Maoist leadership to revive peace talks with the government. It declared that it would now fight for abolition of monarchy. Earlier, Communist rebels were ready to give King Gyanendra a status similar to the

King at temple

KING GYANENDRA made his first public appearance on Sunday since seizing control of the government.

Gyanendra drove to the old Hanumandhoka palace in the centre of the capital, to participate in festival

PTI, Kathmandu

one Norodom Sihanouk had in Cambodia. On Saturday, the government said it was awaiting the Maoists' response to its call for talks. It added that it had no plans to issue them a fresh appeal as the king had told them to join the peace process in his February 1 proclama-

tion. Adding more to King's woes, the Nepali Congress, declared it would start a mass movement for democracy from February 18, which Nepal celebrates as Democracy Day. On this day in 1950, King Tribhuvan (present monarch's grandfather) and the Congress together had ended Rana oligarchy to establish constitutional democracy and multi-party democracy.

Despite all this, on the occasion of Vasant Panchami, the king sat through the vasant shraavan ceremony (oral transformation of knowledge to the king by high priests) at the Old Durbar Square. Elsewhere in the kingdom, loyalists organised rallies and lit oil lamps to welcome his direct rule.

Nepal rebels reject talks offer

flu or -
KATHMANDU, FEB. 13. The Maoists in Nepal today rejected the Government's offer of talks and vowed to abolish the monarchy, even as the traffic blockade called by them disrupted transport outside the capital.

There was no place for immediate talks with the authorities, the Maoist spokesman, Krishna Bahadur Muhara, and the Maoist leader, Prachanda, said. The Maoist demands for a Constituent Assembly, an interim Government and a round table conference were being "refocussed," Mr. Muhara told the BBC. They would now focus on the abolition of monarchy.

On high alert

Nepal's military was on high alert to counter the blockade with helicopters and army convoys escorting fuel trucks and other vehicles that passed through Kathmandu valley. However, traffic around Kathmandu and the western cities of Pokhara and Nepalganj was severely affected. The blockade coincides with the tenth anniversary of the Maoist insurgency.

Very few vehicles except minibuses operated in the south-eastern part of the country with long-route bus services and public goods carriers at a standstill. However, businesses functioned normally in the cities.

'No negotiations'

The tough talk from Maoists came as the Government ruled out any further appeals to them for negotiations. "The call made in the King's proclamation is enough for them if they are serious about resolving problems amicably," said



King Gyanendra of Nepal arrives at the Hanuman Dhoka palace in Kathmandu on Sunday to attend the "Basant Srawan (welcoming the spring season)" function. — Reuters

the Cabinet spokesman and Information and Communication Minister, Tanka Dhakal, in the first Government press conference after the royal coup.

Mr. Dhakal said the "so-called blockade" only had "minimal impact" on normal life. Due to the media censorship, there has been little coverage of the blockade, but Mr. Dhakal said the free press would not be controlled, while cautioning that the media should not do anything that

promoted violence and helped the insurgents. The Government claimed it had adequate stocks of food and fuel, and said it would punish firms hoarding goods.

Appears in public

King Gyanendra made a brief public appearance in the old Hanuman Dhoka Palace, his first since the royal coup and declaration of Emergency 12 days ago, to attend a religious ceremony to mark the arrival of spring. But he made no

FD-11
comments to the mediapersons, who were kept far away. — PTI

Escapes to India

PTI and ANI report from New Delhi:

The former Nepal Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala's nephew and a Nepal Congress leader, Shekhar Koirala, today escaped to India. On reaching Delhi from the Koiralas' hometown of Viratnagar near the India-Nepal border town of Jogbani, he told PTI that the people are "feeling scared and insecure." However, he said he plans to go back to Nepal soon to organise the people against King Gyanendra.

Three Working Committee members of the Nepal Congress are also planning to cross over to India in the coming days, he added.

"The situation is getting worse and it is becoming difficult to operate from Nepal," he said.

Rally planned

The former Nepal Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala's daughter, Sujata Koirala, in her first meeting with Nepali migrants here, said she would hold a massive rally on February 19 in New Delhi.

Holding the meeting under the aegis of the Nepali Jansampark Samiti, she said the forum would stage a dharna in front of the Nepalese Embassy here and launch a signature campaign.

The forum also appealed to international human rights organisations to look into the state of affairs in the Himalayan kingdom, following the clampdown by King Gyanendra last week.

Doing right by the Nepalese

As of now there seems to be a policy vacuum in New Delhi towards Nepal. An executive monarch, by posing the choice as stability *versus* Maoist disorder, is attempting to force New Delhi's hand. Indian policy towards Nepal is caught between opposing the regression of Gyanendra and violence of the ultra-left on the one hand and the fear of returning to the chaos that prevailed before the palace struck, on the other.

The confusion in New Delhi is compounded by the fact that Nepalese political parties appear discredited and their leaders as corrupt as the old feudal elements they replaced. Their incompetence has been shown up repeatedly and single families and clans have monopolized power. New Delhi, like the people of Nepal, is not unjustifiably frustrated with Kathmandu's political elite.

The monarchy that wants to exercise power in the name of the people, however, is even more corrupt, much less accountable, shuns power-sharing and is undeserving of any support. The only honest politicians, if you like, are the Maoist leaders and India cannot support them.

King Gyanendra is playing on the Indian fear of a Maoist spillover. The spectre of communism — a red corridor running through India from Nepal — is being raised. While Bihar and Jharkhand already have indigenous Maoist movements, if similar movements were to gain ground elsewhere along the border in India, it would not be because of the Nepalese Maoists but because of the incompetent governance within. Why paint Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai as villains when the people whose incompetence is creating a fertile ground for disaffection amongst the poor are closer home — the Rabri Devis, Laloo Yadavs, Babulal Marandis, Mulayam Singh Yadavs and N.D. Tiwaris of our own?

However, Gyanendra knows that

India gets frightened easily when there is a talk of a Maoist alliance across the border. Taking a leaf out of his father's book, he has added to this the fear of China and Pakistan gaining influence in Kathmandu. He deliberately ignored the Indian ambassador, preferring to meet the Americans and the British emissaries first. Gyanendra knows India's hot buttons. But the very fact that he is pressing them shows that he needs India.

The choices before India are, however, limited. New Delhi's dilemma is that it does not want to push Gyanendra to the wall and yet deal with him firmly. Cornering the king, although he richly deserves it, would mean immense suffering for the Nepalese people. The radical talk of trade blockage and cutting off oil supply routes is nothing but vacuous, irresponsible and impractical.

The broad contours of a policy that involves a firm disapproval of Gyanendra's retrograde action as well as the Maoist violence must centre on promotion of democracy, a process of reconciliation with the Maoists and the political parties and escalation of the civil war in Nepal.

Consider the worst-case scenario in Nepal: the political parties and the Maoists do not find any common ground; the king is able to bamboozle India into continuing to supply arms; and the civil war continues. A protracted and widespread conflict would mean refugees pouring into India in numbers much beyond the capacity of the states bordering Nepal to absorb them.

India then would have to deal with a truly failed state. In such a scenario, the Indian army may have to move in to help the king. Should that eventuality arise, India would have its own Vietnam in its backyard.

To avoid this doomsday scenario, without legitimizing the actions of Gyanendra, two processes of dialogue are necessary in Nepal: one with the politi-

‘If Maoist movements were to gain ground along the border of India, it would not be because of the Nepalese Maoists’

TWENTY-TWENTY

BHARAT BHUSHAN



The fear factor

cal parties and another with the Maoists. The former requires releasing all the political leaders and allowing their free movement. This decision rests entirely with the king.

It is necessary to release the political leaders, intellectuals and human rights activists because without their participation and consent, the talks with the Maoists would be meaningless. Has monarchy given up its privileges through direct negotiations anywhere in the world? Is Gyanendra willing to make Nepal a Republic for the Maoists to give up arms? Clearly that is not the case.

Whatever change takes place in Nepal has to be gradual or else it will be extremely divisive if not also bloody. Such progressive change has to be underwritten by the civil society and the political institutions of Nepal. They need to be revived for this purpose. They alone can mediate the process of reconciliation with the Maoists.

India must, therefore, press the king to revive parliament. It is an easy and rational way of opening peaceful avenues of resolving the present crisis. Elections would be another mechanism. However, free and fair elections in times of civil war are ruled out.

Even to move to a constituent assembly, constitutional mechanisms are needed. Gyanendra keeps harping about the constitution — let him use the existing constitution to open new avenues to the future. A revived parliament can then mandate negotiations with the Maoists. The dialogue for reconciliation will then have a democratic institutional basis — absent in the king's offer of talks with the Maoists. The parliament can also pave the way for a constituent assembly demanded by the Maoists. In short, a revived parliament can be the bridge between the old and the new situation — it can take Nepal from the present impasse to reconciliation with the Maoists.

India, meanwhile, should not resume arms supplies to Nepal even though there is pressure on it to do so. The Royal Nepal Army should be asked first to account for the weapons supplied up to now. If it is found — and one can lay a wager that this is the case — that the weapons have found their way to the Maoists, then does it make any sense for India to intensify the conflict by indirectly arming the rebels?

Resuming arms supply is not the way out. The RNA is already using helicopter gunships against the Maoists. As the number of non-combatant deaths rise, there will be international hue and cry and India will have to bear the brunt of the criticism. Unless the king is seen to be doing the right thing by his people, there should be no resumption of arms supplies from India. A license to murder cannot be given — not for ten days and nor even for the 100 days that Gyanendra is asking for.

And while India should support political refugees who escape to India, it should not encourage their influx. Every political hopeful wants endorsement from Delhi — consider, for example, that two such aspirants with appropriate pedigree have lost no time in parking themselves in India already. New Delhi should not get into the business of endorsing politicians in Nepal — it has done so in the past and suffered.

If an influx of political refugees is encouraged, those who come to India will get branded for ever to their disadvantage. It is better to endorse, even if indirectly, the campaigns of international human rights organizations including their "at risk" lists. Only those who are likely to be eliminated by the Nepalese security forces — and they are largely in the human rights organizations rather than in the established parties — should be protected if they come to India.

‘Gyanendra keeps harping about the constitution — let him use the existing constitution to open new avenues to the future’

Seven Maoist leaders currently lodged in Indian jails

It's an old palace ploy, they say. By pitting noble notions of democracy against the crime of insurgency, Nepal's King Gyanendra is simply flexing the muscles of his own sovereignty. But he is underestimating the Maoists, reports **Ashis Chakrabarti**

For the three-year-old it must all have been child's play. His family — grandfather, father and brothers — fled the country, leaving him behind at his maternal uncle's home. Then the Prime Minister of the kingdom took him to the temple inside the old palace, crowned him King and ruled in his name before the real monarch was put back on the throne. Unknowingly, the child-king saved the Monarchy.

At three, Nepal's first-ever child-king could do nothing about being used as a pawn by the Prime Minister, Mohan Shamsar Rana. He knew nothing about India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, refusing to recognise the child-king propped up by the powerful Ranas who ruled Nepal, keeping the monarchs virtually prisoners in the palace.

Fifty years later, King Gyanendra would save the Monarchy again, this time even more dramatically. As the entire family of his elder brother and predecessor, King Birendra, was wiped out in the palace massacre of June 1, 2001, he ascended the throne of a kingdom anguished over the royal massacre and even angry at his "conspiracy" in it. As he rode the horse-drawn royal chariot to the palace after the coronation at the same temple in the old palace at Hanumandhoka, the crowds hurled abuses at him.

He would also be an unusual monarch in many ways. A shrewd businessman before he became King, he set about immediately thereafter building bridges with a grieving and confused people. He would be the first king who would allow people to touch him — at the public receptions which he addressed in different parts of the country. This was no small feat for a king who is also seen as a reincarnation of the Hindu god, Lord Vishnu. He was the also the first royal to marry off an offspring — his daughter in this case — to a commoner — a businessman of the Thakur caste. (The royal family is Rajput by caste, from Sisodia in the Indian state of Rajasthan). But large numbers of people still saw him as one who stole the throne with blood and regicide.

And now, when on February 1, he staged the coup against Sher Bahadur Deuba's government, India — and most other democratic countries — cried foul. But the King gave his reasons for the move. He told his people he had taken over to save the country from its politicians and the Communist rebels who took it to the brink of disaster. He even swore his commitment to multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy.

How right he was, echoed all the King's men — from the kingdom's business and professional elite to die-hard Royalists and other privileged sections of the people. Messages hailing the Monarch's move came pouring in also from Kathmandu's well-known cultural and literary personalities such as the Nepalese film actor, Krishna Malla, the Royal Academy chief, Basudeb Tripathi and writer Ravi Charan Srestha. Even some sections of the common people, who were disillusioned with the politicians and terrorised by the Maoist rebels, wondered aloud if the King was not the best bet against the doom that had enveloped the country.

Politicians, human rights activists and other pro-democracy groups could not disagree more. By staging the coup, they argue, the King has not only murdered democracy but also struck a death-blow to the Monarchy itself. To them, the King's logic is not merely fallacious; it is "dangerous" for the country's political and economic stability and possibly even for its national integrity. Worse, it threatens the institution of Monarchy, which is still a symbol of the nation's identity for the majority of the people.

The argument goes like this. Everyone agrees that the politicians have failed to give the country a stable political system since the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1990. Everyone knows that many politicians are corrupt and would do anything to be in power. "But that is true of many democracies. Look at Indian politicians. But would any sensible person suggest that politics is banned in India, and all powers be given to one executive?" asks a leader of the Nepali Congress, the country's biggest political party. "And how about the corruption in the army and the huge expenses of the palace in a country that is among the world's top 10 poorest countries?"

The argument about the Maoists is contested even more vehemently. "This is a suicidal move for the Monarchy itself," says a leading lawyer and human rights activist. By banning political parties, the King is alleged to have left the entire political space open only to the Maoists. "And the Maoists are the only ones who want to do away with the Monarchy altogether and establish a Communist republic in Nepal."

Can the King save the Monarchy?



OLD LOYALTIES: A Nepalese child flaunts the country's national flag and pictures of the King and Queen during a pro-royal march in Kathmandu; (below) Crown Prince Paras (AFP)

for the palace. And, fighting these Communists depends in a significant manner on India's attitude to the palace. At least seven members of the central committee of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) are currently lodged in jails in India. India has helped Nepal with more money, arms and other logistics in the last two years than ever before in its anxiety to curb the Maoist menace which spills over across the 1,400-kilometre-long and mostly porous border between the two countries.

Political and security analysts agree that the King hopes to use the Maoist threat to make India and other democratic countries acquiesce to his coup. "It's like what Musharraf has done to buy American support for his illegitimate rule, saying he's the best bet in Pakistan against the Islamic fundamentalist threat and a political vacuum," one commentator remarks. But it can earn him "only a reprieve", he adds.

The long-term solution for Nepal and for the Monarchy seems to be in the strengthening of a democratic political system. The palace must come to terms, pro-democracy groups say, with the reality that the days of the Monarchy are over. "King Gyanendra would endanger the Monarchy itself if he pays lip-service to democracy and constitutional monarchy and seeks to act like an absolute monarch. It's no longer 1960 (when King Mahendra staged his coup against Nepal's first democratic polity)," says a leading Nepalese journalist.

The problem, however, is that the 1990 constitution, which introduced parliamentary democracy in the country, has left enough room for the palace to short-change democratic politics. It enables the King to take over powers in times of "difficulties" and makes the King's action immune to any legal or other challenge.

In their anxiety to get into power, the political parties seem to have forgotten to put adequate safeguards in the constitution to prevent royal coups. "We should have followed the example of Cambodia. By the time King Norodom Sihanouk was restored to the throne, they had a new constitution which gave him hardly any powers to interfere with the government or the day-to-day administration. He was to be the symbol of national unity and continuity," says an activist of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), the country's second-largest mainstream party.

King Gyanendra obviously wants to be an active Monarch. The question many are asking is: can he save the Monarchy?

THE BLACK PRINCE

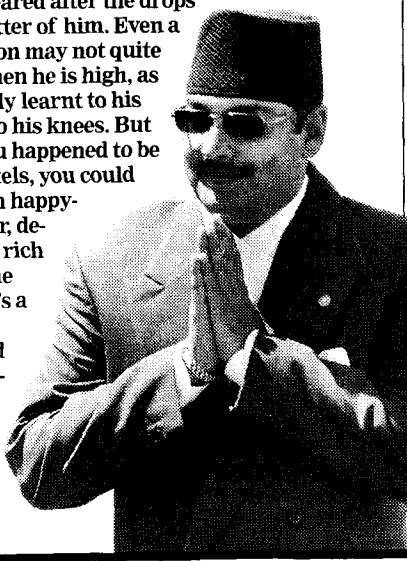
The Monarchy in Nepal has been too closed an institution and the media there too young to give the world their versions of Buckingham Palace scandals. But times are a'changin', as they say. And the man who seems to open up the magic casements of the palace is none other than Crown Prince Paras. The exploits of the young Prince are increasingly keeping the Kathmandu tittle-tattle alive even in normal times. So much so that one Nepalese weekly, edited by an intrepid woman journalist, has already earned the reputation of being "Paras specialist".

Diverse and exciting are the stories about Gyanendra's only son and heir-apparent, mostly, though, of the dark variety. Like his mowing down a well-known Kathmandu personality during one of his fits of drunken driving, which nearly caused a riot some years ago. Or his favourite method of terrorising a hapless victim who would have the muzzle of the Prince's pistol thrust into his mouth, as it happened to a policeman guilty of not recognising him.

"Aren't all rich kids the same everywhere?"

An unusually quiet man when he is sober, he is much feared after the drops get the better of him. Even a cousin's son may not quite be safe when he is high, as the son of Prabhakar Rana recently learnt to his agony and to the serious damage to his knees. But then, on last New Year's Eve, if you happened to be in one of Kathmandu's biggest hotels, you could well be greeted by Paras in a warm happy-new-year hug. His friends, however, defend his small liberties. "Aren't all rich kids the same everywhere? Can't he have his pleasures just because he's a prince?"

When father Gyanendra staged the coup, though, Paras was in better spirits. He was waiting to be a father — for the fourth time. With another royal line completely exterminated, this could not but be good news for the survival of the Monarchy.



More blood flowed and, as the Amnesty International report, published last month, makes grimly clear, a large number of "disappearances", rapes and other tortures took place to add to the 11,000 casualties of the Maoist insurrection in the past nine years. But the army does not seem to have been able to break the rebels' stranglehold on most of the countryside.

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The King did achieve one positive result. Only after he took over, the Maoists, who began their rebellion in 1996, responded to a ceasefire call and began the peace negotiations. It was the army offensive against the Maoists at Doramba village in Ramechhap district on August 17, 2003, in which 19 rebels were killed, that led to the collapse of the second round of peace talks. But, even as the talks with the Maoists went on, the King dismissed four Prime Ministers in the four years of his reign.

"He is trying the old palace tricks of using Communists to destroy the democracy and thereby keep the Monarchy powerful," complains a political analyst and a former teacher at Tribhuvan University, who does not want to be quoted for fear of inciting the palace's — and the army's — wrath.

There is enough historical evidence to support his allegation.

Ever since the first democratic parties began their movements in Nepal, the monarchs have used Marxists to try and put down the mainstream parties. While King Birendra too tried it, this palace ploy was used more extensively by King Mahendra, the present ruler's father. "It's somewhat like the way Siddhartha Shankar Ray (former chief minister of West Bengal) used the Naxalites to try and keep the CPM at bay," the Nepali Congress leader says.

Many former Communists have subsequently put on record how they had been "mobilised" by the palace to counter the spread of the Nepali Congress, which was the spearhead of democratic politics and thereby considered the biggest threat to the Monarchy. Perhaps the most telling symbol of this Monarchy-Communist entente is none other than Keshur Jung Raimajhi, the second general secretary of the undivided Communist Party of Nepal, who was expelled from the party in 1983 and became a staunch Royalist. Until two years ago, he was the chairman of the Raj Parishad (the King's council). Raimajhi, now over 80, was on the state-run television this time too, hailing the royal coup.

But the Maoist rebels of today could prove to be a different ball game

Maoists reject talks, vow to abolish monarchy

By Anand Soondas
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kathmandu: Encouraged perhaps by the success of their nation-wide indefinite blockade, Maoist rebels, who have been fighting a bloody war against the government since 1996, seem to have hardened their stand, calling now for an abolition of monarchy itself.

The BBC in its latest report quoted Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Muhara as saying that their earlier demand for "an assembly, an interim government and a round table conference were being refocused".

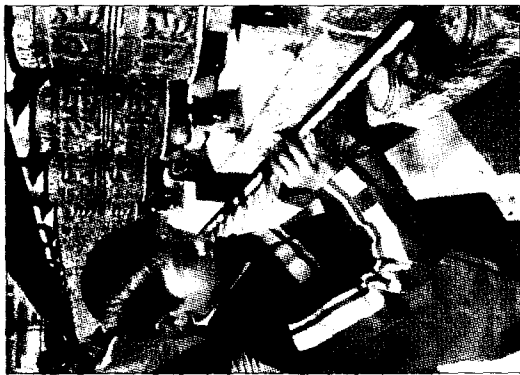
Muhara is reported to have said that their previous demands were "outdated" and they would now focus on the abolition of the monarchy. No one from the government was willing to react to the statement immediately.

This comes in the wake of the Maoist call for a two-day Nepal bandh beginning Monday. The Himalayan kingdom is already reeling under the blow of an indefinite country-wide blockade that began on Saturday. It is only Kathmandu

that remains insulated from the traffic halt. Everywhere else vehicles have gone off the roads, bringing down the quantum of traffic by a whopping 95%.

A jittery government, which says it is ready to take on the Maoists and ensure that normal life is not disrupted, is also dealing with the possibility of the rebels inching closer to Kathmandu. In Banipa, barely 25 km from the capital, a group of insurgents on Saturday blasted the mid-market statue of former ruler Prithivi Narayan Shah. "The incident happened sometime around 7 pm," an eyewitness who TOI spoke to said. "They just came and blew it up."

There are Royal Nepal Army jawans swarming in Banipa, but very few could tell what they were doing when the Maoists lobbed a powerful bomb at the statue. The government has now covered the statue with a large polythene sheet. The army, which is at about 78,000 men, has taken over most or all of Nepal's important highways in an attempt to stop the blockade from creating any further



A Nepalese army soldier, left, with an armed policeman accompany a convoy of buses and trucks, unseen, on the Prithvi highway in Naubische, 32 km west of Katmandu. Right: A Nepalese boy writes under a Buddhist prayer wheel at the Swoyambhunath stupa on the occasion of Basanta Panchami on Sunday

disruptions in the supply of food, fuel and other essential items. The special operation by the royal army is keeping a close watch on all entry and exit points that link Kathmandu to the rest of the country.

An MI 17 helicopter and a gunship have been requisitioned to help those guarding the highways. The aerial patrolling is being done not just to help the foot soldiers but also to keep a hawk's eye over trucks and busses being escorted by the army.

"We have been rigorous in our patrolling and want people to continue their routine activities and resume normal travel. We are there to ensure their security," an RNA officer at Banipa said. No one, though, is ready to take his word for it and risk the wrath of the rebels.

King gets a taste of Maoist power

AP & Nepal

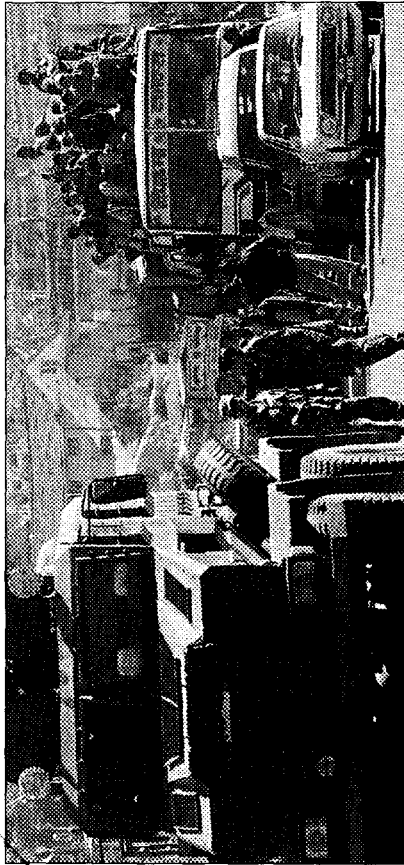
Keshav Pradhan

Nagdhunga, February 12

NEPAL'S MAOISTS seem to have shown King Gyanendra how far his writ can extend in the kingdom. On Saturday all highways converging on Nagdhunga, the only entry point that connects Kathmandu with the lowlands and with India, slowly began to fall silent amid confusion about the beginning of an indefinite Nepal-wide blockade called by underground rebels against the February 1 royal coup.

A police official, posted at this strategic checkpoint located 10 km west of Kathmandu, said, "The number of vehicles passing through this point has fallen by about 90 per cent". The blockade is seen as an acid test for the monarch, who will be taking Maoists head-on for the first time. In August and December, a similar stoppage of supply and transport vehicles by rebels had caused hardship in Kathmandu and other hill districts.

Vehicle movement to and out of the capital city came to a near total halt as



AP
RMA humvees head a convoy of buses on the Prithvi highway in Kathmandu on Saturday.

the Maoists enforced the transport blockade though short-distance buses and other vehicles plied as usual in Kathmandu Valley, defying the blockade. Due to the blockade, vehicles loaded with essential items were held up on the highways and thousands of passengers were stranded.

A police official at the Thankot checkpoint, the main entry point into Kathmandu, said over phone that very few vehicles were moving on the Tribhuvan and Prithvi highways. However, the effect of the blockade was not felt in the capital city and adjoining Lalitpur and

Ex-Nepal PM's daughter flees to India

Agencies

New Delhi, February 12

MAKING A dramatic escape to India, daughter of former Nepal Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on Saturday said she feared a threat to the life of her father at the hands of King Gyanendra's regime.

"He (Koirala) might be subjected to mental torture and I fear they'll apply slow poison to harm his life", said Sucheta Koirala, herself a Nepali Congress leader, who went through an ordeal before reaching here. "I met him (her father) once, two days after the elected government was overthrown. But we don't know what his present situation is. We fear for his life", she said.

Eighty-one-year-old Girija Prasad

Koirala, three times Prime Minister, has been under house arrest ever since the King seized power on February 1. Addressing a Press meet organised by the Nepal Youth Initiative for Peace and Democracy, she revealed that she had trekked for four days from Kathmandu, crossing rivers and mountains to reach India. Walking through the Himalayan kingdom with fear tugging on her heartstrings, she had had her first experience of witnessing 'live' a gunfight between the Royal Nepalese Army and Maoists.

"It was a tiring journey. I walked for almost eight hours to reach the border town of Chitavan. I crossed villages controlled by Maoists with fear for my life. If they'd got suspicious about us, it would have been my end", Sucheta said.

Pro & anti-king chorus in Nepal

Hunt on for 145 prisoners

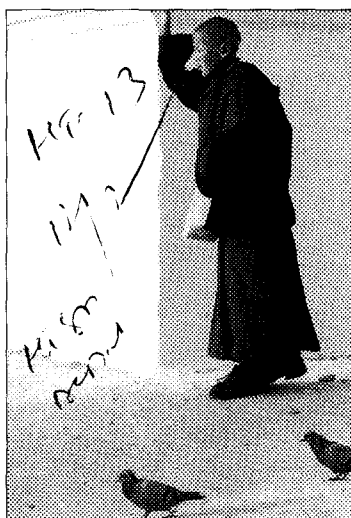
Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 11

FOR THE first time since the February 1 royal coup, pro and anti-king slogans reverberated almost simultaneously in Kathmandu on Friday afternoon.

On Shukrapath near the old palace square, a group of monarchists walked past, shouting "Hamro raja hamro desh pran bhandaa pyaro chha (We love our king and country more than our lives)." About 500 km ahead at Tyoda near the tourist hub of Thamel, a small group of mainline Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) activists held a protest rally that lasted just about a minute. Security personnel instantly swooped down on them as they shouted, "We want Democracy" and "Gyanendra, quit Nepal" and threw white and red leaflets.

Three protesters were caught while the rest disappeared into the nearby narrow and serpentine lanes. Residents, who initially looked shocked and confused by the incident, were later seen quietly picking up and reading the leaflets. UML cadre, Mohan Dhungel, remarked, "This is the beginning of our resistance movement." At Ratna Park, Sunita Roka, a UML cadre, was arrested while distributing the leaflets.

The leaflets, brought out by the UML's central and Kathmandu valley committees, said the royal coup had pushed Nepal to the brink of disaster. They described as "eye-wash," the king's claims that he had taken direct control of the country to protect democracy. Suspecting the king's motive, they questioned, "Did not the king say 'I am not going to sit quite like my brother (King Birendra),' I want to be seen as well as heard," and "



REUTERS

A monk feeds birds at a Stupa in Kathmandu on Friday, Tibetan New Year's day. Nepal recently closed down Dalai Lama's office there.

the king must have an active role" earlier?

The UML warned, "The king has perched himself on a tinderbox. Now he to fight mainstream parties as well as Maoists." It called upon all parties to jointly resist "autocratic monarchical rule."

It is planning to start a mass agitation later this month. The Nepali Congress is also holding talks with mainline parties to forge a joint front against the king. Its spokesman, Arjun Narsingh, said, "We will soon announce our plan of action."

Meanwhile security forces scoured western Nepal for 145 prisoners sprung from jail by Maoists, as the army vowed to foil a road blockade threatened by the rebels to protest King Gyanendra's seizure of power 11 days ago.

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Nepali police crush protest

KATHMANDU, FEB. 10. Police today smothered the first political protest against King Gyanendra's assumption of power and suspension of civil liberties, arresting a handful of demonstrators.

At least a dozen people were thrown into vans by the police in riot gear as they turned up in ones and twos at a heavily guarded traffic intersection here. They were quickly driven away, said witnesses and the Human Rights and Peace Society, which organised the protest.

"Give our rights back! Democracy is in our soul," shouted one woman, before she was bundled off. Another protester waved a black cloth as a group of policemen lifted him into a blue wire-meshed van. "Withdraw the royal proclamation," shouted another.

Maoist attacks

Elsewhere in the troubled Hindu kingdom, a group of around 300 Maoist rebels, armed with crude bombs and automatic weapons, launched simultaneous attacks on a jail, a branch of Nepal's central bank and two police stations in the remote western town of Dhangadi early today.

The Maoists broke open the gates and stormed the jail after a 90-minute gunfight with policemen and freed about 150 prison-

ers, including rebels, an army statement said, in the first big strike since King Gyanendra's action.

Five policemen were killed in the jail attack in Dhangadi, 660 km from Kathmandu. The area is a Maoist stronghold.

11/2

A body thought to be of a rebel was found outside the jail. "We believe more rebels might have died in the battle," said an army officer. The Maoists usually take away bodies of fallen comrades from the battlefield.

In Kathmandu, political activ-

ists hoped the protest in the centre of the capital would help ignite a nationwide campaign against the monarch's decision last week to sack the government, detain political leaders and suspend civil rights. — Reuters



BRAVING THE REPRESSION: Surrounded by policemen this human rights activist protests against King Gyanendra's emergency rule in Kathmandu on Thursday. — AP

For India, the defeat of Maoists in Nepal is the first goal

Kingly faith

SWAPAN DASGUPTA

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“We’re going to come down on those guys like a ton of bricks,” President Bill Clinton swore that fateful morning in May 1998 on being told that India had exploded a nuclear device in the Rajasthan desert. The president threw, what his deputy secretary of state, Strobe Talbot, described as, a “volcanic fit”.

It was not only that the Clinton administration and the CIA were apoplectic at the setback to the US non-proliferation programme, and even seriously contemplated a regime change in India. Their real fury stemmed from the fact that they didn’t have a clue about the Pokhran-II plans. Otherwise, like in 1995, they would have prevented it.

Big powers don’t like to be caught unawares. The elaborate diplomatic and intelligence establishments may be powerless to influence the actual course of events but they exist in order to anticipate events and, consequently, determine their course. A nasty surprise, predictably, prompts intemperate, knee-jerk reactions.

India, quite rightly, perceives itself as an emerging world power and the big brother of south Asia. It relishes the periodic prophecies of imminent greatness issued by organizations like the CIA and sundry merchant bankers. It likes to be consulted, informed and, in turn, leave its thumbprint on neighbourhood developments. Two months or so ago, New Delhi had an inkling that Nepal’s King Gyanendra was contemplating assuming direct charge of the country’s affairs and jettisoning a discredited and fractious political class. It advised the king against removing the buffer between the Maoist insurgents and the monarchy. The US too endorsed India’s stand and Britain’s special envoy lamented the prolonged absence of a functioning parliament in Kathmandu.

The monarch held back for the moment but chose to ultimately disregard the advice. On February 1, he surprised India — and not least the elaborate 32-strong R&AW station in Kathmandu — by staging a monarchist coup.

It is the indignation that comes from being made a monkey of, and not the discomfort of having to deal with an undemocratic dispensation, that explains the initial outrage in New Delhi over developments in Nepal. The prime minister, who has no problems exchanging Urdu couplets with Pakistan’s president, Pervez Musharraf, breaking bread with Myanmar’s Senior General Than Shwe and inviting the King of Bhutan to grace the Republic Day parade — none of them *pukka* democrats — scuttled the

SAARC summit because he didn’t want to be seen doing *namaste* to King Gyanendra. The Indian army chief cancelled his goodwill visit to Kathmandu and there was talk of suspending all arms sales to Nepal. Mercifully, the cabinet committee on security decided otherwise.

To add to its furtive search for a popular insurrection in Kathmandu, an over-indignant media published ridiculous stories of a Tiananmen Square-type massacre in Pokhra. Like in Sri Lanka in the years preceding the disastrous Indo-Sri Lanka accord, Indian intelligence operatives in Nepal have

cluding those headed by Sher Bahadur Deuba, Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa, have been nominated by the king. The only difference this time is that the king has dispensed with the fiction of civilian control.

Second, the turbulence in Nepal that has cost some 11,000 lives has not come about because of undiluted royalist ambitions. It began with the Maoists launching a so-called people’s war in 1996 and the complete inability of the political class to cope with the menace. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) doesn’t believe in either dialogue or



suddenly become over-active feeding visiting journalists with sensational, half-baked stories of royalist ineptitude.

Whether at the inauguration in Washington DC or the polling booths in Iraq, Gaza and Bihar, democracy happens to be the flavour of the season. Under the circumstances, it doesn’t do for a monarch to entertain elevated notions of royal duty. Monarchs in the 21st century are meant to be tourist attractions, not chief executives.

Yet, before the Nepal king finds his place in the pantheon of dictators loathed by the friends of the Maoists — the names of Messrs Salazar, Franco, Pinochet and the former Shah of Iran come to mind — it would be instructive to blend indignation with an understanding of the Himalayan kingdom.

First, for all practical purposes, Nepal has ceased to be a functioning democracy since 2002 when parliament was dissolved. The last elections were conducted some eight years ago. All the governments that have assumed charge since then, in-

“King Gyanendra has never believed in the laid-back approach of his late brother”

the constitutional path. It despises the “reactionary” Nepali Congress and the “revisionist” CPN (UML) as much as it hates the king. The Nepali Maoists are the political descendants of Lin Biao, Charu Mazumdar and Pol Pot.

The king, who has never believed in the laid-back approach of his late brother, has merely taken advantage of this national disrepair to suggest that he can best lead the charge against the murderers who wave the red flag. In the process, he hopes to elevate the status of the monarchy in Nepal and make it a force somewhat akin to the military in Pakistan.

Third, despite encouragement from India and the West, the political class has failed abysmally to get

its act together. G.P. Koirala, the head of the Nepali Congress — the most significant political party — refused to countenance power sharing with either his former party colleague, Sher Bahadur Deuba, or leaders of the pro-monarchist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party. Ordinary Nepalis may be wary of the king but they are exasperated by the shenanigans of the politicians.

Nepal has often been called a “failed state”. It is actually a failed democracy.

King Gyanendra’s faith in his own ability to rescue Nepal from the barbarians at the door may well be misplaced but the south Asian experience suggest that non-ethnic insurgencies are rarely settled by following democratic niceties — the so-called “socio-economic” approach so favoured by the conflict resolution industry. The Naxalites in West Bengal, the Khalistanis in Punjab and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in Sri Lanka were defeated by meticulous military operations that violated every clause of the human rights charter. India can hardly pretend that its own localized counter-insurgency strategies don’t tally with the course King Gyanendra is contemplating. Saving democracy has invariably entailed putting democracy on the backburner.

As the dust settles in Nepal, India has to exercise a few hard options. It can choose to make the ruffled egos of its own establishment the driving force of punitive action against the king. In the process it will be handing over Nepal on a platter to Comrade Prachanda. It should remember that it was President Jimmy Carter’s “ethical” approach in Iran that created the openings for the radicals led by Ayatollah Khomeini. As it is, the Congress is playing a dangerous game appeasing the Maoists at home. The newly formed CPI (Maoist) is delighted at being able to encash the IOUs it secured from the Congress during last year’s general election.

There is, of course, an alternative course. India must recognize that the greatest danger to national security stems from a Maoist victory in Kathmandu. Such a turn of events will make the whole of eastern and central India vulnerable to insurgency — a prospect that is deliciously anticipated by a section of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi military establishments.

There is no alternative but for India to make the defeat of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal its immediate and unwavering goal. The king must be engaged constructively and the Royal Nepal Army has to be given all the operational assistance in the war against the insurgents. The restoration of democracy is a medium and long-term imperative.

Nepal govt releases seven leaders

Kathmandu: Buckling under international pressure, Nepal government released seven political leaders, including two former prime ministers, who were placed under house arrest immediately after the imposition of national emergency by King Gyanendra. No explanation was given for the move.

Among those freed are founder leader of Nepali Congress and former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, leader of CPN-UML Shahana Pradhan, former Prime Minister Lockendra Bahadur Chand, 'Radio Nepal' said on Thursday quoting security sources. Others included chairman of Rastriya Prajatantra Party Pashupati Shamsher Rana, chairman of Nepal Labors and Peasants Party Narayanman Bijucksche and chairman of Nepal Sadhbhawana Party Badri Prasad Mandal and chairperson of NSP Anandi Devi, it said.

Nearly half a dozen political leaders, including president of Nepali Congress

Girija Prasad Koirala, former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress (Democratic) president Sher Bahadur Deuba and general secretary of CPN (UML) Madhav Kumar Nepal are still under house arrest, 'Nepal News' reported.

Concerned over the actions of King Gyanendra, who sacked the four-party government led by Deuba on February 1, US said it will "continue to press for the restoration of civil liberties in Nepal. The actions of the King, in summarily dismissing the govern-

ment and declaring a state of emergency and taking repressive measures such as banning media and jailing political opponents, is something that we view with the greatest concern," state department spokesman Adam Ereli told reporters in Washington on Thursday.

Nepal home ministry said on Wednesday that 25 people have been detained and 18 were put under house arrest to ensure peace and security in the country. PTI



L. B. Chand

K. P. Bhattarai

Business hits all-time low

By Anand Soondas/TNN

Dhulabari (Nepal): These are bad times for businessmen in Nepal. All they have in hand is time to kill. Lots of it.

Businesses across the already impoverished country has hit an all-time low and there is widespread fear that it will get worse as an increasingly anxious people loses more hope with each passing day. In Dhulabari, one of the biggest business hubs of Nepal—and the most important economic and social corridors to India as it is a mere 40 km away from Siliguri in north Bengal—traders are a worried, despondent lot. "I do nothing the whole day," says the owner of an electronic goods shop, though he also sells foreign liquors on the sly. "Sustaining my business has become a problem. In fact, why don't you buy something. *Naam ke vaaste.*"

It was generally understood that this small, dusty town known to large numbers of Indians as a foreign goods goldmine, made over Rs 1 crore in transactions daily. Pankaj, a trader, says that is an understatement. "There are 350 shops here. Rs 5-6

crore was more like it," he expects. Today, however, it is a different and sad story. The sales graph has plummeted to "just about 25% of what it used to be". Moreover, with tourists and foreign goods-crazy buyers from Siliguri, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Delhi and Calcutta carefully skirting Dhulabari in the last few years due to the



Sagan Bahadur waits for customers in his empty shop

Maoist insurgency, business here has made a paradigm shift from retail to wholesale.

"I can talk to you for an hour now without rushing to the counter, you can see how my business is," says Dhiraj Bansal, another trader. In the last few years, real estate prices have decreased even in capital Kathmandu. Many say it has gone down by up to 70%. Five-star hotel rates at many places are down from Rs 9,000 earlier to Rs 3,000. They just want customers.

Businessmen will not say exactly what the quantum of loss has been. That is because they feel this will be some kind of a comment on the state of affairs in Nepal. "You know the direction by King Gyanendra about not letting out any information about anything," says a restaurant owner apologetically.

King, Maoists flex muscles

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 10

ON THURSDAY, King Gyanendra and underground Maoists proved how strong they were in their respective areas of influence.

In Kathmandu, the monarch's security forces cracked down on human rights activists who had gathered on a road close to the Singhdurbar (national secretariat) for a protest demonstration. In faraway Dhangarhi near the Uttar Pradesh border, Maoists raided a district prison and set free 168 inmates — a sizeable number of them were their comrades.

The King, though, released Nepal's top seven leaders, including K.P. Bhattarai and Lokendra Bahadur Chand, from house arrest. On Putali Sadak, human rights activists came out in ones



REUTERS
Rights activist Basu Devkota is being arrested in Kathmandu.

or twos at a time to hold their first open protest since the February 1 royal coup. Every time they did

so, police instantly took them into custody. Holding small black flags, the protesters, belonging to 14 human rights organisations, shouted, "Long Live Democracy" and "Withdraw February 1 royal proclamation." The Human Rights and Peace Society condemned the police action.

In stark contrast, Maoists not only overran the prison in Dhangarhi but also attacked the chief district officer's office and the district police headquarters. Five policemen were killed and four others were injured in the midnight raid. The body of a suspected rebel was found near the prison. An Army official said, "We have now taken control of the town." Eighteen prisoners returned to Dhangarhi, which is located at the base of Maoist-infested western Nepalese hills, during the day

A nation in crisis: Where the deaf rule the mute

By Anand Soondas/TNN

Ita Bhatta (Nepal): Fear is tangible and pervasive in Nepal. You can touch it, see it and feel the chill seep through your body. It is there everywhere. The entire nation has gone mute even as those ruling it have turned deaf.

In village after village, in towns and business centres, a people known for their innocent garrulity have turned cold, almost hostile. "If you want to talk about politics, please go away," says Madhav Pradhan, a teacher at Ita Bhatta, a small town with patches of houses en route the tiny airport at Bhadrapur. Then, offering tea, he pulls his chair close and sits quiet. He has nothing to say. "So, when are you going back to India?" is all he has to ask.

King Gyanendra's diktat banning all Nepalese citizens from talking about the new developments—the coup or the monarchy—is a law not to be broken. No one will dare say anything about the Maoists either, because they too, like the government, take swift action easily.

"You can understand our consternation," says Lalit, a businessman in Dhulabari, an adjoining town. "The police and the Royal Nepal Army have their men everywhere. We also see and recognise a lot of Maoists moving around. Everyone is marked. It is better to just shut up. The whole of Nepal, I think, has shut up."

On February 6, a gang of seven young men were arrested from Dhulabari. The RNA said they were arrested from a shop where they had come to collect extortion money. Some local residents thought they were students with democratic leanings. "If you are arrested, you just disappear. It's tougher now because your family will not get

any information about you as all communication links have been severed," says Kailash Acharya, a college student.

In Kakarbhita, the fear factor is even more tangible. You cross the Indian border and the first sight that greets you is a contingent of tough-looking RNA men, all armed with automatic weapons. Some of them are atop armoured vehicles with long-range ma-



chine guns. There is frisking going on everywhere.

Petty shopkeepers who drag in everyday their rickety cycles laden with paan, supari and cheap Indian toffees—the kind that poor schoolchildren are given to help them forget for a few minutes the bitter reality around them while sucking into the hard, sugary lobes—are not spared either. "You know me *babaji*," pleads one such person too poor to be called a trader to the RNA jawan turning his wares upside down. "I go through this post everyday." Nothing will cut through the security cordon, though.

"We are not very comfortable doing this," justifies the RNA officer after the check. "Anybody could be carrying anything. How do we know who is a Maoist sympathiser and who is not. It is for the good of the people."

Taste of double trouble for Gyanendra

J. HEMANTH

Kathmandu, Feb. 9: A week after the royal coup, the new dispensation headed by King Gyanendra got a real taste of what is in store for it when Maoist rebels made a bid on the life of a prominent royalist and political forces began regrouping for the struggle ahead.

Suspected Maoists shot at former minister and staunch royalist Lakshya Bahadur Gurung in the picturesque resort town of Pokhara, 200 km west of Kathmandu, today.

The condition of Gurung, who was admitted to Manipal Medical College, is stated to be critical. He was the chairman of a committee which felicitat-

ed Gyanendra last year.

Even as their top leaders continued to be kept under house arrest, some prominent leaders of the Nepali Congress and pro-India Nepal Sadbhawana Party met at a secret location in the valley today and discussed a possible combined strategy.

A senior leader who attended the meeting said they would come out with a common agenda tomorrow. "We are planning to begin street protests on February 20 against the royal takeover," he said.

He revealed that efforts were on to rope in top leaders of the Nepal Communist Par-

ty (United-Marxist-Leninist), who have gone into hiding after the arrest of around 35 leaders.

Top Nepali Congress leaders Arjun Narsingh, K.C. Govindraj Joshi and Mahesh Acharya reportedly attended today's meeting.

The Supreme Court fired the first salvo at the fledgling government by directing it to produce a former president of the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) within three days.

The apex court's action came on a habeas corpus petition filed by the incumbent NBA president and the king, whom's leading criminal la-

wyer, Shambu Thapa.

The legal eagle has sought the court's help in ascertaining the whereabouts of his predecessor Sindhunath Pyakurel who was picked up by the Royal Nepal Army on February 1, the day the king seized power.

Yesterday, the court admitted Thapa's petition after being formally informed about the suspension of some articles relating to fundamental rights on February 1.

The court had refused to accept the petition on Monday because of the dilemma following the promulgation of emergency on February 1.

The government is expected to file its response in the apex court some time tomorrow.

Now that the restrictions have somewhat eased and communication lines have been restored, political parties have begun exploring ways and means to voice their protests and mobilise public opinion against the royal coup.

Small groups of students were seen distributing pamphlets denouncing the royal takeover in crowded areas and disappearing before the authorities descended on them.

The pamphlets, which bear no printline, exhort the mass-

es to take to the streets in protest against the suppression of their fundamental rights.

Two transport trade unions affiliated to the communists and the democrats merged formally. Yogendranath Karmacharya, the president of the Nepal National Transport Association, and Hira Udhhas of the Nepal Transport Association announced that they would henceforth monitor the emerging developments, including the blockade imposed by the Maoists.

They also hinted that they would ask their members not to operate transport serv-

Maoist rebels target prominent royalist, political parties begin to regroup

ices from Saturday.

But the litmus test for the government will come on Sunday when the three-day nationwide bandh called by the Maoists begin.

The bandh to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Maoist-sponsored people's war is expected to paralyse nearly 80 per cent of Nepal's landmass where the rebel outfit's writ runs.

Even commercial hubs like Birgunj, Narayanghat and Biratnagar in the Terai region of the Himalayan kingdom would be largely paralysed. However, Kathmandu is likely to be unaffected, thanks to the huge concentration of Royal Nepal Army troops and armed police.

Palace intrigue

55.8
9/2 What gives with Gyanendra?

New Delhi might find it hard to digest the Nepalese Ambassador's clarification that the recent political development in his country was "not an exercise by the King to take more power but to consolidate multiparty democracy". He sees nothing wrong in the King's action and asserts it was in keeping with India's stand that "constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy are twin pillars of political stability in Nepal". But had he been so keen on preserving democracy, what need was there to dismiss the Sher Bahadur Deuba government in November 2002? Deuba's was a caretaker government considering that the King accepted his recommendation for parliament's dissolution in May that year and all that the Prime Minister wanted was postponement of a mid-term poll by another six months. Such was the consensus reached at an all-party meeting that authorised Deuba to go into the legal and constitutional aspects of delaying the poll. Admittedly the constitution does not allow postponement beyond a stipulated time but surely the King had other options — for instance, immediate restoration of parliament which, according to experts, stands automatically reactivated if elections cannot be held in time. King Gyanendra's motive behind appointing two pro-palace governments and reinstating Deuba as Prime Minister, fitted his strategy to usurp power since he knew none of these was equal to the task of restoring order and holding elections.

The Maoists have all along insisted on direct talks with the King and if they now agree to sit with a government of loyalists, it will confirm suspicions of some secret understanding with the King to bypass political parties. The King perhaps would not have acted so blatantly had he visited Delhi on 24 December. With Deuba and fellow ministers waiting at the airport to give him a send off, the King cancelled the trip citing PV Narasimha Rao's sudden death. That in itself was no earth-shaking event, and the monarch could have come calling at a later date. Implicit in his act, though, was that he does not want Delhi to influence his decisions, certainly not about the Congress, with which his palace does not have good relations since Rajiv Gandhi's time.

THE STATESMAN

09 FEB 2005

BJP to blame for Babri: Govindacharya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
VARANASI, FEBRUARY 8

FORMER BJP ideologue K.N. Govindacharya today accused the party leadership of being responsible for the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and said the party leaders present there that day had "failed" to read the mind of the karsevaks, assembled with the intention to desecrate the structure.

"The BJP leaders had failed to read the mind of the over one lakh karsevaks who were emotionally charged

with the intention to demolish the structure on the fateful day of December 6, 1992," Govindacharya said. He, however, did not name anyone.

"The BJP leaders also failed to control the situation near the disputed site at Ayodhya by making an appeal to the mob to disperse from there and not demolish the structure," he said. "The BJP leaders could have mobilised its 6,000-strong cadre, present in Ayodhya then, to control the mob by dispersing them to avoid the eventual demolition of the mosque," he added.

"The eventual outcome

of the karsevaks but also its lack of vision to utilise the cadres in controlling and dispersing the mob," he added.

The demolition was a glaring example of contradiction between cadre-based and mass-based politics and the failure of the BJP leadership's understanding to work out a balance between the two brands of politics," he further said.

Referring to his own stand on the Ayodhya agitation vis-a-vis demolition of the mosque, he said such incidents should be "neither condoned nor condoned. But at

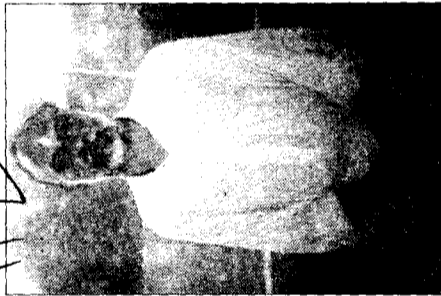
the same time, there are lessons to be learnt for all".

"The pseudo-secularists should understand that politics of minorities and appeasement policies would lead to incidents like December 6," he said, adding: "*Ek varg ko garam rahi kar dusre varg ko thanda nahi rakha ja sakta hai* (you can't keep one section quiet by keeping the other on the boil)."

Govindacharya said the judiciary should have intervened under Article 143 by deciding on the pending litigation before the demolition of the disputed structure.

He was also critical of the role of the media in reporting the issue. Stating that the "imbalance of objectivity between the Vernacular and English media was glaring", and he alleged that the "oneupmanship blurred the objective of the two brands of media.

Referring to former IB director M.K. Dhar's book *Open Secrets*, wherein he claimed that Govindacharya's marriage with Uma Bharati was objected to by the Sangh Parishad, the leader said he would not like to comment on the issue beyond what Bharati's guru had already said.



not only reflected the failure of the saffron leadership present there to gauge the mood

King connects Kathmandu to the world again

Sudeshna Sarkar
in Kathmandu

Feb. 8. — After six days of being cut off from the rest of the world where the telephone and Internet connections were concerned, Nepal's new government headed by King Gyanendra finally restored telecommunication links last evening.

ISD call facilities and Internet connections were resumed after a high-level committee monitoring the security situation daily felt the risk could be taken. Communications had been disrupted from the morning of 1 February

Ban on hoarding

KATHMANDU, Feb. 8. — With Maoist rebels announcing an indefinite nationwide strike from 13 February, the government today warned traders and citizens against hoarding food and fuel. The government also drafted an "action plan" aimed at providing education, health, water, roads and agricultural development to the rural people. — PTI

when King Gyanendra dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba government and imposed a state of emergency with the suspension of fundamental rights in the Himalayan kingdom.

Most of the diplomatic community in Kathmandu, including India, the UK and USA, had made representations to the government, asking for the restoration of communications. The new dispensation's communication curbs violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations that says the host state shall permit and protect free communication on the part of the diplomatic missions allowed by it for all official purposes.

Though local, ISD and STD calls can go through now, mobile telephone services are yet to resume. While people welcomed



NEPAL CONNECTED: Foreign tourists browse the Internet in Kathmandu on Tuesday. — AFP

the restoration of phone and Internet links, an Indo-Nepal joint venture, however took a beating.

Reporters' rap

KATHMANDU/NEW DELHI, Feb. 8. — Reporters Without Borders today condemned the presence of security personnel inside the offices of newspapers in Kathmandu and the control they are exercising over news reports. The organisation also requested the release of detained journalists and an end to the harassment of the families of those journalists who have gone into hiding to avoid arrest. The palace today issued a new series of directives banning negative reports about the security forces. — SNS

Bloody battle before talks

KATHMANDU, Feb. 8. — Despite peace overtures made this week to Maoist rebels, the Nepal army spokesman warned of a long and bloody battle before the guerrillas are weak enough to be forced to the negotiating table.

Brig. Gen. Dipak Gurung said that despite an offer of unconditional talks, the new government headed by the king was expecting to meet the rebels on the battlefield rather than around the table. "We have to force the Maoists to come to the negotiating table, we are looking for them. Wherever they are we are going to launch offensive operations. "We have to make them weak," he said. "They broke the ceasefire in August 2003 and since then we have managed to inflict casualties on them... They are definitely weaker but still not that weak that they will come to negotiation table."

In another development, Nepalese security forces have killed dozens of Maoists in an aerial raid in western district of Dhaulak, a local media report said today. The report did not give further details. — AFP & PTI

King Gyanendra needs international support to swing the situation in his favour

Thy hand, great monarch!

BY S.D. MUNI

KING GYANENDRA'S takeover of power on February 1, 2005, has brought him face to face with all the popular political forces of Nepal, the armed Maoists and political parties. It has also isolated him from his erstwhile supporters in the international community, particularly India, the US, the European Union and Britain. With this confrontation, not only is the king's reputation at stake, but also the very survival of the institution of monarchy that he represents.

To win this battle of survival, his options are limited and difficult. The one that sounds prudent and politically profitable for him does not seem to be achievable. And the one that seems possible is fraught with destructive consequences.

The prudent option is to engage the Maoists politically in talks for a resolution of the insurgency problem. The talks may yield the immediate peace which he promised the Nepali people in his takeover address. If there is a ceasefire between the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) and the Maoists and talks do begin, pressure on the king against his takeover may be diffused in both domestic and international circuits. No wonder then that some of his ministers have invited the Maoists for talks 'without pre-conditions'. The Maoists have long been desirous of direct contact with the king, and such an offer was made taking the Maoist desire at face value.

However, Maoist leader Prachanda has almost categorically refused to talk to the king while condemning his political takeover. They may be feeling confident from the success of their recent initiatives of 'strategic offensive', and also, they may not be keen to bail out the king from the difficult position he has put himself in with the coup. The prospect of such talks with the Maoists then doesn't appear to be bright.

At the same time, it is possible that the Maoists, being tactically resilient, are quietly negotiating for appropriate conditions to engage with the king. They perhaps seek to be assured that the movements of the RNA during the talks will be restricted and that there will be international mediation. There might also be a wish to set a preconceived 'outcome' for the talks, in the form of



either an interim government headed by them, or an elected Constituent Assembly to be constituted under their overall supervision. Anything less than this may erode the credibility of the Maoists among their own supporters and invite a charge of seeking power at the mercy of the king. These terms will be very hard for the king to accept because such a Constituent Assembly will pitch the fate of the monarchy into a realm of uncertainty.

Any new Constitution by an elected assembly will remove the RNA from the king's control leaving him politically vulnerable and ineffective. The king may consider the possibility of a nominated Constituent Assembly, the composition and outcome of which he can manipulate to his advantage as much as possible. This will clearly not be acceptable to the Maoists.

Demands are also voiced from the king's side, likely at the behest of security forces, that before entering talks, the Maoists must lay down their arms. There is no likelihood of the Maoists even considering this as a price worth paying for talking directly with the king. Thus, the option of political engagement for negotiations between the king and the Maoists is almost a non-starter under the prevailing circumstances in post-coup Nepal.

The second option the king may exercise is to unleash the army on the Maoists. The army is claiming its readiness to take on the Maoists militarily. The king's coup, with restrictions on fundamental rights and freedom, media and communications, national and international

human rights watchdogs, and political parties and activities, has created desirable conditions for the army to run riot in Nepal. The chief RNA spokesman, Brig. General Deepak Gurung, is reported to have said: "Now we can solely go after the Maoists in a single-minded manner without having to worry about what's going to happen on the streets." Having obtained massive quantities of arms and training from India and the US, and cornering huge budgetary allocations, the RNA is likely to be upbeat. There are already reports of heavy military movements in a number of sensitive districts.

Notwithstanding the RNA's confidence, the task of subduing the Maoists militarily looks almost impossible in view of the record of recent army-Maoist encounters. The Maoists have continued to maintain their offensive. Senior Indian army officers dealing with their Nepali counterparts are often puzzled at the RNA's timidity despite all the equipment and training. The RNA can surely indulge in ruthless killings of Nepalis in the name of Maoists. But Nepal's terrain and the Maoists' morale are such that the latter's capacity to wage relentless guerrilla warfare is impressive.

Also now nearly half of the RNA's strength is tied up in managing palace security, civil administration in district headquarters and a restrictive regime of controlling communications and civil rights. In addition to this, the king's armed forces have to deal with the gradually growing protests and defiance by political parties.

The king's repressive moves are forcing the hitherto competing political parties to come together to fight the monarchy. The monarch's new 21-point programme of pursuing anti-corruption charges against political leaders and dangling carrots of land distribution, jobs, loans and financial incentives to rural and urban Nepali youth will not erode social support either for the Maoists or the political parties in any significant manner.

The efforts to keep the political leadership on the run and the cadre confused and directionless may prove to be counterproductive. The threatened political cadres may join the Maoists in opposing the repression. The Maoists have already called for a united front with the political parties and have even appealed to the second layer of parties' leadership to forge a common struggle against the monarchy.

While the Maoists may fight the RNA in rural Nepal, they may assume the leadership of urban protests and agitations by party cadres. There are possibilities of the rise of a 'people's movement' on the lines of the 1989-90 experience in Nepal, which threw out the panchayat system. While the 1989-90 movement was led by a liberal democratic leadership, this time the Maoists and the Left extremists may be in command and there may be no space for any compromise by the monarch.

The king's only hope for sustaining his military option lies in the continued military and moral support from the international community. He is quietly mobilising China, Russia and Pakistan for this purpose. But the support of these countries may not be adequate and effective if others disapprove of it.

King Gyanendra has started mobilising support groups in India and is also pleading for involvement of the United States and Britain. It remains to be seen if India and the democratic international community will deviate from their stated positions and decide to stand against the popular forces of Nepal to save a repressive regime.

The writer is Professor, School of International Studies Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

King ready for Maoist talks

Newspapers find voice, rights flak for govt

Kathmandu, February 7

NEPAL'S NEW government headed by King Gyanendra has offered to hold unconditional talks with Maoist rebels to end an insurgency that has claimed more than 11,000 lives.

The rebels had previously said they will negotiate only with the King or his representatives under an international mediator, with an agenda that includes electing a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. "Now they should come for dialogue without any conditions," a government statement said on Monday, adding that those issues can be discussed if the rebels agree to meet a committee of Cabinet ministers which has still to be appointed. The Maoist agenda of a round-table conference and an interim government and assembly "can be discussed at the negotiating table."

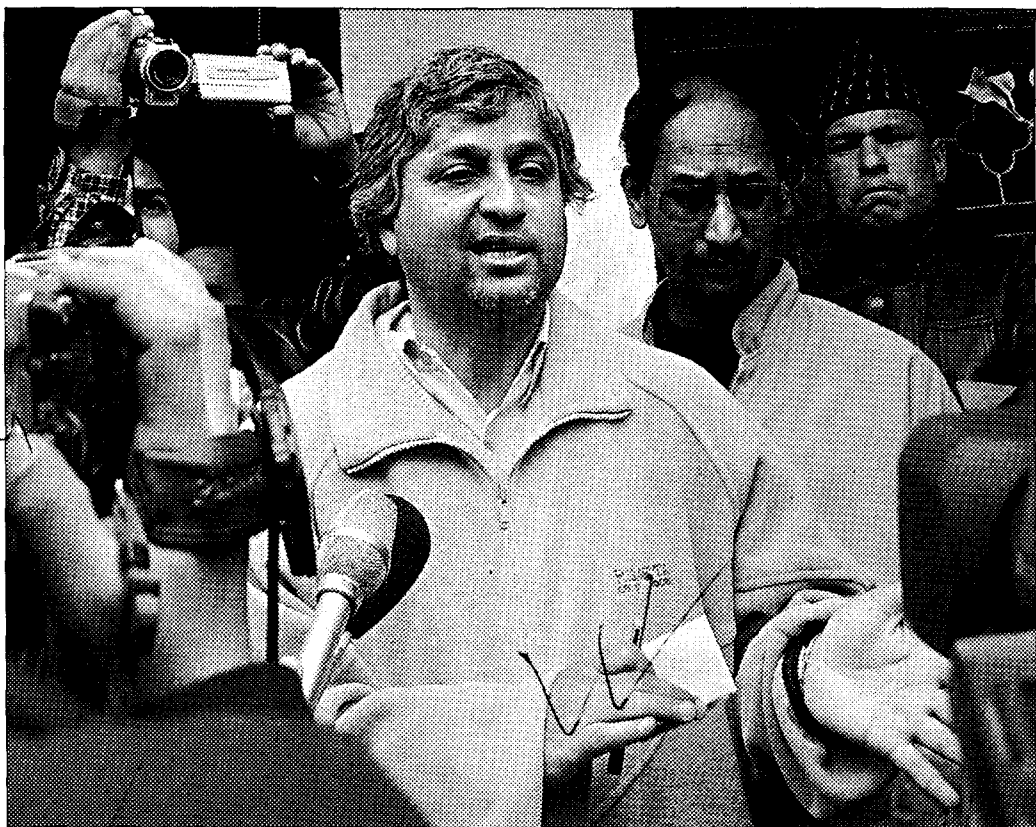
Newspapers in Nepal have pressed the government to lift curbs on press freedom, imposed since the takeover. The *Kathmandu Post* daily published a leader on Monday entitled "Reconsider." It says it will not challenge the new government but asks it to reconsider certain provisions of the emergency.

Similar articles have appeared in the Nepali-language paper, *Kantipur*, in what the BBC's Charles Haviland in Kathmandu describes as a new boldness creeping into the media. The new government has imposed heavy censorship on the media, mostly implemented by the military. Phone lines have been cut and internet services suspended since the takeover.

On Monday a slew of human rights groups held a meeting in defiance of a ban on gatherings and called for a protest on February 10 near the federal government's central secretariat in downtown Kathmandu. The meeting urged activists to court arrest and called for the restoration of democracy and press freedom. "We would like to fill the jails of Nepal for the sake of democracy, human rights and peace," said Krishna Pahadi, former president of the Nepal Human Rights and Peace Society.

However, in India two senior Nepalese politicians leading a group of six who fled across the border at the weekend, urged the Maoists not to listen to Gyanendra. "We appeal to the Maoists not to hold talks with the king... they should seek a democratic solution to their demands," said Dilendra Bood, former education minister in Nepal. "The Maoist issue must be debated in the democratically-elected house because there are no military solutions." Vinay Dhvaj Chandra, chief whip in the Nepali Congress party, called on India to help.

Agencies



Nepalese human rights activist Krishna Pahadi talks about taking on the King in Kathmandu on Monday. AP

Nepal bans criticism of army

Associated Press
Kathmandu, February 7

NEPAL'S NEW royal government on Monday banned criticism of the country's security forces, strengthening a clamp-down on dissent the King says is necessary to end a bloody communist insurgency.

The government also banned political activities by public servants and authorised the seizure of private property but eased a ban on gatherings by private citizens. People may hold workshops, meetings and conferences providing they get permission

first and the gatherings do not disturb law and order or undermine "the kingdom's sovereignty and integrity," the government said in a statement aired on state-run media.

The new decree banned any public comments "made directly or indirectly" about the security forces "that is likely to have negative impact on their morale." Violators could be placed under arrest, the government said.

It said the security forces could monitor telephones, radio, fax and e-mail and other forms of electronic communication and block them when necessary. It

gave no elaboration on when private property could be seized by the government.

Gyanendra has said he had dismissed former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba because Deuba failed to end the insurgency or to conduct parliamentary elections. Nepal has been without a working legislature for nearly three years since Gyanendra fired Deuba for the first time in 2002. The move set off street protests, and the King reinstated Deuba last year. The rebels have been trying since 1996 to overthrow the government and establish a socialist state.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

08 FEB 2005

Democracy in cold storage

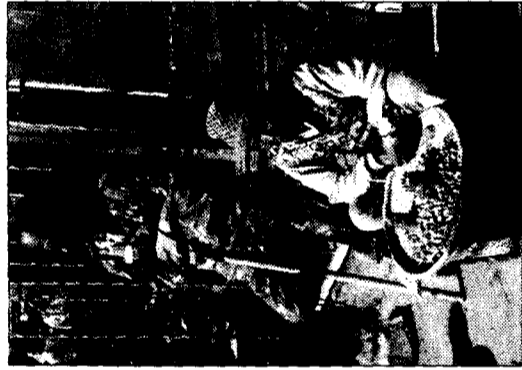
in the past

IN an era when kings have become constitutional and largely ceremonial figures, the royal coup in Nepal comes as an extraordinary turnaround. Far from divesting himself of authority, as his peers are doing, King Gyanendra has dismissed the government that he had appointed a few months ago and assumed State powers for a period of three years. Democracy, already under strain in Nepal, has been put in cold storage, prominent politicians have been placed under restraint, strict censorship imposed, communication links severed, protest banned. There had been hints earlier that the King wished to take on executive authority for himself, but the uncompromising action we have just seen came as a surprise to practically everyone, including former Prime Minister Deuba, its first target. He was accused of not making proper preparations for the polls that were expected in the near future, and also of failing to take initiative in dealing with the Maoists. True, the Deuba government seemed ineffective, as did more than one of its short-lived predecessors. But the issues now raised go well beyond those of governance alone. It is possible that the crackdown by the King, its full impact and consequences masked by stringent censorship, may calm things down in the short run and project the semblance of normality. But there is no disguising the gravity of the constitutional crisis now precipitated.

In Kathmandu, a government has been established, and portfolios distributed to persons of some standing who have proved willing to fall in with the King's plans. This government will be hard pressed, however, to

project the authority and credibility it requires, except perhaps in dealing with basic day-to-day business. Both within the country and internationally, its members will suffer the disability of being seen as royal functionaries, authority having now been concentrated at one single point. This adds to the longer-term problem, for if now things do not work out satisfactorily — and the odds are against — then there will be nobody else to take responsibility. The institution of monarchy itself, now that the king has stepped into the executive sphere, will be under test in very difficult and challenging circumstances. The monarchy's role as unifier and symbol of the nation, already targeted by the Maoists, could come under severe strain.

Events in Kathmandu remind us this is a region that has been plagued by forcible eviction of elected governments. In this, Pakistan has set the pace. Developments in Nepal are reminiscent of much that we have seen in our neighbourhood to the west, where it was the chief of the army, not the head of state, who intervened. As seen there, the first target is bound to be the elected assembly and the civilian



A riot policeman stands next to a peanut vendor in Kathmandu. — AFP

wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

tion, both overt and concealed, will follow, despite the appearance of calm that the initial shock may induce.

Among the tasks to be done in Nepal, the most important is to find a way of dealing with the Maoists. This has already become an almost insuperable challenge. Different approaches to solving the problem have been tried, without much headway. It is difficult to see what the King's direct interven-

legislators. It can be argued that they have much to answer for and are tainted by venality and ineptitude, nevertheless they have been put where they are by popular vote. In Nepal, the people's right to elect their own government was achieved after a prolonged struggle, which only makes the suspension of democratic processes all the more regrettable. The royal coup in Nepal is anchored on army support, without which it could not be conceivable — earlier democratisation, which whittled down the powers of the monarch, still left him as the head of the army. If the Pakistani experience is anything to go by, the respite given by such forceful intervention will be short-lived. Popular reaction, both overt and concealed, will follow, despite the appearance of calm that the initial shock may induce.

Among the tasks to be done in Nepal, the most important is to find a way of dealing with the Maoists. This has already become an almost insuperable challenge. Different approaches to solving the problem have been tried, without much headway. It is difficult to see what the King's direct interven-

(Salman Haider is a former Foreign Secretary, Govt. of India.)

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08 FEB 2005

Check the king

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Gyanendra should know that he has only one option: the speedy restoration of democracy

WITH the suspension of civil liberties, Nepal has receded behind a cloud. Such opacity does not exactly lend itself to accurate political interpretation. Yet, after almost a week since King Gyanendra's coup, it would appear that he has met with greater resistance than he had possibly envisaged. India's disapproval of these extra-constitutional methods has found an echo in the various capitals of the world. This, despite the king's conscious attempts to project himself like a Nepali version of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, who has taken on the challenge of fighting the terrorist and the Al-Qaeda for a safer world. If Beijing is indeed tempted to utilise the present situation to upgrade its status with Nepal, it would have to weigh the benefits of such a policy against the dividends of a cordial relationship with India.

The writ of the king, thanks to a decade of Maoist insurgency, did not extend beyond Kathmandu and its environs in the best of times. Because of the king's draconian measures to suppress dissent, disaffection within Kathmandu may at present be muted, but the ordinary citizen here — after having experienced 15 years of democratic politics with all its severe limitations — is unlikely to regard a return to an era of feudal rule with equanimity. The king has actually opened up another front through his audacious

over-reach. The resources of the Royal Nepal Army are certain to be greatly stretched in the days ahead. Today it has to fight the Maoist insurgency, on the one hand, and quell dissidence in the capital and protect the Narayanhitti Royal Palace, on the other. A coup of this kind in the age of globalisation has an additional fallout. As the reports carried by this newspaper indicate, Nepal is on the brink of a serious liquidity crisis and the communication black-out that the king has ordered has seriously undermined not only banking transactions but now threaten manufacturing and tourism — something that the people located in the poorest nation in South Asia can ill afford.

The fact that the king — who had disdained thus far to explain himself to the world — has now attempted to mount a justification for his actions before foreign representatives, including the Indian envoy, indicates that the pressure is beginning to tell. This is the time for India to get its point home that the king has only one real option before him: to speedily work towards the restoration of democracy in his country. In the short term, this means lifting the emergency and restoring civil rights. In the longer term, it would mean the return of multi-party democracy, including a credible election process in the not-too-distant future. //

INDIAN EXPRESS

08 FEB 2005

Nepal gags army criticism, to form peace talks panel

SHIRISH B. PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 7

TIGHTENING its grip, Nepal's new royal government today banned political activities by public servants and all "direct or indirect" criticism of security forces fighting Maoists.

The new regime also announced its plan to set up a committee to hold unconditional talks with the Left-wing extremists. "The government is going to form a committee that will hold a dialogue with the Maoists soon," Nepalese Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Buddiraj Bajracharya said yesterday.

A government notification broadcast on state media said any public comments made "directly or indirectly" about



At the gate of a college in Kathmandu. Reuters

security forces "that is likely to have negative impact" have been banned and violators could be arrested.

Since the imposition of censorship after the seizure of power by King Gyanendra on

February 1, some newspapers here have been criticising the monarchy in a subtle manner.

One such editorial in the *Nepali Times* weekly says about trees being cut down, a clever metaphor for a gagged press. The article goes on to say how trees allow people to breathe freely, and how their roots hold the soil together and the need to "bring back greenery".

Banning political activities by public servants, the government said it could seize private property when necessary.

The notification also said the security forces could monitor telephone, fax, radio, e-mails and block them when necessary. The government, however, eased a ban on public gatherings, but placed strict controls on them. —PTI

INDIAN EXPRESS

8 FEB 2005

Activists protest against Gyanendra

Terry Friel

KATHMANDU 7 FEBRUARY

NEPALI human rights groups plan to stage the first open show of defiance since King Gyanendra seized power last week, saying they could no longer remain silent and daring him to "fill the jails."

Almost a week after the king sacked the government, suspended civil rights and banned dissent, leaders of 24 human rights groups and professional bodies defied arrest to meet in a house in Kathmandu on Monday to decide on action.

They plan to bring their supporters onto the streets on Thursday outside a complex housing the Prime Minister's office and Parliament. But with communications difficult, it was not clear how many people would join the protest.

There have been no major public demonstrations in Nepal since King Gyanendra took power almost a week ago and ordered extra troops, police and armoured cars onto the streets.

The ousted government's failure to make progress in ending a Maoist rebellion that has killed more than 11,000 people was one of the reasons King Gyanendra gave for his sudden move.

"We are not going to remain silent," said Krishna Pahadi, a leader of the Human Rights and Peace Society. "We dare the government to fill the jails in the name of democracy. The government would like to make Nepal a big jail."

The king has jailed possibly hundreds of politicians, activists, journalists and rights workers across the country.

—Reuters

Nepal bans criticism of armed forces

Kathmandu: Tightening its grip, Nepal's new royal government on Monday banned political activities by public servants and all "direct or indirect" criticism of security forces engaged in fighting Maoist insurgency.

The new regime also announced its plan to set up a committee to hold unconditional talks with rebels, who are fighting to topple the multiparty democracy and have denounced King Gyanendra's action seizing power, describing him a "national betrayer."

A government notification broadcast on state media said any public comments made "directly or indirectly" about security forces "that is likely to have negative impact" have been banned and violators could be arrested. Since the imposition of censorship after the seizure of power on February 1, some newspapers here have been criticising the king in a subtle manner. PTI

স্বচ্ছাসেবী সংস্থার হাতে গোধরা রিপোর্ট

নয়াদিল্লি, ৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি: গোধরা কাণ্ড নিয়ে তদন্তকারী বিচারপতি ইউ সি বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় কমিশনের অন্তর্বর্তী রিপোর্টের পুরো বয়ান আজ প্রকাশ করেছে দুটি স্বচ্ছাসেবী সংস্থা। হিউম্যান রাইটস ল নেটওয়ার্ক (এইচ আর এল ডব্লিউ) এবং হারমনি অ্যান্ড ডেমোক্রেসি নামের ওই দুই সংস্থা রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করায় বিতর্ক দেখা দিয়েছে। দুটি সংস্থাই গোধরা কাণ্ডের তদন্তকারী নানাবর্তী কমিশনের নিন্দা করে বলেছে আগে কাজ করেও নানাবর্তী অন্তর্বর্তী রিপোর্ট পেশ করেননি। এইচ আর এল ডব্লিউ-এর পক্ষে কলিন গনজালভেস জানান নির্ভরযোগ্য সূত্রেই তাঁরা ওই রিপোর্টের প্রতিলিপি হাতে পেয়েছেন। গত মাসে বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় কমিশনের রিপোর্ট প্রকাশে সোরগোল পড়ে যায়। গোধরায় সবরমতী এক্সপ্রেসে বাইরে থেকে আগুন লাগানো হয়নি বলে জানান বিচারপতি। — পি টি আই



Gyanendra takes a cue from the Maoists

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 6

IN NEPAL, do as Maoists do. That's what must have prompted King Gyanendra to initiate a new reforms agenda that focuses on the welfare of the kingdom's bonded labour, landless peasants, *dalits* and under-privileged classes.

Previous governments had also tried to win over these groups that form the backbone of the Maoists' fighting cadre by initiating similar reform programmes that really never took off.

The King's new council of ministers has proposed to set up a land bank for judicious distribution of land among landless peasants and bonded labourer or *kamaiyas* who were freed by the GP Koirala-led Nepali Congress government in 2000. It has proposed to give free education to *dalit*, underprivileged and disabled students.

The council has paid special attention to the development of districts falling in western Nepal's Karnali zone where the headquarters of the Maoists' parallel government is located. It has offered jobs at home and abroad to Maoists who have shunned violence. Besides, it has adopted several poverty alleviation programmes.

In Maoists-held areas, the rebels have simultaneously launched development programmes. They have banned drinking, gambling and driven out money-lenders from villages.

However, the council's proposed anti-corruption drive is seen as a move to keep mainstream parties, which have opposed the royal takeover, under check.

Meanwhile, Nepali Congress spokesman Arjun Narsingh KC, who has been confined to his house by security forces, said, "The king has put the institution of monarchy in danger by taking direct control of the government." Meera Pokhrel, supplies minister in the Deuba government, said, "My husband is being detained in Rajbiraj the prison."

Phone's dead, long live king

Avirotek Sen *Ali 85 Nepal*
Kathmandu, February 6

THE PALACE official sits alone in the lobby of the Yak and Yeti hotel, a few hundred yards from the Narainhity palace.

He has just ordered a sandwich and a drink. It is past midnight. Kathmandu is asleep (no late night telephone calls to disturb anyone, although midnight knocks cannot be ruled out).

"I finished late" says the official, biting into his sandwich. "And then I went home..." So? "My house is at the end of a long driveway. I rang the bell at the gate for 15 minutes. Nobody answered. And this (he points to his cellphone) is useless. So I just headed here for a bite. I've booked into a hotel nearby".

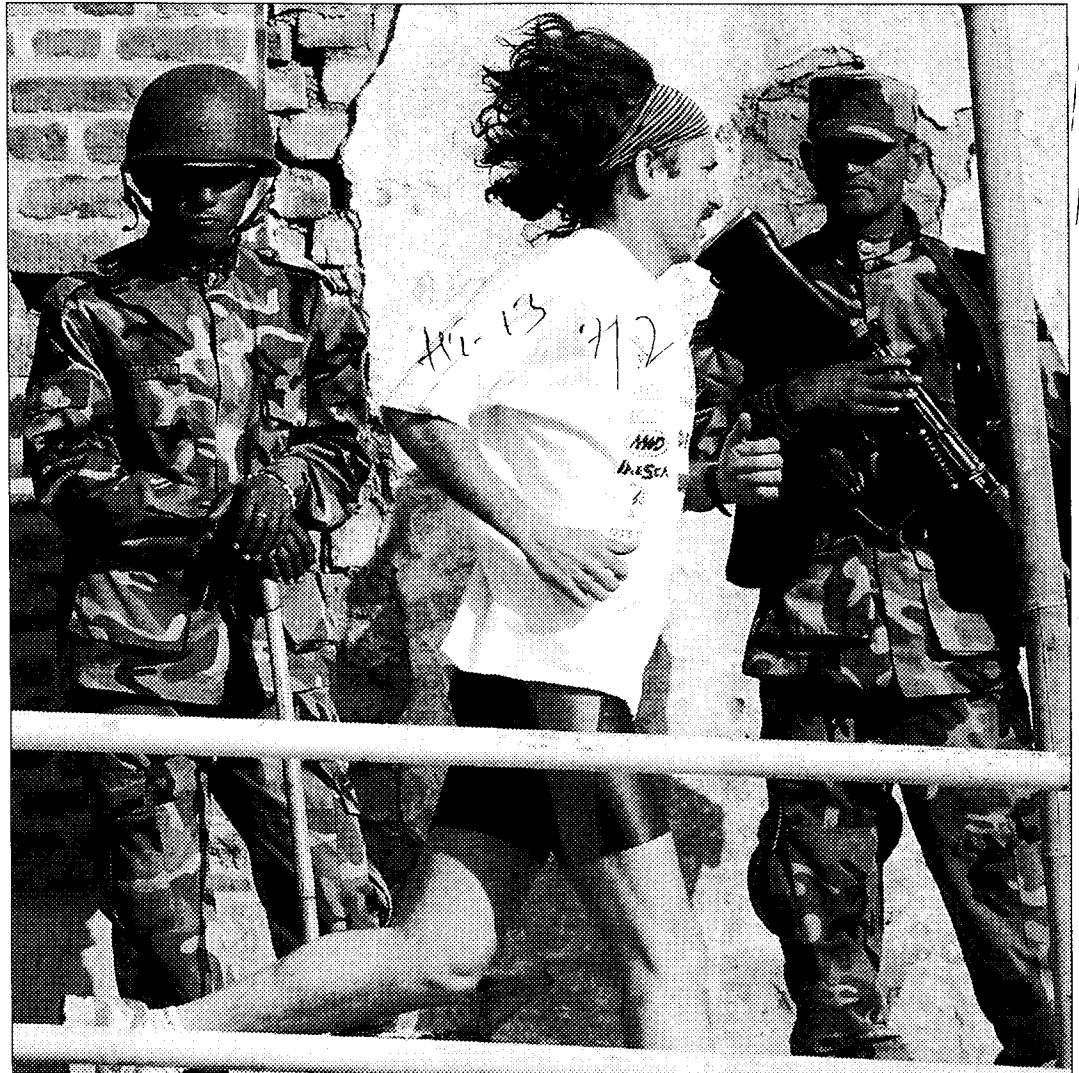
The official eventually got home at nine the next morning having spent a night out in the real world.

For what the King's men call "security reasons", Kathmandu has been cut off from the rest of the world—and from itself—for five days now. The phone lines are restored (only for calls within Nepal) for a few hours a day, generally on the whim of whoever it is that is in charge.

You cannot log on to the internet. And everybody, including palace officials who leave their office premises at the end of the day has been affected. When the telephone lines are up, everyone types a hopeful *www* on their monitors. All the screen says is "page cannot be displayed".

Banking services have collapsed. Aid agencies can't function. Credit cards aren't being accepted in most places. And Thursday's lead story in the major Nepali daily *Kantipur* says the online arm of the Pashupati temple has run into losses.

The response to their web facilities — from connecting with the almighty through cyber-



REUTERS

A foreigner jogs past Nepalese policemen guarding a Kathmandu road on Sunday.

prayers to mystical firewalls against evil spirits — has been very poor. Well business couldn't have been very good this past week. It is doubtful, however, whether the "guest editors" (Royal Nepalese Army officers) who put that day's paper to bed

would have seen the irony. The guest editor situation has changed, reliable sources at *Kantipur* told *Hindustan Times*, but the net is still down.

At the Pub Maya in Thamel, a cybercafe owner downs a series of Rum Punches. He's out of

business for now, and has no idea until when. "But I don't really mind. The situation in Nepal had hit the bottom. It can only improve", he says ordering another Rum Punch.

The phone is dead, long live the king.

Reforming the prince of darkness

Avirotek Sen
Kathmandu, February 6

DEVELOPMENTS IN Nepal have been so dramatic over the last few days that something pretty significant has been overlooked.

Crown Prince Paras, arguably the second-most notorious royal in the world (after Prince Harry, of course) sat in on the first meeting of the new council of ministers his father King Gyanendra appointed on Wednesday.

It will not be his last meeting. Sources say that since the palace now has absolute power, the Crown Prince will be involved in

BEYOND THE COUP

executive decisions.

Paras, whose ascension as Crown Prince saw major protests — there were five lakh signatures collected of irate subjects — has been a royal headache for Gyanendra.

His escapades are many and various: from running over famous Nepalese artist Praveen Gurung, to brawling in night spots. (Palace officials however, insist that the fight at Kathmandu's Soaltee hotel on New Year's

Eve "wasn't the Crown Prince's fault". The Prince's guards were rough with some people who were hugging and shaking hands with the Paras, thinking there was a security risk, they say, and that's what led to the fight.)

And his fondness for drink (a trait he shared with his late cousin, former crown prince Dipendra) is also well-known.

In the resort of Pokhara, for instance, locals say he frequented the Moondance Bar, among many other watering holes, to hang out and play pool.

Sources in the palace say that giving the Crown Prince more

responsibility is the King's way of trying to reform his heir. And eventually groom him to become more acceptable to the people. This will probably require a personality transplant, say people who have watched the Crown Prince for some time.

The Monarch, naturally, is said to be more than a little concerned about Paras. He doesn't want it to appear that Nepal's royalty lacks a second line of leadership.

"He wants the Crown Prince to contribute with ideas", said a palace official. The people of Nepal have reason to wonder what these ideas might be.

তলে তলে তৈরি হচ্ছেন নেপালের নেতারা

অগ্নি রায় ● কাঠমান্ডু

৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি: জরুরি অবস্থা নিয়ে তাঁর ব্যতিক্রমী, সাহসী লেখা বেরিয়েছে নেপালের নামকরা দৈনিকে। তা নিয়েই কথা হচ্ছিল। আর বিষ্ণু বুটাতোকি বলে দিলেন, “দেড় মাস পরে ফের আসতে হবে আপনাদের।” বিষ্ণুর ধারণা, পরিস্থিতি পুরোপুরি তেতে উঠতে সময় লাগবে। মাস দেড়েক পরে হবে আসল লড়াই।

বিষ্ণুর মতের শরিক এ দেশের অনেক সাংবাদিকই। তাঁরা বলছেন, আকস্মিক আঘাতে রাজনীতিকদের ছত্রভঙ্গ করে দিয়েছেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র। তাঁদের অনেকেই বন্দি। যাঁরা সেনাদের রক্তচক্ষু এড়িয়েছেন, তাঁদেরও আপ্যাত্ত প্রকাশ্যে আসার উপায় নেই। এই অবস্থায় ঘর গোছাতে মাস দেড়েক সময় তাঁদের দিতে হবে।

গৃহবন্দি এক প্রাক্তন মন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে কথা বলেও এই ধারণার সমর্থন মিলল।

তাঁর কথায়, “প্রত্যাহাত করতে আমাদের আরও একটু সময় লাগবে। আমরা গোপনে নিজেদের মধ্যে যোগাযোগ বাড়াচ্ছি।” যদিও সেই যোগাযোগের সূত্র কেটে দেওয়ার জন্য সরকারি উদ্যোগের অভাব নেই। পাল্লা দিয়ে চলছে ধরপাকড়।

বেসরকারি সূত্রে খবর, কাঠমান্ডুতে ৫০০ জন, সারা দেশে দেড় হাজার সাংবাদিক, আইনজীবী, মানবাধিকার কর্মীর ঠিকানা এখন মহারাজগঞ্জ এবং কাকোই সেনা ব্যারাক। এঁদের মধ্যে আছেন, নেপাল বার অ্যাসোসিয়েশন-এর প্রাক্তন সভাপতি সিদ্ধনাথ পারাকুয়েল। নেপাল ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন কংগ্রেস সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে, সংগঠনের সহ-সভাপতি পুঙ্কর আচার্য আর সদস্য মঞ্জু ভাট্টারকে আটক করেছে সেনারা। ‘ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ফেডারেশন অব জার্নালিস্টস’ যতই ধৃত সাংবাদিকদের ছেড়ে দেওয়ার জন্য চাপ দিক, প্রাসাদের হেলদোল নেই।

মাওবাদীরা অবশ্য ময়দানে নেমে পড়েছে। সরকারের শাস্তি আলোচনার প্রস্তাব উপেক্ষা করে মাওবাদীদের প্রধান প্রচণ্ড ইতিমধ্যেই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, ‘স্বৈরাচারী রাজার বিরুদ্ধে লড়াই চলবে।’ এবং সেই লড়াই শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। নিরাপত্তার বেড়া জাল ভেদ করে খবর পাওয়া গেল, কাঠমান্ডু থেকে ৫০০ কিলোমিটার দূরে নেপালগঞ্জে সেনার সঙ্গে সংঘর্ষে এক জন মাওবাদী প্রাণ হারিয়েছে। ২০ জন আহত। এদের মধ্যে একটি শিশুও রয়েছে। আহতদের আটক করা হয়েছে বলেও খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে। মাওবাদীদের রাখা বোমা নিষ্ক্রিয় করা হয়েছে মাহেন্দ্র হাইওয়েতে।

পশুপতিনাথ মন্দিরের ভেতরে ঘোরাঘুরি করছে গোয়েন্দা-কুকুর। মন্দিরের ভিতরে বোমা রয়েছে, এই খবর পাওয়ার পরে কোনও ঝুঁকি নিতে চায়নি সেনারা। তাদের বুটের শব্দে ভারী হয়ে থাকে রাজধানীর ভিতরে

ভিতরে বড় ধরনের রক্তপাতের আশঙ্কা ক্রমশই বড় হয়ে উঠছে।

এর মধ্যে অব্যাহত গতিতে চলছে ভারত বিরোধিতা। আজ থেকে ভারতের সব টেলিভিশন চ্যানেল দেখানো বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়েছে নেপালে। নিষিদ্ধ ভারতীয় সংবাদপত্রও। ভারতের সাংবাদিক দেখলেই রয়্যাল নেপাল আর্মির কর্তব্যাক্রমা প্রণয়ন করছেন, “আপনারা কেন আমাদের সাহায্য করছেন না? ভারতও তো মাওবাদীদের সমস্যায় ব্যতিব্যস্ত। আমাদের সাহায্য করলে ভুটানের মতো ভারতকে তো আমরাও সাহায্য করতে পারি।”

সব দেখে শুনে হতাশ কাঠমান্ডুতে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের দফতর। কালই সেখানে এক বৈঠকে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের কর্মীদের সতর্ক করা হয়েছে একটা সার কথা বলে।

‘নিজের প্রাণ বিপন্ন করে কোনও কাজ নয়।’

● নেতারা পালিয়ে ভারতে...পৃঃ ৫

07 FEB 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

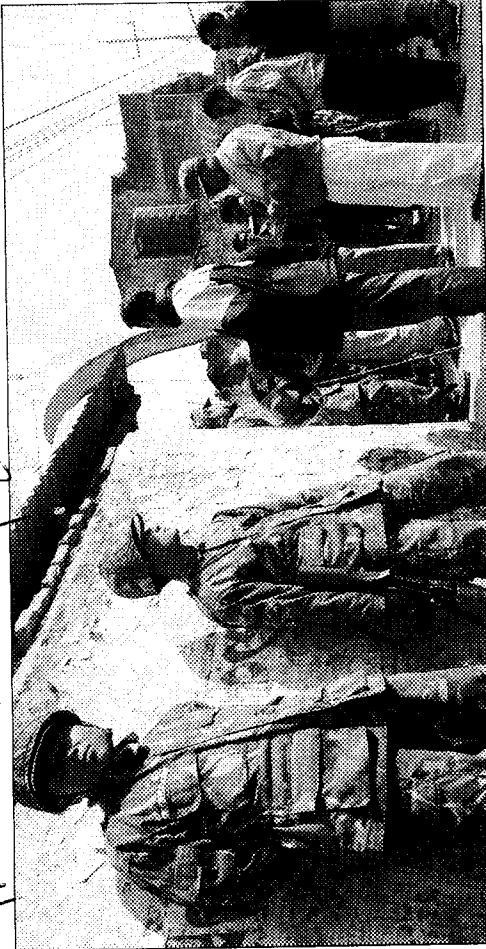
Nepal Maoists sneak into Bengal, Bihar

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, February 6

FEARING ARREST following annexation of all powers by Nepal King Gyanendra, some of the cadres of Communist Party of Nepal have slipped into West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand where they could indulge in extortion and spark clashes with Naxalite groups, say Central security agencies.

According to a report submitted by the agencies to the home ministry, the CPN cadres had slipped through the porous Indo-Nepal border and would be now engaged in extortion racket in Jharkhand and Bihar.

The presence of CPN cadres has the potential to spark bloody clashes with MCC and PWG, which are already operating in the two states and are engaged in extortion rackets, informed sources said. In fact there have already been some reports of clashes between CPN and MCC but have not turned ugly so far. The Union home ministry was already con-



Nepalese armed riot policemen keep watch outside a university as students show IDs to enter the campus in Kathmandu.

cerned about reports hinting at the possibility of clashes between groups of the Maoist Communist Centre and the People's War in Bihar and Jharkhand.

They said the three groups were based on caste lines and CPN in particular comprised of Brahmins and was in need of money for its sur-

vival. Its first area of operation would be to take over the "Rangdhari" (extortion) practice at coal quarries in Jharkhand and Bihar where the MCC and PWG have been charging unauthorised cess from coal dealers, sources said.

The two Naxalite outfits merged to form the Commu-

nist Party of India (Maoist) last September, ending an exercise spanning two decades to unite the factions that have often been at war.

The merger, kept under wraps for a month, included unification of the guerrilla groups of the two outfits into the People's Liberation Guer-

rilla Army.

Centre tells border guards to let in fleeing leaders

Deep Joshi
Nainital, February 6

IN A significant move the Centre has directed the security agencies manning the Indo-Nepal border not to restrict the entry of the Nepalese leaders fleeing their country for fear of being persecuted by the Army following the declaration of emergency in the Himalayan Kingdom.

Meanwhile, several leaders of Nepal's different political parties have taken shelter in Kurmaon's border areas even as patrolling on the Indo-Nepal border has been stepped up. SSB officials said India was not opposed to Nepalese leaders "including Maoist rebels fleeing Nepal for fear of being persecuted by the Royal Nepal Army being given shelter in the country."

"We have orders to immediately provide shelter to the Nepalese leaders including Maoists, if such a request comes from them," said the Deputy Commander of the SSB's Battalion-1.

He told HT that the security on the Indo-Nepal border had nonetheless been stepped up in view of the possibility that a large number of Maoist rebels might infiltrate into India in case their mass persecution was ordered by the Nepalese regime. D.C. Patni, the Commander of SSB's IIIrd Battalion, however, revealed that an intensive night patrolling "is also simultaneously being undertaken on the border, which has become quite vulnerable to infiltration, partly because it is highly porous and partly due to the country's open trade policy with Nepal."

For a hammer, every problem is a nail

Gareth Evans could have been a loveable aging hippy. But this longest-serving former foreign minister of Australia is the president of the Brussels-based International Crisis Group. He had first gone to Nepal as a back-packer in his youth.

"Anyone who claims to have a clear solution to the Nepal crisis is either ignorant or has had too much to smoke much like me when I first landed in Kathmandu," he said to some friends after returning from Nepal recently.

King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, however, thinks that he has a clear solution — executive monarchy.

Nepalese kings are known to be pot-heads. The monarch who spent his short tenure in a coma, King Dipendra, allegedly massacred his family under the influence of a deadly overdose of Famous Grouse whiskey, *ganja* and *charas*. His father, King Birendra, apparently enjoyed a joint only occasionally. King Gyanendra, however, is not known to be a pot-head. He seems in full control of his faculties.

King Gyanendra is putting in place what an unusually thoughtful Nepalese commentator, C.K. Lal, describes as a "post-modern monarchy". King Mahendra and his grandson, Birendra, although ambivalent towards democracy, tried to function with written constitutions. Theirs was a modern monarchy. In his attempt to run Nepal as a corporation, with himself as a hereditary CEO, Gyanendra is ushering in a new phase.

Lal says that postmodern authoritarianism is different from its earlier avatars in that all modern institutions, like the press, and the legal system,

seemingly stay in place. Yet the writ of only the man at the top runs as in the case of Fujimori's Peru or Chavez's Venezuela.

Nepal's postmodern monarchy has become possible because the climate was right, domestically and internationally. Terrorism created a political space for authoritarianism. Conservative political ideas suddenly become kosher. Witness what happened to the American society and electorate after 9/11. Even General Pervez Musharraf's military coup went on to be legitimized after the war on terror. In the wake of the attack on Indian parliament on December 13, 2001, a draconian law like the Prevention of Terrorism Act was passed by parliament.

These momentous international developments inspired King Gyanendra to project himself as a champion of the war on terror and symbol of stability. He was also helped in his ambition by the internal political situation in Nepal. The parliamentary parties were badly divided and their internecine differences, fuelled by extreme egotism, had become irreconcilable. The Maoist left had mounted a challenge that the parties were unable to meet. Both the parliamentary parties and the extreme left were reduced to appealing to the monarchy as the residual source of power.

There can be little doubt that sooner rather than later the mobile phone network and internet will be switched on in the Himalayan Kingdom — in the information age such channels cannot remain blocked for long or they clog up the economy. The press and the judiciary will also start functioning in a manner of speaking. The king's cabinet will be justified on the basis of merit and technocratic talent. The king will announce some more populist policies. The struc-



Postmodern monarchy

ture of power will seem almost normal.

Foreign dignitaries, including from India, which suffers from terrible blindness in its neighbourhood, will start making exploratory forays into Nepal and genuflecting before the king. Gyanendra himself will profess eternal friendship and talk of strengthening traditional ties with India. And soon pompous voices will emerge from the gin-drinking foreign policy pundits emphasizing "order" over participatory democracy in backward societies.

Indian television channels will aid

this process of "normalization" with their monstrous appetite for drivel. They will report that everything was normal in Kathmandu with visuals from Thamel. King Gyanendra may well then muse to himself and ask: Who is the pot-head now?

However, this would not mean the end of civil war in Nepal. In all probability, the disintegration of the political parties will be stemmed; the students' organizations will get radicalized and may go with the Maoists; and the political parties will be increasingly inclined

to join hands with the Maoists against the monarchy. This People vs the Palace republican movement will spell the end of the Shah dynasty.

King Gyanendra's takeover may seem a negative development. In the long run, however, it is likely to have far-reaching positive consequences. If the political parties and the Maoists come to a common minimum understanding, together they can initiate a radical transformation of Nepalese society through democratic reforms.

Why is this a probable scenario? Because the monarchy has chosen to go against the tide.

In the last one and half decades, beginning with the coming in of multi-party democracy in 1990, Nepal has become an intensely political society. One should not forget that a majority of the Maoist cadre is in the 12 to 22 years age-group. The Maoist movement's influence is the highest in the mid-western Himalayan districts that are not the poorest — there are poorer areas to the far west. Nor is illiteracy the highest in this area. Nepal in fact is emerging as a left-wing society by choice.

Of the 40 demands that the Maoists put forward initially, the mainstream political parties supported 36. Now they will have one more common ground with the Maoists — republicanism. Whatever political consolidation takes place now, therefore, is unlikely to be in favour of the centrist parties or the monarchy. The decisiveness of this shift will be determined by the extent to which King Gyanendra can rally people behind the slogan of Nepalese nationalism being in danger. The monarchist *panchayat* system introduced by his father after subverting democracy was

based precisely on this doctrine. But today's Nepal is different — over the last four decades, people's aspirations have become more consumerist, empty slogans will not satisfy them.

More importantly, after the dismissal of multi-party democracy in October 2002, the failure of King Gyanendra's rule by proxy has been all too evident. It makes no sense for people to endorse his failure.

The most important catalyst in the emerging situation will be India's reaction. The Western countries will take their cue from New Delhi. India's desire to patch up with the authoritarian regime of Gyanendra will be constrained by its self-image in this age of democracy and human rights.

India is the largest democracy in the world and wants a permanent seat in the UN security council. For two and a half years, it talked of supporting the twin pillars of multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy in Nepal, but King Gyanendra has demolished them single-handedly. Can New Delhi now afford to put history in the reverse-gear in its own backyard?

It is reasonable to assume that India will find it difficult to take a public posture in favour of an absolutist monarchy even if it supports the crushing of the Maoists by the military. If, however, India legitimizes the king, the liberal democracies of the European Union — especially Sweden, Norway and Germany, who have been looking for a foothold in Nepal, will harvest the local sympathy for democracy. The Americans are already there. If this is what India wants as an emerging power, this is what it will get.

‘In his attempt to run Nepal as a corporation, with himself as a hereditary CEO, Gyanendra is ushering in a new phase’

‘The most important catalyst in the emerging situation will be India's reaction. The West will take its cue from New Delhi’

Nepal's fate will be determined by its people

The king next door

DEB MUKHARJI

Heist report

The royal proclamation earlier this week adds yet another twist to the trials which have dogged the people of Nepal over the past years. The imposition of emergency and the suspension of political activity have been coupled with the ancillary suspension of constitutional provisions, which grant civic rights and liberties. As of now, communication links with the outside world also remain severed. There has been a uniform expression of dismay in India at the royal take-over, with concern about what impact the events will have on Indo-Nepal relations.

The almost exponential spread of the Maoist insurgency over the past few years was gradually squeezing the economy of Nepal and the Royal Nepal Army, despite considerable international assistance, has not been able to check its growth. The Maoists seem to be able to operate at will and have a substantial presence in a majority of Nepal's districts. Meanwhile, in Kathmandu, there has been a game of musical chairs in the appointment of prime ministers since the dismissal of the elected government and dissolution of the elected lower house. Even before these exercises of the royal prerogative, the political parties of Nepal had not distinguished themselves in any worthy manner. Within a short period of the restoration of democracy in 1991, Nepali politics was characterized by inter- and intra-party feuding arising largely from personality conflicts and the desire for power.

In the context of this recent history of Nepali politics, some sympathetic chords could echo the dismissive tenor of the royal proclamation towards politics and politicians. There is, however, more to it, as the king also seems to have actively contributed to the disunity among politicians almost since his accession to the throne, instead of acting to bring them together to face a common challenge. He cannot, therefore, avoid his share of the responsibility for the sorry state which in which Nepali politics finds itself.

It also needs to be recalled that unlike the rest of south Asia which had suffered a colonial yoke, Nepal has been independent for the past two hundred years. This is a matter of understandable pride for the Nepali. At the same time, while British India could, and did, imbibe

contemporary values, Nepal retained an essentially feudal structure where the concept of democracy was not defined, and certainly not encouraged. Nepal's first tryst with democracy was summarily terminated by the late King Mahendra and could only resurface after thirty years in 1990 after a protracted struggle. What happened on February 1, 2005, is thus seen as not so much of a step compelled by the exigencies of the situation and the inability of the political parties to

reprehensible word in the international vocabulary today, and the *Maobadis* being termed terrorists (first by India), the world at large, including India, would fall in line with the regime's avowed determination to resolve the Maobadi problem. Internationally, the idea could perhaps be persuasively promoted, as we have seen repeatedly, including in south Asia, where democracy takes a poor second place to firm action against terrorists. Where King Gyanendra may have been poorly

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tant binding force for Nepal as a state. Clearly, it can continue to be respected only if it is seen as a glue and not as a shroud, a guide and not a partisan. As for dealing with the Maobadi threat, even if one were to believe that the palace once had links with them to settle scores with the mainstream political parties, much water has since flown down the Bagmati and they are now a force in their own right.

India would have to exercise her choices with caution. The founder of modern Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah, had pithily surmised the position of Nepal as a yam between two stones. Nepal has always displayed considerable diplomatic skill in dealing with her two giant neighbours. As times change, it is inevitable that there would be an increasingly assertive Nepal. But the facts of geography, history and custom (including the much maligned treaty of 1950) need to be seen. The relations of Nepal and India are indeed unique. A Nepali citizen may rise to the highest ranks in the Indian armed forces, where over thirty thousand Nepalis serve in the army with more than one hundred thousand pensioners in the hills of Nepal. They are free to join the civil services in India. There is an open border permitting free movement of people with duty-free access to goods of Nepali origin. Millions of Nepali citizens earn their livelihood in India and there are innumerable family links at all levels of society. Any serious unrest in Nepal affects India, as we have recently seen with large-scale migration following Maobadi activities and army operations. It is important that India's actions do not hurt a people already beleaguered.

One question that may need early assessment is the assistance to the Royal Nepal Army. This has been most substantial over the past three years in an effort to raise the efficacy of the RNA against the Maobadi insurgency. But should the army be used to suppress the legitimate democratic aspirations of the people, then a reappraisal may be necessary.

The course of events in the coming days would be determined by the people of Nepal. The exercise of options by India would depend on how this develops. In the days of the *raj*, a senior official is said to have remarked, "We have no policy towards Nepal, only friendship." This would be valid even today, and friendship has to be for the people at large.



cope, but as a body blow to the nascent and struggling Nepali democracy.

But 2005 is not 1960, and it is unlikely that this step back into time would pass without let or hindrance, either nationally or internationally. Any attempt to return to the romantic Shangrila of yesterday with a placid people accepting the laws laid down by the palace would only create a stifling prison, as seems to be the case now with a Nepal bereft of communication with the outside world. What was unacceptable to the people of Nepal in the Fifties of the 20th century and what they successfully struggled against after 1960, is unlikely to be sustainable today. Unlike 1960 also, Nepal has tasted freedom, has enjoyed a vibrant and free press and has seen the emergence of a forward-looking, nationalist and educated middle class.

The calculation would seem to be that "terrorism" being the most

What was unacceptable to the Nepalis in the Fifties is unlikely to be sustainable today

advised is that his own standing in Nepal is not as strong as his forebears, particularly after the palace massacre of 2001. And even King Birendra, still enjoying the traditional religious halo, had been compelled to compromise fifteen years ago with the will of the people.

In a nation accustomed to revering the monarchy, talk of republicanism, even outside the confines of the Maobadis, is no longer taboo. Above all, the king has placed the prestige, if not the future, of the monarchy on the line by removing the protective wall which the political parties provided. The monarchy as an institution has been an impor-

The author is India's former ambassador to Nepal

U / FEB 2005

Nepal activists struggle to rally

KATHMANDU, FEB. 6. Their hands tied by the arrest of their leaders, a communications blackout and a censored media, Nepal's anti-monarchy forces are battling to mobilise opposition to the King's seizure of power.

King Gyanendra has established an iron grip after Tuesday's power grab, a widely condemned do-or-die gamble aimed at sidelining political opponents and quelling a Maoist rebellion, but which could threaten the future of the monarchy itself. Small clusters of political activists, trying to stay one step ahead of the police and working without phones, are struggling to organise protests and rally international support.

"Some protests will be organised, but we don't know when," Ram Sharan Mahat, a senior figure in the Nepali Congress party told Reuters today. "The problem is the present network is off the track and we are trying to ... tie the threads together. We are between the deep sea and the devil."

So far, there have been no widespread protests against King Gyanendra's sacking of the Government and suspension on civil rights, which leading Nepali human rights groups say have created a *de facto* military regime under the king. Extra troops and police, some in riot gear, have been deployed on Kathmandu's streets and outside media offices.

Violence feared

Analysts say Nepal is now destined for a surge in violence as the army-Maoist fighting intensifies and political protests eventually get under way, raising the risk of further trouble.

"We are entering a period of prolonged instability," said Kunda Dixit, an analyst and editor of *The Nepali Times* weekly.

"The King has never disguised his distrust for political parties' leadership and reflecting the public's disenchantment with them, but the people's lack of support for the parties does not necessarily translate into support for the King."

The King is gambling that without the political squabbling, he and his army can step up their offensive to force the Maoists back to the negotiating table. But the rebels have come out strongly against his decision and show no signs of laying down their arms.

"If the King fails, it will strengthen the Maoists, which are already a dangerous force," said Mr. Mahat.

"If he fails, it could cost his crown because the real power will go to them".

"If he succeeds, this will enhance the role of the King in favour of a stronger monarchy. With that, multiparty democracy will be weakened."

Strategic stalemate

Successive governments and military offensives have failed to swing the war against the Maoists. Both sides admit they have ground to a strategic stalemate where neither can win on the battleground. — Reuters

THE HINDU

07 FEB 2005

For the people, by the King

SUDESHNA SARKAR
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KATHMANDU, Feb. 5. — King Gyanendra has unveiled a 21-point programme that sounds pro-people and good government-oriented and also takes into consideration the Maoist insurgency as well as rampant corruption in the administration. The announcement was made at the first meeting of the newly constituted Cabinet of 10 ministers.

A Royal Commission will be formed within 15 days. It will hold spot investigations and seize and nationalise the property of those guilty of abuse of authority, smuggling, tax evasion and bribe. The new probe body could be a cause of concern for some former ministers and top bureaucrats said to be leading lavish lifestyles not supported by known means of income.

Four members of the ousted Deuba Cabinet have been arrested. They are former works minister Mr



INFORMATION HIGHWAY: With censored newspapers on Saturday. — PTI

Prakash Man Singh, agriculture minister Mr Honnath Dahal, education minister Mr Bimalendra Nidhi and minister of state for foreign affairs Mr Prakash Mahat. Also behind bars is Mr Minendra Rijal, Nepali Congress (Democratic) spokesman.

The new government will institute a land bank to distribute land to landless peasants and freed Ka-

mayas — people from the Tharu community who virtually work as serfs for landlords, provide special measures for students from the Dalit, disabled and minority communities, and have an effective punishment system for delays, favouritism and bribery. In the economic sector, there will be special assistance for cottage industries and encourage-

ment for the private sector to develop water resources and expand industries. The new government aims to narrow down the existing gap between the rich and poor in the capital as well as other metros by fixing housing land standards and taking into consideration Nepal's proneness to killer quakes, reinforce construction of houses according to anti-

earthquake measures. Nepal will see improved surface connectivity with new roads, an electric train system running from eastern to western Nepal and tunnel ways waterways and ropeways. Civil service would have more women, Dalits and ethnic minorities.

The remote Karnali region in north-western Nepal, a hot bed of communist insurgency, will have agriculture, education and health measures to make it self-sufficient as well as better road links connecting different district headquarters. The Maoists who give up arms as well as their victims would be provided training to get jobs in and outside the country.

The new finance minister, Madhukar Shumsher Jang Bahadur Rana, said the government's immediate priorities are to maintain law and order, improve security, reach relief packages and provide effective development related services.

Nepal detains media rights activists

KATHMANDU, FEB. 5. Nepalese soldiers arrested two leaders of a media rights group, after authorities suspended press freedoms and warned it would take action against those who criticise it.

Taranath Dahal, president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, was detained on Saturday and Bishnu Nisthuri, the group's general secretary, on Friday, the organisation said in a statement. Officials refused to comment on the arrests.

The two men had been critical of the suspension of Nepal's press freedoms, which followed King Gyanendra on Tuesday dismissing the Government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, declaring emergency rule and cutting all telephone and Internet lines, which were working again for about five hours on Saturday.

The Government also arrested four ministers of the ousted Sher Bahadur Deuba Cabinet.

The King accused the previous government of failing to organise parliamentary elections or control a Maoist insurgency, and pledged to do both himself within three years.

Dozens of politicians have been detained or put under house arrest and soldiers were posted at media offices to check all reports before they were published or broadcast.

World leaders denounced the sacking of the Government and said it would undermine democracy and set back the country's efforts to fight the insurgency.

King Gyanendra appointed a new pro-royal Government, which on Saturday announced it would crackdown on corruption and reduce poverty.

Many politicians in successive Governments over the past 14 years of democracy have been accused of bribery and corruption, with several resigning in disgrace. — AP



King's last Gambit

While King Gyanendra prepares to take on the Maoists, the world tries to decipher the man...

Avirook Sen
Kathmandu

ON MONDAY night, King Gyanendra of Nepal summoned his Prime Minister to the Narayanhity Palace. The two men met at Mangal Sadan, a building on the premises that the king uses for such purposes. Deuba was told that he hadn't delivered. The Maoists had practically taken over the country. There was no sign of the promised election.

And that the King was not pleased. Just before 10 the next morning as troops built up on the streets, Indian Ambassador Shiv Mukherjee was at an appointment with Deuba. The Prime Minister reportedly told him "It's over now for me."
It was the beginning, however, for the 57-year-old man who might possibly be the last king of Nepal. An ambitious, complex man, who has just asked the world a complex question: "Who do you support? The terrorist Maoists, or me?", to justify his coup.

The Man

One of the highlights of Gyanendra's career, says his official CV, is that he was the chairman of the Advisory Committee for the Coronation of His late Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah (1975). A few lines below, however, come the two critical parts of the document, bold and underlined: Ascended the Throne of the Kingdom of Nepal (2001), Supreme Commander of the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA).

The ascension, as everyone in Nepal knows came after the palace massacre of June 2001. It placed him above all his subjects, but never quite above suspicion. Gyanendra was away in Pokhara on the night of the massacre, but rumours have spread on what his role in the tragedy might have been. No one is sure. No one wants to be.

Officials at the palace turn this around. "The people of Nepal grew to love and respect him even more after the massacre. It was a traumatic time for his majesty, but he remained strong through it. The people saw that."

What they see now, is a very different king from his predecessor Birendra. The king's aides say that while Birendra had "more majesty", Gyanendra is far more accessible. "He does not even mind being touched!", says one awestruck aide, "there are pictures of him being patted on the back by commoners". In the previous king's reign this would have been an outrage.

But contrast that to the one story everyone in Kathmandu will tell you. Once, while studying in St Joseph's College, Darjeeling, the schoolboy Gyanendra and other Nepali princes were told they would have the honour presenting a flower to Jawaharlal Nehru, who was visiting. Gyanendra reportedly said he wouldn't do it. "I am higher than he", he had said.

Had Enough of Being a Figurehead

He was a king before his brother was. In 1950, when the Ranas (a line of hereditary prime ministers who controlled Nepal) were about to take over completely, his father Tribhuvan fled to India with his heir, Birendra leaving four-year-old Gyanendra behind. Shamsher Rana, the then Prime Minister quickly installed Gyanendra as king.

Of course, he would only be a figurehead. King Tribhuvan returned and regained the crown with Indian help months later. (There is a section that suspects Gyanendra never quite forgave India for that).

But when he did get the throne again in 2001, it was also as a figurehead. At least that is what people thought. A constitutional monarchy had been in place for 11 years. The king's role in governance was limited, but there were a few key clauses in the constitution of 1990 that opened the door for Gyanendra when he decided that he'd had enough of being a figurehead. That it was time to RULE.

Exactly when he made that decision isn't clear, but the king's desire to rule - as the absolute monarch - was seen as early as October 2002, when he first dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba government. The local magazine *Himal* ran a cover story then, saying the king "Wants

to walk alone". The 31-minute speech he eventually delivered while taking absolute power was, according to palace sources, years in the making. "The king had issued warnings to the political parties at various forums" says a royal aide. This happened at speeches he gave during traditional felicitations at least four places over the last two years.

The speech, say aides, has entire chunks lifted from what he had at these functions.

And yet, there was an element of surprise. In Pokhara half an hour before the king's proclamation an office-bearer of the regional hoteliers' association was having a worrying conversation. "A Maoist leader had called to say that they would prefer if the association collected Rs 1 crore rather than them having to go and extort from individual hoteliers." They had reportedly said that the latter process would be both more expensive (Rs 2 crore) and more painful.

The hotelier was expected to get back in two days time. "And then", he said with a chuckle, "the phones went down."

The Maoists haven't called. But they have also rejected the King's overtures. They want the monarch out. The king, through his dummy council of ministers, has said that democracy won't come in, unless the Maoists are taken care off. That, the government says, it plans to do very soon.

The Monopoly of Force

King Gyanendra may or may not enjoy the loyalty of his subjects, but there is a group of 78,000 people who will do anything for him: The Royal Nepal Army. In 2001 when he ascended the throne, it was the RNA who escorted him to the coronation when Nepal's through the empty streets of Kathmandu. They had to: the public hadn't accepted the new monarch and influence wasn't ruled out.

The RNA motto - "Nation, Crown, People" - tells the story. "People" come after the king.

It has always been that way, but under Gyanendra, the army has gotten richer, more influential, and, it would appear, less accountable.

The RNA plans to increase its strength to 1,00,000 by the end of 2005. The king, who enjoys what one diplomat called "the monopoly of force" (the police has been rendered ineffectual by the Maoists, who in turn have grassroots networks, but are poorly armed), will ensure that happens. It doesn't just suit him, his survival as monarch depends on his influence over the RNA.

The RNA's budget increased by about 10 per cent a year from just Nepali Rs 89 crore, the year Nepal became a democracy, but over the last four years there have been huge jumps. It started four years back, when it went from Nepali Rs 385 crore to Rs 585 crore. It stands at well over Nepali Rs 800 crore now.

But the budget is only half the story. The Army, which doesn't disclose how it spends its money, nevertheless keeps asking the government for more funds.

During the first emergency declared by Gyanendra, it was allocated Rs 4.5 billion and ended up spending Rs 5.9 billion. And last year, it spent Rs 15 billion according to some estimates - that's almost every fourth rupee in the national budget.

The kind of money spent on the RNA has never pleased politicians, and there's been constant friction in the politician-army relationship.

In many ways, the RNA was waiting for an opportunity such as the one that presented itself on February 1. It gives them authority in addition to their weapons. It also makes Pyar Jung Thapa, the chief of army staff, the second most powerful man in Nepal. He was expected at the Indian Embassy function where Deuba figured he was out. But did not come. He must have been very busy.

If the RNA is able to quell the Marxist rebellion.

Murder & Madness

AFTER THE second king of Nepal Pratap Singh Shah died of natural causes his son Rana Bahadur Shah was crowned at the age of two-and-a-half.

His mother served as regent queen for eight years till an uncle imprisoned her on charges of having sexual relations with her minister. He killed the minister and installed himself as regent for the next nine years.

Two years after coming of age Rana Bahadur put his uncle in jail, who died there in mysterious circumstances. He then abdicated in favour of his son and took off to live in Benares. A couple of years later, he returned, replaced his second wife's head minister by killing him and reinstated his first wife as the regent queen. But he then exiled her and married a teenager. Rana Bahadur was killed in a family spat in 1806.

The fifth king, Rajendra Bikram Shah was weak and a raging court battle ensued between his wives and his son Surendra Bikram Shah (who most historians call mad). It culminated in a massacre in 1846 where at least 55 court officials died.

Can the army take on the Maoists?

Aditya Sinha
New Delhi

THE ONLY card King Gyanendra has left in his dealing with the Maoists is the Royal Nepalese Army. If the Maoists decide not to negotiate with him, he'll need the army to crush their movement. And if the Maoists do talk, but put up conditions that he can't accept (like stick to their demand for a republican form of government), he'll have no choice but to, again, crush them. But is the army upto the job?

Of the 78,000 strong army, half were recruited during the past four years, when the Maoist insurgency took a turn for the worse. Part of the army is completely untrained to fight: their primary responsibilities have been, traditionally, to guard the king, to parade around Kathmandu, and to present arms.

But from the current strength, if you deduct those on leave, those on duty at the palace, those tied up in international commitments and those at the border, you're left with a strength of 55,000 to 60,000. That is not enough to put a battalion in each of the 75 districts of the country. Large tracts would lack an army presence, and considering that 68 districts are virtually controlled by the Maoists, it means the army can't even give them a bloody nose.

Half the officer corps, especially the top brass, comprises families loyal to the king. For them, it's the done thing to do, though that doesn't necessarily mean they're an effective commanding force. The officers who've been recruited in the past four years are far more professional - they've come on the basis of merit - but they are perhaps not as committed to the king.

Then there's a serious problem with the army's jawans. There's a question mark on the level of infiltration by the Maoists.

The army also lacks an intelligence network. It has to rely on the civilian intelligence agency, which is ineffective: with only an estimated 10 per cent of Nepal's police stations functioning, there is virtually no flow of ground-level information. The army also lacks transports planes and helicopters, essential for a serious anti-Maoist operation; much of the country has hilly terrain (many district headquarters have no approaches by road), the thinly stretched army could only be redeployed if there were ample air support.

Perhaps the biggest issue is that the army itself apparently does not believe Nepal's Maoist problem has a military solution. How the king proceeds with such a weak hand is anyone's guess.



The Red Brigade

Supreme Commander
Pushp Kamal Dahal
Prachanda

An engineer by training, he is in his early 50s. The final decision is his.

The politburo

Baburam Bhattarai
Trained political economist from JNU

Krishna Bahadur
Mahara
Currently underground, little known about him

Ram Bahadur Badal
Commander of the Peoples Army

Pasang
Commander of the Eastern Zone

Dinath Sharma
Political activist, little else known

Maitrika Prasad
Yadav Currently in a Nepalese jail, in mid forties, a political activist, represents the Terai region

C P Gajurel
Arrested in Chennai, 2004 while travelling on a forged British passport, used to handle international relations

Mohan Vaidya alias
Kiran Arrested in Siliguri when he came for a cataract operation, oldest member

Nepal police raid political meeting

KATHMANDU, FEB. 4. Dozens of paramilitary police personnel raided an underground political meeting and rounded up a group of party officials on Friday, days after the King seized power and banned public gatherings in the Himalayan kingdom.

About 50 members of the Nepali Congress-Democratic had gathered in the yard of the party's headquarters when the paramilitary police arrived, surrounding the building. While most of the party members slipped out in the minutes after the raid, about a dozen were left inside when police locked the gates.

Mediapersons held

Reporters and photographers covering the meeting, from both the Nepalese and international media, were also briefly held. Authorities confiscated digital camera disks and videotapes from the journalists — including a team from the Associated Press and Associated Press Television News — before telling them to leave.

It was not clear whether the party members were arrested, or were later freed.

Nepal has been in political turmoil since Tuesday, when King Gyanendra dismissed the

government led by Sher Bahadur Deuba and declared a state of emergency, taking power for himself. He also suspended most civil liberties and cut telephone and Internet lines.

In his speech announcing the state of emergency, the King accused the Government of failing to bring the country's communist insurgency under control and call parliamentary elections.

The King suspended several provisions of the Constitution, including freedom of the press, speech and expression, peaceful assembly, the right to privacy, and the right against preventive detention.

Since then, dozens of politicians have been detained or put under house arrest, including Mr. Deuba, who is a member of the Nepali Congress-Democratic. Strict censorship has also been imposed on Nepal's media.

A journalist spoke by phone from Pokhara during a brief period on Friday afternoon when domestic telephone service was restored.

The daughter of the former Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, who heads the Nepali Congress Party, said her 81-year-old father is under house arrest. — AP

THE HINDU

05 FEB 2005

New Censorship Laws, Troop Deployment Make It The Toughest Crackdown In Nation's History

Nepal in its oyster

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kathmandu: Thursday was just another normal day in Nepal—vehicles plied on the streets, shops and business districts remained open and children went to school. However, it was supposed to be day one of a three-day strike called by Maoist rebels to protest King Gyanendra's takeover.

The large turnout on the streets did not indicate that Nepalis had lost their fear of Maoist guerrillas, who have waged a bloody nine-year struggle against constitutional monarchy. Neither is it a testimony to the keen support Gyanendra enjoys. It has more to do with a complete media blackout. Tough censorship laws have kept all newspapers, radio

and television stations from reporting political events, including the Maoist bandh call. "The people have no clue that Thursday was a bandh," said an observer, "there is a complete news blackout."

After Gyanendra assumed power by sacking the previous government, the most visible sign of the new regime is the censorship imposed on the media. Not only have telephone, mobile phone and Internet networks been disconnected since Tuesday, but all media outlets have been warned not to report anything against the takeover. Army officers, stationed at all newspapers and stations, are watching the news flow. "We have to get clearance from army officers before going to press. It's bad, but what can we do," said an editor.

After being sworn-in on Wednesday, the new government introduced a new law banning political reports for six months. "The media has to be disciplined," said the new information and communication minister Tanka Dhakal, a former functionary of the discredited Panchayat which was overthrown by political parties in 1990. As a result, newspapers are choc-a-block with reports about the new cabinet, its promises and

interviews with the new ministers. Reports of detentions and house arrest of hundreds of political leaders, activists and human rights defenders and intimidation of journalists by security personnel are non-existent. Even the postponement of the Saarc summit, which came about after Indian PM Manmohan Singh strongly criticised the royal coup, found scant mention.



CITY UNDER SIEGE? A man sits next to barbed wires on a Kathmandu street on Thursday

"I have not seen such censorship in my life. In the old days, you could at least test the waters by writing provocatively," says a newspaper editor who survived even the 30-year direct monarchical rule of the Panchayat regime from 1960-90. Unable to deal with the new laws, some private and radio stations have pulled their news programmes off the air completely. Only a few international correspondents are being able to do some kind of reporting — if they can find a way to get their stories out.

The intimidation campaign has not led to the arrest of any journalists yet, but writers are afraid. "We are lying low right now. We'll have to wait and watch," said one. The Federation of Nepalese Journalists criticised the clampdown, saying: "We demand a return to democratic rule and fundamental freedoms." But the statement was not carried by any media group.

Maoists have tried to take advantage of the situation, urging political parties to join hands against the monarchy. But political activists are wary. "They have consistently used violence against parties in the past. How can we trust them now?" asks a senior political leader who is fortunate enough to be free.

Talk peace or face action, Maoists told

Kathmandu: Nepal's new government headed by King Gyanendra called on Maoist rebels to hold peace talks or risk 'alternate steps', as the Himalayan nation entered its fourth day on Friday cut off from the outside world.

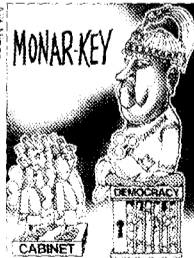
"We ask the Maoists once again to come to the negotiation table and help to solve the present political crisis," said home minister Dan Bahadur Shahi, of the 10-member pro-royalist cabinet, which was sworn-in on Wednesday. "If they do not come forward, we may have to think of alternate steps," Shahi said on state television.

The rebels had refused to talk with the previous Deuba government arguing that as it had been appointed rather than elected. There was no immediate rebel response to the ultimatum. But after the seizure of power, Maoist leader Prachanda had denounced the monarch as a "national betrayer". TNN

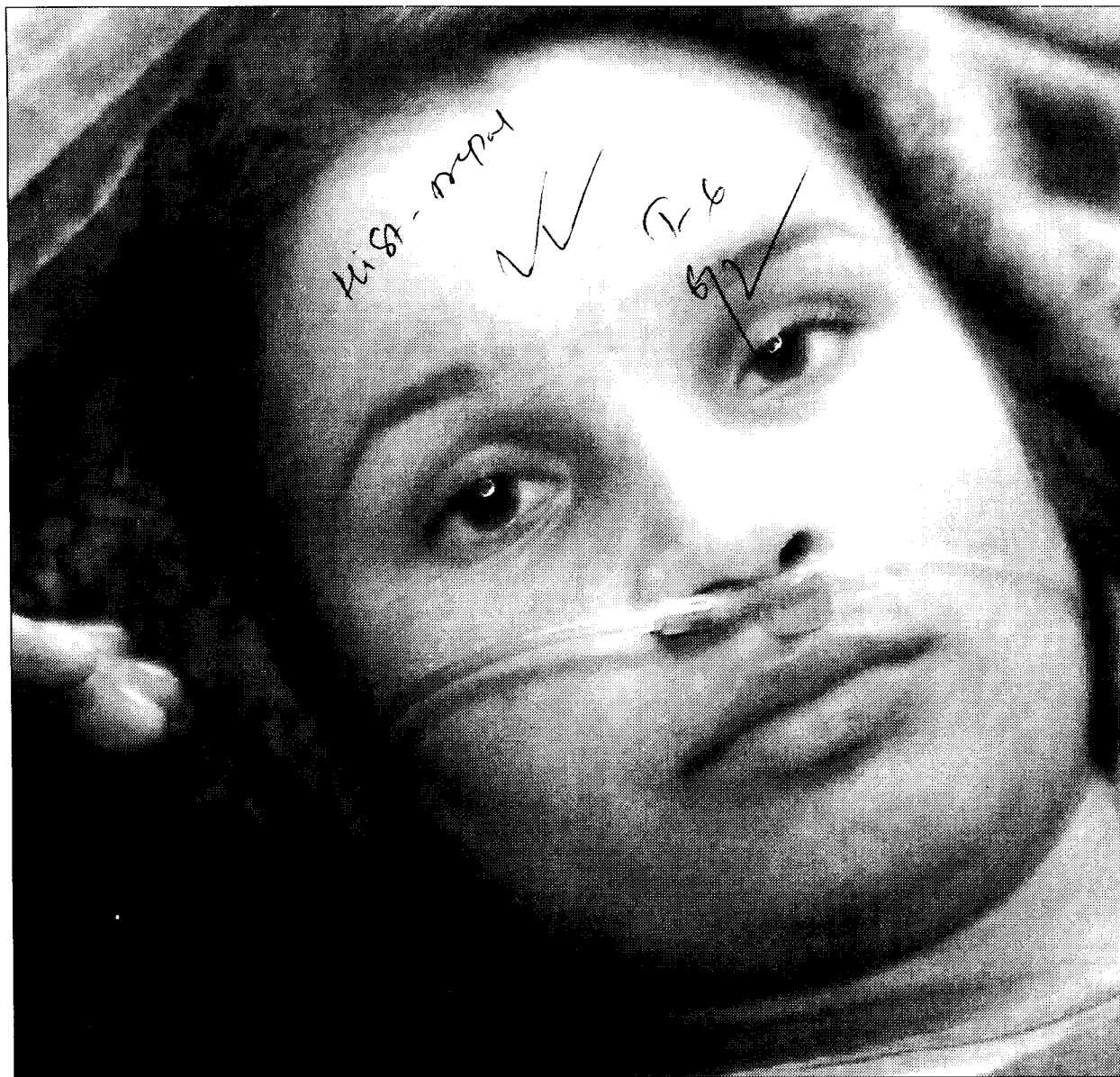
Who's backing the royal coup?

Kathmandu: With most countries and international institutions denouncing the royal coup and demanding a return to democratic rule, the question doing the rounds in Kathmandu is: Who is backing King Gyanendra in this fool-hardy attempt? There is no clear cut answer to this. Many in Kathmandu first speculated that the Palace had made secret agreements with India and the US before launching the coup. But strong reactions from both those nations have demolished that theory. India has also received praise for postponing the Saarc summit citing the developments.

An Indian diplomat in Kathmandu said "We are as much in the dark as you are." With India and the US out of the picture, speculation is turning towards China. The Chinese on Wednesday termed the developments in Nepal as the country's "internal matter". TNN



As in 1950, self-exiled Nepalese freedom lovers rush to Raxaul for shelter



Geeta, who received a bullet injury during an army raid on a college campus in Pokhara, in hospital on Saturday. The students were staging protests against King Gyanendra's coup. (Reuters)

Beeline for home away from home

ASHISH SINHA

Raxaul (India-Nepal border), Feb. 5: Boiled brinjal was the staple diet of Himalayan giants Ganesh Man Singh, Matrika Koirala and Krishna Bhattarai — the first known as the “Gandhi of Nepal” and the other two going on to become Prime Ministers — when they fled to this town after the palace crackdown on democrats decades ago.

The local Arya Samaj, then housed in a few hutments, gave them shelter. The evenings were marked by “strategy sessions” on countering the durbar onslaught.

The brainstorming must have played a role in the storming back of the democrats and freedom-loving intellectuals.

“Ganesh Man Singh’s wife stayed here for six months. I got an offer of Rs 50 lakh for handing them over but I refused,” recalls 92-year-old Nand Kishore Sakaria, fondly known as Nandu Babu, the moving spirit behind the Arya Samaj, which today has a sprawling campus and a beautiful temple.

Raxaul is returning to its old role of being the *sharan sthali* (shelter) of the Nepalese freedom-lovers today. The big difference from 1949-50, when pro-democracy leaders were ousted by King Tribhuvan, is that now the self-imposed exile is not being spent on the Arya Samaj campus.

Most of them have taken shelter in hotels and houses of their friends and acquaintances.

The people-to-people relations between the two nations, particularly in the border areas, is cordial enough to be called family links.

“*Hum logon ka roti-beti ka rishta hai* (We marry across and share food),” says Dipendra Chauhan, the editor of *Ankush*, a Birganj-based Nepali daily whose publication has been banned.

“This is so different from the government-level and diplomatic relations, which

changes according to convenience,” he adds.

Nandu Babu turns emotional when he is reminded of those days. “More than 25 people used to live here at any point of time. But the border was much more porous those days. There were at least two murders of Nepalese leaders in Raxaul and everyone believed that the Shahi Sena (Royal Nepal Army) was involved. But we did not succumb,” he says.

“Kings have tried becoming dictators in the past

Between lines

Beyond printing dry announcements released by the palace, a cursory glance of the Nepali press seems to say little about the situation. But a closer look reveals some substance hidden between the lines.

A small graphic in a weekly shows the front pages of a number of foreign newspapers. Among the headlines are “Trouble on the roof of the world” and King sacks govt: Nepal cut off”.

The editorial is about trees being felled, clearly a metaphor for a muzzled press. The piece waxes poetic about how trees allow people to breathe freely, and how their roots hold the soil together.

“Can we ask the concerned authority to promptly correct the move and bring back greenery?” it concludes.

but they have failed every time. Gyanendra will have to bow down before the democratic sentiment. Besides, he will not be able to control the Maoists, who have grown in number and strength and operate on a different plane.

“The entire democratic world is watching Nepal. The king will have to find a way out. Repression has never lasted long in Nepal. It goes against the very nature of its people,” he adds.

Left springs Maoist surprise

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Feb. 5: India’s apprehensions over the growing influence of Nepal’s Maoists notwithstanding, the Left today made it clear that it is willing to express solidarity even with the armed rebels if they fight for restoration of democracy in their country.

“If Maoists want to restore democracy in Nepal, we are willing to show solidarity even with them,” CPM leader Sitaram Yechury said this afternoon after a meeting with other Left and socialist parties on the Nepal coup.

South Block has always stressed that Nepal’s stability and progress hinge on the twin pillars of constitutional monarchy and democracy and

any imbalance can lead to expansion of Maoist influence.

The fact that Maoists have already started taking advantage of the turmoil to lead the fight against the king has begun to worry the Indian establishment. Fears that a large number of Nepalese people, including Maoists, might now cross over to India has prompted Delhi to step up vigilance along its borders.

The meeting called upon

the Centre to make it clear to Kathmandu that “this palace coup is unacceptable”, the Left said in a statement.

It has also decided to hold a national convention on February 24 in the capital.

The Congress was left out of today’s meeting, which was attended by the CPI, Forward Bloc, RSP, Nationalist Congress Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Janata Dal (Secular), Samajwadi Party and the CPI (ML).

King to court people

Nepal’s new government will focus on fighting corruption and poverty, the state media said today.

Analysts say King Gyanendra is likely to work quickly to win popular support, capitalising on a brief honeymoon period for his move, with many Nepalese fed up with the politicians he sacked on Tuesday and placed under house arrest.

Yechury pointed out that only those parties that have jointly fought in the past for restoration of democracy in Nepal were invited today.

Although the meeting strongly condemned King Gyanendra’s action, Yechury said “we leave to the government to decide what steps it should take to ensure the early return of democracy in Nepal”.

The Nepal crisis also came up for discussion at a meeting of the National Security Advisory Board, chaired by the new national security adviser, M.K. Narayanan. Members of the board threw up several opinions, with some saying a tough stand should be taken against Gyanendra to keep India’s credentials with Nepal’s political parties intact.

Journalists' fight for democracy

4/2 By Christopher Warren

The royal coup in Nepal demands a strong global response in defence of democracy and civil rights.

Journalists in Nepal have been leading the fight against repression from the Government, the King, the Army and Maoist guerrillas in the country for 10 years. In a statement from the Federation of Nepalese Journalists smuggled out of the country today, they have become the first reported group to condemn the monarchy's grab for power.

According to a source in the country, one Nepali language paper, *Rajhdani*, has demonstrated extreme courage by publishing the names of people arrested in the February 1 coup.

Media being monitored

The media are being monitored by Army personnel, usually inside the offices themselves. In the case of one anti-monarch publication, the *Jan Asha* weekly, a colonel is reported to have moved into the building. The private media are protesting by not publishing entertainment news or reporting deliberately on non-issues.

On February 1, 2005, King Gyanendra of Nepal dismissed the eight-month-old Sher Bahadur Deuba Government and declared a state of emergency. The King also suspended the constitutional rights to freedom of press, speech and expression, to assemble peacefully, to privacy and against preventive detention.

All local land phones and mobile phones have been cut off so the Nepalese cannot even talk to each other. Access to the Internet and satellite television has been blocked.

The airport was shut and planes turned away. Some limited flights from India have been resumed, but it is unclear how frequent these will be. Nepal has an open border with India, but reports suggest that the Army and customs officials are searching all returning Nepalese for any newspapers, magazines or other published material.

The only reports coming from inside the country are being smuggled out or broadcast through the BBC and U.N. orga-

nisations in the country. The only news into the country is from short wave services such as the BBC World Service.

Reports suggest that hundreds of people have already been arrested. Some are under house arrest, others under police arrest. The third category are being held by the Army. It is reported that many of those have been arrested based on video footage of street demonstrations taken by Army intelligence.

The statement demonstrates great courage by the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) leader and prominent Nepali journalist, Tara Nath Dahal.

It says: "The Royal announcement made yesterday, by ending the spirit and value of the Constitution of Nepal, is a coup against democracy and peoples' rights. This has undoubtedly destroyed the fabric of democracy and has also confirmed that the lives of ordinary civilians as well as national values are in grave danger.

"The Federation strongly condemns and expresses disagreement on this historic and enormous mistake. To believe that following a path like this will restore peace and democracy is standing against the values and ideas of modern civilisation.

"The Federation of Nepali Journalists does not believe that, in the 21st century, the country can progress and achieve democracy through an 'imposed' monarchy by the King. This move has also ended freedom of expression, press freedom and other rights of the citizens that were won after great struggle and sacrifice.

"Press censorship and the presence of the Army in media houses have begun. Communications have been completely disrupted. Now there is no free press and it has been effectively killed. At this time, the Federation of Nepali Journalists believes that its duty is to fight for freedom of the press, democracy, a just peace and national freedom. We also believe that it is important to fight for this with courage and determination in order to guarantee the right of the Nepali people to information."

In a statement to the BBC, Ta-

Tara Nath Dahal has also said that the journalists are organising a protest rally, despite the martial law order that no groups of more than five people are allowed.

Grim history

The IFJ has documented Nepal's grim history of violating human rights and freedom of speech. Nepalese journalists have been under intense pressure over the last three years during the CPN (Maoist) bloody struggle to establish a "people's republic" and abolish Nepal's constitutional monarchy and the State's attempt to control the movement.

More than 100 journalists were arrested during the previous state of emergency from November 2001 to August 2002 and many of them were subjected to torture.

The actions of King Gyanendra mirror the actions of his father. In a near identical royal coup in 1960, King Mahendra shut down democracy in Nepal for 30 years.

Since then, Nepal has opened up through trade and tourism. The 30-year dictatorship left Nepal's 20 million people living in one of the poorest countries in the world.

In the 1960s, it was easy for the world to abandon Nepali democracy. The world needs to send a clear message to King Gyanendra and the Army leaders that this will no longer be the case.

The decision by India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, to force the cancellation of this weekend's Dhaka summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was a positive step. The coup has been rightly condemned by the U.S. Government and other democracies.

We can't know how much of these global protests are known to people like Tara Nath Dahal fighting for democracy in Nepal.

But we can be sure that they are being heard by King Gyanendra and the Nepalese Army.

(Christopher Warren is President of the International Federation of Journalists which represents over 500,000 journalists in more than 110 countries. He led an IFJ mission of support to journalists in Nepal late last year.)

Crisis in Nepal

By Rajeev Dhavan

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CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE takes years to build but may collapse in a day. Following the end of the rule of the Ranas in 1951, governance in Nepal was conducted through a number of interim advisory governments. No sooner was the multi-party Constitution adopted in 1959, it failed. B.P. Koirala led the Nepali Congress Party to an electoral victory. But by 1960, King Mahendra suspended Parliament and took control. On the basis that Nepal was not quite ready for a parliamentary democracy in which political parties competed for power, a new panchayat-based Constitution was created in 1962. Amid years of indifferent governance, political agitation led to a constitutional referendum in 1980. As a result, the King agreed to direct elections but without political parties.

Increasing discontent led to Nepal's new Constitution of 1990, which created a parliamentary democracy with a Bill of Rights and an independent judiciary. In 1991, G.P. Koirala led the Nepali Congress Party to victory and became Prime Minister. But in 1994, he was defeated in a no-confidence motion. He lost the elections and a communist Government was ushered in. It also fell soon. The period 1997-2001 saw many governments — the result of party splits and infirm coalitions. Over the 1990s, the Maoist rebellion intensified. Talks for a truce failed in 2001 when a state of Emergency was declared, which is remembered for its flourish of state lawlessness.

Amidst all this confusion, on June 1, 2001, King Birendra and his family were killed by Crown Prince Dipendra, who also died after inflicting gun shot wounds on himself. King Gyanendra ascended the throne. As violence increased, Prime Minister G.P. Koirala resigned. Even though the Assembly was dissolved in 2002, no elections were called. A veritable musical chairs followed of successive Prime Ministers with Sher Bahadur Deuba, who was Prime Minister between 2002 and 2003, being reappointed in June 2004. Meanwhile, the rebels blockaded Kathmandu. Finally, on February 1, 2005, King Gyanendra sacked Prime Minister Deuba and declared an Emergency to assume all powers of governance for three years.

From 1951, Nepal's experiments with constitutional democracy have been disfavoured by history. The present crisis is riddled with a constitu-

If electoral democracy was suspended in Nepal in 2002, the sacking of Prime Minister Deuba and the assumption of total autocratic powers by the King now have totally buried any semblance of constitutional governance in Nepal.

tional impasse. Normally, a Prime Minister who is willing to act as one cannot be dismissed unless he has lost his majority. The question of Prime Minister Deuba losing his majority did not arise as there have been no elections since 2002. King Gyanendra has relentlessly sacked Prime Ministers since he was enthroned in 2001 — trying his hand with various alternatives including royalist supporters. If the sacking of Mr. Deuba was unconstitutional, the legality of the King's assumption of Emergency powers is even more doubtful. Under Nepal's Constitution, an Emergency can be imposed if a "grave crisis" such as war, external aggression, armed rebellion or extreme economic disarray threatens the

sovereignty and integrity of the country. Nepal is in a state of crisis. In the absence of elections, there being no Parliament, the question of the House of Representatives approving of the Emergency by a two-thirds vote does not arise. Constitutionally, an Emergency beyond a period of one year is not envisaged. An arbitrary declaration of Emergency for three years goes beyond the pale of constitutional governance. If electoral democracy was suspended in Nepal in 2002 (from when elections have not been held), the sacking of Prime Minister Deuba and the assumption of total autocratic powers by the King in 2005 have totally buried any semblance of constitutional governance in Nepal for a long time to come.

Constitutional lawyers have problems dealing with situations of this nature. The sacking of Prime Ministers is not unknown even under constitutional governance. In 1963, the Privy Council in appeal found the sacking of the Nigerian Prime Minister invalid. But Malaysian courts found the removal of a provincial Premier in 1966 valid. In India, Governor Dharam Vira's dismissal of Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee in West Bengal in 1967 was not interfered with by courts. Mulayam Singh's complaint that Governor Motilal Vohra had sacked him unfairly in June 1995 was sent to a Supreme

Court constitution bench where the issue died an obsolescent death. But in all these cases, a justification for the dismissal was a refusal to test that government's majority.

But ingenuity has never failed lawyers and judges in such situations. In a sense, a new justificatory trend emerged in Pakistan in 1958 when President Ayub Khan scrapped the Constitution of 1956 to assume total powers. In Dosso's case (1958), the Pakistan Supreme Court used jurist Hans Kelsen's theory that a revolution can be justified when the basic norm underlying a Constitution disappears and a new system is put in its place. Dosso's case became the

new basis for a new jurisprudence for usurpers. As a result, every usurper or dictator who destroyed an old Constitution could claim the right of constitutional governance under a new basic norm of his own creation. But in such situations what was the new basic norm? In Asma Jilani's case (1969), Pakistan courts took the view that the doctrine of necessity could be the constitutional basis for a new usurper regime. As Pakistan went through usurper after usurper, this usurper jurisprudence was consolidated — no less in Begum Bhutto's case in 1977. This consolidation became even more startling when President Pervez Musharraf assumed power in 1999 and administered a new oath to his judges preventing them from challenging his usurpation.

Pakistan's 'usurper jurisprudence' was not alone in pursuing this kind of constitutional subversion. Judges from Ghana followed this approach in Sallah's case in 1966 and those from Nigeria in Laknami's case in 1969. Such an issue reached English courts in the aftermath of Ian Smith declaring independence in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). But in Madzimbamuto's case (1969), British judges refused to follow the change-in-basic-norm theory and declared Mr. Smith's regime unconstitutional — although one dissenting judge seemed to give some legal basis to the Smith regime under the doctrine of necessity. But while it was

possible for British judges in Britain to take this stance from far away London, it requires courage for local judges located in the crisis country to challenge this kind of unconstitutionality in the face of a military or dictatorial takeover.

As far as Nepal is concerned, it remains to be seen what Nepalese courts will do if asked to deliberate on the actions of King Gyanendra. In the past, the lawyers of Nepal have been courageous in taking constitutional issues to court. Nepal's judges could declare King Gyanendra's takeover unconstitutional. This would mean restoring Prime Ministership to Mr. Deuba who will in any case not be responsible to any Parliament. It would, of course, be easier for them to invoke Kelsen's theory of a change in the basic norm to legitimise King Gyanendra's usurpation of dictatorial power. In this, it would find support from the doctrine of necessity invoked by Pakistan's courts to justify virtually all or any kind of unconstitutional violation. A doctrine to justify revolution has been trivialised to help dictators. The rule of law is ill-served by such constitutional acrobatics.

But where does Nepal go from here? The actual situation in Nepal is serious and drifting out of control. When King Gyanendra used the Emergency powers in November 2001, the situation worsened in ways that forfeited the confidence of the people. Quite apart from the constitutional violations, the present situation was hardly the time to compound a military crisis into a constitutional disaster. It is in the overall interests of Nepal that the King recall his orders sacking Mr. Deuba. Declaring a three-year Emergency is neither necessary nor prudent. On February 2, 2005, he swore in a Cabinet of loyalists. What is needed is to create consensus national governance, which will take Nepal into a democratic framework. When Mr. Deuba asked President George W. Bush for support to fight the Maoist rebels in 2002, America pledged \$20 million to this cause. It remains a moot question as to what the Government of Nepal expects from America now — and, even more so, what America led by President Bush will threaten to do. This is the time for the King of Nepal to return to first principles of democratic governance and not invite further chaos in an already troubled nation. Constitutions require an inner morality to make them function.

Army was in action before the King

Catherine Philip in Kathmandu

Feb. 3. — Two days after the shocking announcement by King Gyanendra of Nepal concentrating all power in his hands, details of the precise military planning behind Nepal's declared Emergency have begun to emerge.

Even before King Gyanendra's television speech on Tuesday had started, troops were moving into newspaper, television and radio offices to direct news coverage and ban any criticism of the palace. Editors were summoned to the palace and warned against any negative reporting.

As troops surrounded the houses of senior politicians and government ministers, placing them under house arrest, student leaders and political activists were also being rounded up.

Streets leading up to human



A pro-monarchy rally in Kathmandu on Thursday. — AFP

rights offices were blocked by armoured vehicles. State-run telecommunication companies

Delhi gets in touch

NEW DELHI, Feb. 3. — India has managed to establish contact with the new Nepalese establishment and convey its views on the dismissal of the Deuba government. Indian ambassador to Nepal Mr SS Mukherjee met new

foreign minister Mr RN Pandey and the defence attache contacted Royal Nepal Army officers today. **(Details on page 4)** Nepal's Ambassador to India Mr Karma Dhoj Adhikary today said: "The basic fabric of relationship between India and Nepal is the recognition of our country's sovereignty and capability. There is nothing that threatens our relationship." A strike called by Maoists in Nepal evoked partial response today even as the new government invited the rebels for talks. — SNS & PTI.

phone and Internet lines.

Few in Kathmandu mourn the politicians themselves, who have proved ineffective in resolving the crisis with the Maoists. However, many say that the King has kept his government deliberately weak to obtain more power for himself.

Others suggested that a weary population might be willing to give the new order a go, but only if it brought speedy results. If not, the King may have made a serious miscalculation. "If peace doesn't come quickly, it'll be very difficult to maintain the monarchy in this country anymore," Rajendra Dahal, editor of *Himal Khabar-patrika* newspaper said. "It is a high-stakes gamble." A small number of dismissed politicians who succeeded in communicating with the press vowed to fight back.

— **The Times**
More reports on page 4



Nepali Congress Party activists stage a demonstration against King Gyanendra in Kathmandu on Thursday. — AP

Media blackout in Nepal

KATHMANDU, FEB. 3. Days after seizing power, King Gyanendra moved on Thursday to tighten his grip over Nepal by clamping down on the media — issuing a ban on independent news broadcasts and threatening to punish newspapers for reports that run counter to the official monarchist line.

A government edict, printed in the state-run newspaper *Gorkhapatra*, said any news outlet publishing reports critical of “the spirit of the royal proclamation” would be met with punishment.

The order, which also bans news reports seen as supporting the rebels, will remain in effect for six months. A similar announcement on state radio said private radio stations would no longer be allowed to broadcast

any news or opinion. All broadcasts were to remain “purely entertainment,” the statement said.

The news blackout and a cut in Internet and phone services that accompanied Tuesday’s declaration of a state of emergency apparently thwarted a call by Maoist rebels for a nationwide strike on Thursday, with most people saying they were not aware of the announcement.

Worried its opponents might try to marshal support for protests against the King, soldiers have been dispatched to many newspapers and TV stations to censor news reports.

Demonstrations

Despite the clampdown, a few small demonstrations

sprang up on Thursday in Kathmandu.

Several groups of 20 or so protesters gathered to shout slogans protesting the King’s power grab.

For the most part, though, life appears normal in Kathmandu.

Rebel demands for a general strike usually bring the country to a near shutdown, with residents staying home out of fear of reprisals by guerillas.

But while traffic was lighter than normal in this crowded city, cars still filled the streets and most shops were open.

While news was not available from the rest of the country, long-distance bus drivers said at least one highway — the main road from Kathmandu towards China — had been blocked by the guerillas. — AP

Silence & stares rule under king

ASHISH SINHA

Birganj (Nepal), Feb. 3: Mr Deep Blue Camouflage and Mr Olive Green Camouflage — that is, men of the Nepalese armed police and the Royal Nepal Army — stare deep into you as you move around the Himalayan kingdom's second largest city.

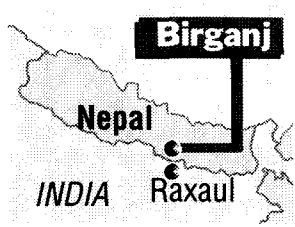
Gurkhas both, their looks are stoic, betraying not the slightest emotion. You cannot, obviously, be a journalist because outward flow of all information has been banned. The iron curtain is much too real. This reporter masqueraded as an Indian transporter — in Nepal on "usual business" — and moved around on a cycle rickshaw.

The man on the streets of Birganj, whether of Indian or Nepalese origin, is silent like stone, mostly out of fear, it seems. King Gyanendra, who has reserved all powers unto himself for three years, is seen as a "tough guy, who knows no extent". The late Birendra Bikram Shah was considered a liberal and an avatar of Vishnu.

Politicians — from the Nepalese Congress, the Sadbhavana Party, even communists — have been sneaking into India through Raxaul but hoteliers in the Bihar town are under orders not to disclose their presence.

One of them, however, opened up after pestering. "The royal takeover is unconstitutional. The ban on the media is worse, a violation of basic rights," said a Nepalese Congress leader of Parsa district, within which Birganj falls. He was in Raxaul.

"The Maoist problem is already there. We now anticipate a joint agitation by the forces of democracy," said his associate. "It (agitation) may take some time but it will happen for sure." But "democracy" was more a euphemism for him — and in no way, an ideological



Nepal's new government said on Thursday it wanted peace talks with Maoist rebels but clamped down on dissent, banning all criticism of the king's decision to assume power for three years.

Soldiers have been posted in television newsrooms to monitor all broadcasts before they are aired, reporters said. State radio announced a six-month ban on all news that opposed the royal proclamation of emergency and the sacking of the government.

The government said its first priority was peace with the Maoists. "To establish peace, we are considering how to go forward with the peace process and the dialogue with the Maoists," education minister Radha Krishna Mainali said.

"Will they come to talk or not? If they do, we can move forward in a certain way. And if they don't, we have to make another choice."

logical standpoint for an alternative and desirable system of governance.

The three-day general strike called by the Maoists began today. While Birganj seemed normal, public transport did not move. Even drivers of rickety autorickshaws — no public vehicle look new in this extremely backward region — were simply not ready to leave the city and drive even for a few miles to the outskirts.

Details of the bandh — and of violence, if any — were not available. But a trader said: "A Maoist bandh in this part means total standstill. This



A policeman stares at a woman in Kathmandu on Thursday. (AFP)

call came before the developments in Kathmandu. Surprisingly, many shops in Birganj are open today. That is a change from the earlier time.

Another resident said the change could turn out to be "positive" — the beginning of "better times" than the rule of "self-centred politicians who merely play power games". "If the king manages to strike a deal with the Maoists, he will become a darling of the masses. It is too early to say, but I feel he will give the process a try," he added.

Nearly a dozen newspapers — like *Ankush*, *Prateek*,

Bypass and *Narayani Times* — are published from Birganj. None came out for the second day today. The situation will continue for some time because the ban — not mere censorship — has been enforced strictly. "There are informers everywhere," a journalist said.

Shopkeepers from villages around Birganj regularly come to Raxaul for purchases. "We just want our life to go on as usual. Peace will be a bonus. In my village, most people believe that Nepal is still a monarchy. The king is held in high esteem and awe," said a

middle-aged man who crossed over today.

The pro-palace Rajbhakta Deshbhakta Samoh and Nepal Rashtrawadi Sangha took out a "victory procession" in Birganj yesterday, which was led by Pashupati Rauniyar and Janak Shah. The evening before was celebrated as "mini Diwali".

The fate of Madhesis (people of Indian origin in Nepal) is also being discussed. "They can come under attack from the Maoists and the army. That will be very unfortunate. Nearly 25 lakh Nepalis work in India. The hills are vacant due

to migration. We too need protection and an assurance from the Indian government," whispered an elderly Madhesi at a betel shop.

The Nepalese Congress leader in Raxaul claimed he anticipated the "coup" when a meeting of the pro-palace Raj Parishad was held in Kathmandu late last year. "Former minister Jang Mehar Shrestha had expressed concern about the meeting," he said.

The film *Padmashree Laloo Prasad Yadav* is not banned in Nepal, unlike the poll-bound Bihar. It is drawing a good crowd in Birganj.

Alert on Nepal border

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Lucknow, Feb. 3: Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have started beefing up security along the porous border with Nepal following the proclamation of emergency in the kingdom.

Both states suspect a crackdown on Maoists in Nepal will spark massive infiltration of Nepali militants into India.

"The intelligence network in the border districts has been activated. Instructions have been issued to the superintendents of police to keep vigil..." said Alok Sinha, the Uttar Pradesh principal secretary.

Sources said checking has been intensified on routes to the seven border districts. Five companies of armed forces have been sent to the areas.

Uttarakhand has three districts — Rudrapur, Champawat and Pithoragarh — bordering west Nepal. The 275-km border in the hilly terrain of Uttarakhand has made the state vulnerable to infiltration.

"We are keeping a close watch on the situation on the border and have kept security forces on their toes, especially in the sensitive areas," said director-general of police Kanchan Choudhary Bhattacharya.

Reinforcements of the Provincial Armed Constabulary and the Sashstra Seva Bal, which guard the border, have been deployed.

Delhi connects with palace

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Feb. 3: India today began its official contact with the new regime in Kathmandu despite the outrage over King Gyanendra's coup.

Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, the Indian ambassador, met Ramesh Nath Pandey, Nepal's new foreign minister, to discuss the situation evolving out of the king's decision to sack the government, impose emergency and assume power.

Briefing reporters here, foreign ministry spokesperson Navtej Sarna said the ambassador met Pandey to convey the "import" of Delhi's stand on the recent developments in Kathmandu.

India has in its statements expressed serious concern over the developments and asked for restoration of democracy and release of political leaders arrested

by the army since Tuesday.

Avoiding a direct comment on Delhi's reaction, Nepal's ambassador Karni Dhoj Adhikary said here today that bilateral ties would not be affected.

"The basic fabric of the relationship between India and Nepal is the recognition of our country's sovereignty and capability. There is nothing that threatens our relationship," he said in Kathmandu's first official reaction since Tuesday's coup.

Delhi, despite its strong reservations, has been keen on keeping a line of communication open with the palace, a desire evident in today's meeting in Kathmandu.

This first became clear yesterday when foreign secretary Shyam Saran refused to make restoration of democracy a pre-condition for starting a dialogue with

Kathmandu's new regime.

Nepal is strategically one of India's most important neighbours. Any negative impact in Nepal — in this case, a countrywide violent agitation by the Maoists — can have a spillover effect on India as the countries share a long and porous border.

Adhikary rejected the fear of "ramifications" affecting India.

Delhi, however, is worried that the king's coup may help the Maoists occupy the space vacated by the democratic forces and launch a countrywide movement against the palace.

Adhikary contended that the "main objective" of the king's action was to "secure the future of multi-party democracy in the country". "There was some confusion initially. But today there is a sense of relief in Nepal," he said.

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 3: India's decision to stay away from the Saarc summit appears to be a deliberate attempt to send a strong signal to Dhaka about Delhi's "dissatisfaction" with the state of bilateral relations.

India had cited deteriorating law and order in Bangladesh and the "political turmoil" in Nepal as the reasons for its withdrawal from the summit scheduled in Dhaka. It has since been postponed.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Navtej Sarna today rejected Bangladesh's charge that the decision owed to developments in Delhi's relations with some South Asian neighbours.

"Let me clarify," Sarna

Jab at Dhaka in Saarc retreat

said. "We have not sought postponement due to any developments in bilateral relations with Saarc countries. We have drawn attention to developments that have an impact on the entire region of South Asia and not just India."

He cited the strong statements of the heads of missions of the European Union and US assistant secretary of state Christina Rocca had issued in the past few days on the violence directed against political

leaders in Bangladesh and deteriorating law and order.

Sources, however, said the Indian establishment — frustrated with Dhaka's failure to enter into any "constructive dialogue" with Delhi over the past few years — took the opportunity of the Nepal royal coup to indeed send out a signal to Dhaka.

Bangladesh foreign minister Morshed Khan had yesterday expressed "shock and dismay" at Delhi's decision. But

Morshed's anger, the sources said, was directed more at India's move to cite his country's deteriorating law and order.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led coalition government's keenness to host the summit in Dhaka had more to do with proving some domestic points than pushing for regional cooperation.

Dhaka was aware that the opposition Awami League was bent on focusing the world's attention on the "total breakdown in law and order" in the wake of attacks against the party.

By claiming to provide adequate security for the visiting dignitaries, Dhaka was trying to tell the neighbours as well as the Awami League that there were not many takers for the Opposition's claim.



Posters change, life is as usual

Kathmandu, Feb. 3 (Reuters): The shiny new posters of the king of Nepal hastily pasted up around Kathmandu declare the dawn of a new era for the troubled kingdom.

However, hundreds of political leaders and activists are under house arrest, behind bars or on the run, communication with the outside world is cut, the media are muzzled and army officers control all television news.

For most Nepalis, life proceeded as normal today, despite an unsuccessful attempt by Maoists to shut the city down in protest against King Gyanendra's seizure of absolute power for the next three years.

Shops and businesses bustling with customers, laughing children walked to school and buses plied the narrow, smoke-choked streets.

But changes are visible. Soldiers scrubbed political slogans and the names of politicians off walls. (Reuters picture above)

Posters of King Gyanendra that hail the "beginning of Nepal's new era" are being quickly put up.

Opponents of the king's decision have no way to rally supporters because all telephone lines are cut and Internet access is severed.

Cyber cafes were among the few places still shuttered. But movement on the streets was carefree. Although some extra police in riot gear have been deployed, soldiers and police were friendly.

For those in the news business, times are less relaxed.

"It's hard," said a reporter for a private channel filming at Democracy Wall. That rallying point of protest near the palace was set up after Gyanendra sacked the same Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and suspended Parliament in late 2002. "We are just doing this for archives. We can't use it," he said.

Reporters said they were under pressure not to be critical. "They are really going to be watching us. This is worse than anything before," said one.

Manmohan sends 'tough' message

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Feb. 3: The glimpse of steel was not by design, or so they say.

Manmohan Singh's decisions to skip the Saarc summit and increase the foreign investment ceiling in telecom was not part of a larger exercise to redefine his image as a "tough and decisive" leader, sources close to the Prime Minister said.

But they conceded that the moves "belied the perception of a person who could be persuaded under pressure" and "to that extent" signalled a reinvention of his persona.

The sources said the Prime Minister, right from the beginning, had not been at ease with the idea of attending a summit in Dhaka in an environment perceptibly

"hostile" to India. "The PM felt the idea of Saarc was meaningless if it took place in an environment that was inimical to peace and prosperity. Any statement or resolution that emanated would be hollow and rhetorical," a source said, referring to reports of how Bangladesh "encouraged" anti-Indian insurgency groups on its soil.

"His priority is to have the best of relations with our neighbours but these would have to be reciprocal and mutually beneficial and not at the cost of having terrorists sneaking into Jammu and Bengal from across the borders. Singh is all for breaking down trade and human barriers in the subcontinent, but not at the cost of harming our territorial integrity," he added.

Singh's decision to absta-

in from the summit, the sources said, was meant as a "message" as much to Nepal, where King Gyanendra sacked the government on Tuesday, as to Bangladesh that he would not countenance any breach of democracy or territorial integrity.

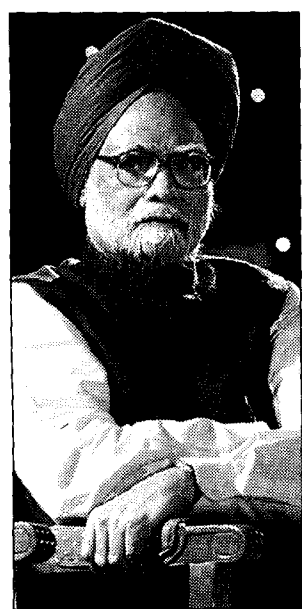
The sources claimed that once Singh got a fix on the events in Nepal, his "mind was as good as made up". Yesterday, he held a series of consultations with national security adviser M.K. Narayanan, foreign minister K. Natwar Singh, former Prime Ministers I.K. Gujral and Atal Bihari Vajpayee and former deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani.

Though Vajpayee and Advani refused to make a statement — sources said the matter was "too sensitive" for a casual response — an official

statement from the BJP echoed the Indian establishment's view. "The king's draconian actions have caused a serious setback to the process (of democracy)," it said.

Asked how long India could avoid doing business with the Nepal king, a source said: "We will eventually have to. But we have made our point. Don't forget how (Pakistan's Pervez) Musharraf had to struggle before he gained legitimacy and when he did, it was only because the US found him useful post 9/11."

On the FDI hike in telecom, Singh, the sources said, was determined to push it through before the budget. A senior minister had reportedly raised the security angle at the cabinet meeting but was firmly told that such fears were taken care of.



Singh: Decisive

Army keeps Kathmandu on hold

SUJAN DUTTA

New Delhi, Feb. 3: Army chief General Joginder Jaswant Singh is deferring a visit to Kathmandu where he was to take over as honorary chief of the Royal Nepal Army.

The generals of India's and Nepal's armies enjoy honorary chief status in each other's country. Delhi is now telling Narayanhi Palace — the residence of the king in Kathmandu — that their unique military relationship is in peril even as King Gyanendra prepares for a major military offensive against

Maoist insurgents.

"I see military-to-military relationships as part of the overall diplomatic strategy of the country. I have not yet indicated a time frame (to visit Nepal) because of the situation there. I will decide on it with the permission of the government," General JJ said in an interview with **The Telegraph**.

But a defence ministry official said the army chief might be asked to turn down the invitation from RNA chief General Pyar Jung Thapa. Reports from Kathmandu yesterday said the invitation was sent despite the seizure of power by Gyanendra and India's con-

demnation of the act. But General JJ's office could not confirm having received the invitation.

Delhi is already under pressure from within to dilute military assistance to Nepal, a demand voiced by the Left after the royal coup. The Indian military establishment cannot consider such drastic steps immediately because the Himalayan kingdom is strategic to its interests and it would leave the field free for other powers — most importantly China — to rush to the aid of the RNA, which was just beginning to cast off its palace-guard image.

By convention, the first for-

eign trip of a new Indian Army chief is to Nepal. General JJ took over as the 22nd army chief on January 31.

The custom symbolises the deep and wide ties that bind the two armies — India is the primary supplier of military equipment, much of it at a third of the cost, to the RNA. Most of its officers are trained at Indian military institutions. An estimated 80,000 Gorkhas from Nepal serve in crucial combat formations of the Indian Army.

Army headquarters has also asked the chief of the central command, Lieutenant General Ram Subramaniam,

to cancel his visit to Kathmandu. He was to leave tomorrow.

General JJ said the army headquarters was monitoring the situation in Nepal and advising the Prime Minister accordingly. "We are keeping ourselves abreast of the situation. As and when our views are sought by the government, we give them."

Nepal is understood to have figured in his meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shortly after General JJ's ceremonial takeover on Monday.

The RNA has about 78,000 troops equipped with weapons and logistics mostly from India but also from the US, the

UK and Belgium. Its officers are alumni of the National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla, and the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun.

At the Indian Army's Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Vairangte, Mizoram, RNA officers have been training to fight the Maoists.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the king's chief adversary, also has its own "Peoples' Liberation Army" that no military observer can underestimate. It counts among its ranks soldiers who have retired after serving in the Indian Army.

INSIDE NEPAL



A participant at a pro-monarchy rally in Kathmandu. (AP)

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ON PAGE 6

Democrats lose in King-Maoist battle

From Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, February 3

ON THE third day of the royal coup in Nepal, the battle for supremacy seemed to be confined to King Gyanendra and underground Maoists. The monarch, who, on Tuesday, seized state power in total disregard of the Constitution, tightened his grip over the kingdom by imposing fresh restrictions on the freedom of expression and by launching media propaganda to garner support for his government.

On the other hand, the outlawed Communist rebels organised a kingdom-wide shutdown to protest against the royal takeover. This made it evident that it would not be easy for the palace to

revive peace talks with them. At Bhadrapur airport in eastern Nepal, air passengers had to travel two to three hours by cycle-rickshaws to catch their flights.

In stark contrast, mainstream parties, who swear by the Constitution, continued to be quiet as the King's new government has shut down their offices. They have not been able to ascertain how many of their leaders and activists have been incarcerated by the new regime. Strangely, no formal ban on any mainline party has been announced so far. Prior to this, mainline parties led by the Nepali Congress used to jam major roads around the palace almost every day, shouting slogans for peace and democracy.

The Nepalese information ministry warned that it would punish all those who defied a six-month ban imposed on the publication of "news, views and articles related to acts of terrorism" by the print and electronic media. Security personnel have been maintaining vigil at various media offices. Telephone and Internet services are yet to be restored.

Throughout the day, Radio Nepal broadcast statements issued by individuals, including lawyers, teachers and journalists, welcoming the coup as "a right and timely step towards restoring peace and normality". This reminded one of the last days of autocratic panchayat rule that the monarch's late brother, King Birendra, un-

successfully tried to save with the help of similar propaganda in 1990.

But the King's decision to seize power is all set to give a fillip to the demand for a replacement or amendment of Nepal's 1990 Constitution that accepts kingship as a symbol of national unity.

Serious discussions on the Constitution first began when the monarch started hiring and firing prime ministers after the dissolution of Parliament in 2002.

The NC, which is leading a stir for revival of Parliament, is now not averse to accepting the demand for a constituent assembly — an issue hitherto raised only by the Maoists. It is debating whether to seek a new constitution or amendments.



Security personnel remove a message painted on wall as military personnel look on in Kathmandu on Thursday. REUTERS

খবরের প্রতি ছত্রে নেপালি ফৌজের খবরদারি

অগ্নি রায় • কাঠমান্ডু

৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি: যদিও শহরটা কাঠমান্ডু, তবু মনে হচ্ছে পড়ে আছি বিচ্ছিন্ন এক দ্বীপে। বাইরের জগতের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগের প্রায় কোনও উপায়ই নেই। টেলিফোন কাজ করছে না। টেলিফোন ভবন সেনাবাহিনীর দখলে। মোবাইল ফোন জাম করে দেওয়া হয়েছে। বন্ধ ইন্টারনেটও। ভরসা একমাত্র স্যাটেলাইট ফোন।

বাইরের দুনিয়া দূরস্থান, দেশের ভিতরের খবরও মিলছে না কাঠমান্ডুতে। রাজধানীর খবর যাচ্ছে না অন্যত্র। জ্ঞানেশ্বর ক্ষমতা দখলের প্রতিবাদে গত কাল থেকে তিন দিন

সাপাষণ ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিয়েছে মাওবাদীরা। সে খবর আমজনতার কাছে এসে পৌঁছয়নি। সেই রাগে কাঠমান্ডুর উপকণ্ঠে মাওবাদীরা আজ আটটা ট্রাক জ্বালিয়ে দিয়েছে। মঙ্গলবার সকাল দশটায় ক্ষমতা দখলের পরেই একের পর এক এক জ্ঞানেশ্বর রাজনীতিককে আটক করেছেন। দেশের সব দলের সব শীর্ষ নেতাই হয় গৃহবন্দি, না-হয় লুকিয়ে। এই ভাবে রাজনৈতিক বিক্ষোভ বন্ধর করার পরে সংবাদ মাধ্যমের উপরে চড়াও হয়েছে রাজদরবার। সরকারি রেডিও জানিয়েছে, আগামী ছ'মাস রাজার সিন্ধুস্তের বিরোধিতা করে কোনও খবর প্রকাশ করা যাবে না।

সাইবার ক্যাফে বন্ধ। তবে খোলা ক্যান্টিনে, ডিস্কা থেকে। সেখানে মূলত উচ্চবিত্ত নেপালিদের ভিড়। নেপালের রাজনৈতিক মহল বলছে, রাজার সামনে মূল কাজ দু'টি। এক, নেপালি কংগ্রেস, সিপিএন (ইউ এম এল)-র মতো মূলস্রোতের দলগুলির বিক্ষোভ সামাল দেওয়া। সেই জন্যই নেতাদের ব্যাপক ধরপাকড় করা হয়েছে। সকালে সদ্য অপসারিত প্রধানমন্ত্রী শের বাহাদুর দেউবার দল নেপালি কংগ্রেস (ডেমোক্রেটিক)-র দফতরে গিয়ে দেখি দরজায় তালা। দলের পতাকটা উড়ছে, কিন্তু সাইনবোর্ডটা কে খুলে নিয়ে গিয়েছে। "তিন দিন ধরেই অফিসে কেউ আসছে

না," জানালেন বাড়ির কেয়ারটেকার। একই হাল দেউবার জোটসঙ্গী কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি অফ নেপাল (ইউ এম এল)-র দফতরের। ফলে রাজ সিঙ্হাস্তের বিরোধিতা করে বিক্ষোভ সংগঠিত করার প্রশ্নই ওঠে না। গৃহবন্দি নেপালি কংগ্রেস নেতা গিরিজা প্রসাদ কৈরালী চোরাপথে বিদেশি সাংবাদিকদের উদ্দেশে অডিও কাসেট পাঠিয়ে এক জোট হওয়ার ডাক দেওয়া সত্বেও। উল্টে আজ নারায়ণহিত রাজপ্রাসাদের সামনের দরবার মার্গে রাজার সমর্থনে মিছিল বেরিয়েছিল। দ্বিতীয় কাজ, মাওবাদীদের ক্রমবর্ধমান প্রভাব খর্ব করা। নেপালের গ্রামাঞ্চলের বিস্তীর্ণ এলাকা এখন

মাওবাদীদের দখলে। মঙ্গলবারই তাদের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসার প্রস্তাব দিয়েছিলেন জ্ঞানেশ্বর। আজ তাঁর নতুন মন্ত্রিসভার স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী দান বাহাদুর শাস্ত্রী ফের বলেছেন, "আমরা চাই মাওবাদীরা আলোচনার টেবিলে এসে বর্তমান রাজনৈতিক সঙ্কট নিরসনে সহায়তা করুক। তারা যদি এই ডাকে সাজা না দেয় তা হলে আমাদের অন্য পদক্ষেপের কথা চিন্তা করতে হবে।" দেউবার আমলে মাওবাদীরা জানিয়েছিলেন, তারা শুধু রাজার সঙ্গেই কথা বলবে। এখন রাজার ডাকে সাজা দেওয়ার লক্ষণ দেখাচ্ছে না তারা। মাওবাদীদের প্রধান 'প্রচণ্ড জ্ঞানেশ্বর' সিন্ধাস্তের বিরোধিতা করে সব দলকে

'সামন্ততান্ত্রিক স্বৈরাচারের' বিরুদ্ধে লড়াইয়ে তাদের সঙ্গে সামিল হতে ডাক দিয়েছেন। অনেক সাধাসাধনার পরে রাজকাণ্ড নিয়ে মুখ খুললেন কাঠমান্ডুর আশ্রয় কলেজের ছাত্রছাত্রীরা। যা বললেন, সেটা জ্ঞানেশ্বর পক্ষে গেল না অবশ্য। তাদের মতে, এতে মাওবাদী-সমস্যা মেটানো যাবে না। বরং তাদের বাত্বাভুত হবে। শহরে সাধারণ মানুষদের অনেকেই কিন্তু বলছেন, এ ছাড়া আর কী-ই বা করতে পারতেন রাজা। নেতাদের যা হাল!

এটা তাঁদের মনের কথা, না কি আতঙ্কে 'রাজভক্তি' দেখাচ্ছেন, তা অবশ্য বোকা গেল না।

Kathmandu offers to renew peace talks

KATHMANDU, FEB. 2. King Gyanendra announced a 10-member Cabinet dominated by his own supporters on Wednesday, one day after he dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba government, declared emergency rule and virtually cut his nation off from the world.

An official later said the new Government would reach out to the Maoist rebels to renew peace talks.

Dozens of politicians have been arrested and many more have gone underground to avoid detention, an Opposition figure said, as extra riot police and soldiers patrolled the streets of Kathmandu, where civil liberties were curtailed.

King to head Cabinet

The King will head the Cabinet, state radio said in a report

that gave few details other than the new body's members.

"The King has expressed confidence that everyone will support and cooperate with the new Cabinet," the palace said in a statement.

The Home Minister, Dan Bahadur Shahi, said the Government would soon be approaching the Maoist rebels to renew talks.

"The King has the chief executive authority now, so it will be easier for the rebels to come for peace talks. It is what they have been wanting," Mr. Shahi said in comments carried on state radio. The Maoists, who control much of rural Nepal, broke off peace talks in August 2003.

The rebels balked at later invitations from the Government of the ousted Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, to renew

the talks, insisting that real authority remained in the hands of the King.

The King on Tuesday sacked Mr. Deuba's interim government, accusing it of failing to hold parliamentary elections or control the Maoist struggle and pledging to do both himself within three years.

World leaders condemned the power grab — King Gyanendra's second in three years — saying it undermined democracy and the fight against the resistance.

Police began arresting politicians on Tuesday when the king declared emergency rule and continued the arrests Wednesday, said Shovakar Parajuli of the Nepali Congress party.

"We don't even know how many of our people have been arrested," Mr. Parajuli said.

He estimated that at least 50

of the group's top leaders were arrested, and said he was among those who went underground to avoid arrest.

Remains isolated

The tiny Himalayan nation remained largely isolated on Wednesday, with telephone and Internet lines cut. Soldiers were deployed at some private Internet service providers to make sure they remained disconnected.

The airport was open, but only limited flights were going into Kathmandu.

Soldiers deployed

Soldiers were also deployed at the offices of many of the top newspapers, where Editors, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they had been warned by palace officials to be

very careful about what they printed in the coming days.

On Wednesday, heavily armed soldiers were posted outside the offices of *Kantipur*, one of the country's most prominent newspapers, and journalists there said soldiers were making sure no politically sensitive stories went in to print.

Despite the political turmoil, life appeared largely normal in Kathmandu, with most shops open and traffic still heavy enough to clog the city's maze-like streets.

The situation could grow more complicated on Thursday, when a nationwide three-day strike called by the Maoist rebels could shut down much of the country.

The strike was announced before the current political crisis began. — AP

নেপালের দিকে নজর সারা বিশ্বেরই

রাজ্য সীমান্তে
ইন্দো-তিব্বত
বাহিনী চায়

সঙ্কটের মোকাবিলায়
এ বার ভারতের
নেতৃত্বে যৌথ উদ্যোগ

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: নেপালের পরিস্থিতির পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে এ রাজ্যে মাওবাদী তৎপরতা রুখতে উত্তরবঙ্গের নেপাল সীমান্তে ইন্দো-টিব্বতান বর্ডার পুলিশ (আই টি বি পি) মোতায়েনের কথা ভাবছে রাজ্য সরকার। স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতর সূত্রের খবর, এই নিয়ে বুধবার কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে কথাও হয়েছে। নেপাল সীমান্তে বেশি এস এস বি জওয়ান মোতায়েন করা হবে। কিছু এস এস বি জওয়ান ওই সীমান্তে চলে গিয়েছেন। কেন্দ্রের বার্তা পেয়ে নেপাল সীমান্তে চূড়ান্ত সতর্কতা জারি করেছে রাজ্য।

বমুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য বলেন, “সামগ্রিক পরিস্থিতির উপরে নজর রাখা হচ্ছে। নেপালে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের কোনও পর্যটক সমস্যায় পড়েছেন কি না, সেই ব্যাপারেও খোঁজ নিচ্ছি।” নেপালের পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে এ দিন স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরের অফিসারেরা বৈঠকে বসেন। স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব অমিতকিরণ দেব বলেন, “কলকাতায় নেপালের কূটনৈতিক অফিসে নিরাপত্তা বাড়ানো হয়েছে। নজরদারি জোরদার করা হয়েছে উত্তরবঙ্গের নেপাল সীমান্তে।”

দার্জিলিঙের রানিগঞ্জ থেকে সান্দাকফু পর্যন্ত নেপাল সীমান্তের বহু এলাকায় অত্যন্ত দুর্গম। সীমান্তের ঠিক ও-পারে মাওবাদীদের ঘাটি আছে। তাই ইন্দো-টিব্বতান বর্ডার পুলিশ নিয়োগের কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে। ওই কেন্দ্রীয় পুলিশবাহিনী দুর্গম পার্বত্য এলাকায় পাহারা দেওয়ার জন্য বিশেষ প্রশিক্ষণপ্রাপ্ত। মঙ্গলবার নেপালে যা ঘটেছে, তার পরে স্বরাষ্ট্র দফতরের আশঙ্কা, ও-দেশে সামরিক বাহিনীর তাড়া খেয়ে মাওবাদীরা আরও বেশি সংখ্যায় উত্তরবঙ্গে ঢুকে আশ্রয় নেবে। গণতন্ত্র বিপন্ন হয়ে পড়ায় মাওবাদীরা নেপালের কয়েকটি দলেরও সহানুভূতি ও আর্থিক সাহায্য পাবে এবং সে-ক্ষেত্রে উত্তরবঙ্গে ঢোকার আশ্রয়বিস্তারও তারা আরও বেশি পাবে বলে মনে হচ্ছে রাজ্যের।

সীমা সিরোহি • ওয়াশিংটন

২ ফেব্রুয়ারি: নেপালে উদ্ভূত সঙ্কটের মোকাবিলায় যৌথ ভাবে এগোবে ভারত, চীন, ব্রিটেন ও আমেরিকা। আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে না-হলেও এ বিষয়ে দেশগুলির যে কোনও সিদ্ধান্তই সমন্বয়ের মাধ্যমে নেওয়া হবে বলে মার্কিন প্রশাসন সূত্রে ইঙ্গিত দেওয়া হয়েছে।

কালকের ঘটনায় আমেরিকার প্রতিক্রিয়া ভারতের মতোই। কাঠমাণ্ডুতে চার দেশের রাষ্ট্রদূতেরা পরস্পরের সঙ্গে ঘনিষ্ঠ যোগাযোগ রেখে চলছেন বলেও খবর মিলেছে। বস্তুত বুশের দ্বিতীয় দফার শুরুতেই নেপালের অভ্যুত্থান প্রথম বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ। আজ বুশকে নেপালের পরিস্থিতি সবিস্তার জানাবেন নয়। বিদেশ সচিব কন্ডোলিজা রাইস। তবে আমেরিকা এর পরে কী ব্যবস্থা নেবে তা অনেকটাই কিস্তি নির্ভর করছে ভারতের উপরে।

সুনামির পরে ভারত, আমেরিকা, জাপান ও অস্ট্রেলিয়া ‘কোর গ্রুপ’ গড়ে ত্রাণের কাজ এগোনোর সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়। নেপালের ঘটনাতেও একই রকম ব্যবস্থা চাইছেন রাইস। ভারতের সঙ্গে চীন ও ব্রিটেনকে নিয়ে কোর গ্রুপ গড়ার কথা ভাবছে আমেরিকা। এখনই সামরিক অভিযানে যাবে না আমেরিকা, তবে তারা নেপালের আর্থিক অনুদান বন্ধ করার কথা ভাবছে বলে খবর।

তবে দেউবা সরকারকে হটিয়ে দেওয়ায় মার্কিন প্রশাসনের একাংশ খুশি। কারণ, তাঁদের মতে, এই সরকার নিকর্মা। তবে জ্ঞানেন্দ্র তিন বছরের জন্য শাসন হাতে তুলে নেওয়াতেও তাঁরা একই রকম বিরত। কাজেই শেষ পর্যন্ত আর্থিক অনুদান বন্ধ হবে কি না তা নিয়ে সংশয় থেকেই যাচ্ছে। তবে বন্ধ না করলেও ইতিমধ্যেই আর্থিক

অনুদান কমানোর কথা ভাবছে বিশ্ব ব্যাঙ্ক, অ্যামনেস্টি ইন্টারন্যাশনাল-সহ কয়েকটি আন্তর্জাতিক সংগঠন। কয়েক দিনের মধ্যেই এ বিষয়ে তারা বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করবে বলে জানা গিয়েছে।

তিন বছরের মধ্যে মাওবাদীদের বাগে আনার অস্থায়ী জ্ঞানেন্দ্র ক্ষমতা দখল করলেও মার্কিন বিদেশ দফতরের মুখপাত্র রিচার্ড বাউচারের মতে, সেটা কখনওই সম্ভব নয়। বরং এতে উল্টো ফল হবে বলেই তিনি মনে করেন। মাওবাদীদের বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিরোধ দুর্বল হয়ে পড়বে। কাল নয়াদিল্লির তরফেও একই আশঙ্কার কথা জানানো হয়েছে। ভারতে মাওবাদীদের দৌরায়া নয়াদিল্লিরও বিশেষ চিন্তার কারণ। এ অবস্থায় নেপালে মাওবাদীদের স্বর্গরাজ্য তৈরি হলে ভারতকে তার প্রত্যক্ষ প্রভাব থেকে আড়াল করা যাবে না।

সংবাদ সংস্থার খবর, নেপালের ঘটনায় অত্যন্ত ক্ষুব্ধ রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের মহাসচিব কোফি আন্নান। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের মানবাধিকার বিষয়ক হাইকমিশনার লুইজি আরবার জানান, গত সপ্তাহে যখন কাঠমাণ্ডুতে জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে তাঁর কথা হয়, তখনও রাজ্য তাঁকে মানবাধিকার ও গণতন্ত্রের প্রতি তাঁর অকুণ্ঠ সমর্থনের বলেছিলেন। তাঁর আশা, কথামতো জ্ঞানেন্দ্র অবিলম্বে গণতন্ত্রের কাঠামো ফিরিয়ে আনবেন।

ব্রিটেনের সরকারি তরফে যেমন দ্রুত বহুদলীয় সরকার গঠনের দাবি তোলা হয়েছে, তেমনই মানবাধিকার সংস্থা অ্যামনেস্টি ইন্টারন্যাশনালের তরফেও জ্ঞানেন্দ্রকে হুঁশিয়ারি দেওয়া হয়েছে। ২০০১-০২ সালের জরুরি অবস্থায় নেপালে মানবাধিকার লঙ্ঘনের বহু ঘটনার কথা উল্লেখ করে তার পুনরাবৃত্তির ব্যাপারে সতর্ক করেছে অ্যামনেস্টি।

Nepalis want democracy, not monarchy

By Yogendra Yadav

The key to the future of Nepal after the dismissal of the Deuba Government and the imposition of Emergency lies in a question that everyone finds difficult to answer at this stage: how would the Nepali citizen respond to this act of the King? The state of censorship and the absence of any reliable information from within Nepal have made this question all the more difficult to answer. In the absence of reliable information we all tend to fall back on stereotypes and prejudices. All those who are concerned about these developments and the fate of democracy in our neighbourhood will wonder about some tough questions: do the ordinary Nepalis care for democracy? Are they not disgusted with the way democracy has worked in the country ever since 1990? Are they not fed up with the Maoist insurgency and would they not welcome any attempt to resolve the matter, no matter who does it? And finally, isn't the Nepalis' regard for the institution of monarchy still strong enough for them to accept the latest ad-

venture by the current King? It will be a long time before we can answer these questions with some confidence. But fortunately a recent survey of Nepali public opinion and attitudes on democracy gives us definite clues on most of these questions. This survey was carried out in August and September 2003 by a team of Nepali political scientists led by Professor Krishna Hachethu of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. This was a part of a project "State of Democracy in South Asia" of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, in collaboration with International IDEA, an inter-governmental organisation headquartered in Stockholm. While the report based on the findings of this survey was released in October 2004 and was extensively discussed in the Nepali media, the world outside Nepal did not notice this.

Representative survey

This is a very representative survey, with the sample being drawn on a strict random basis from select polling stations

spread throughout the country. The survey was carried out in 163 locations spread evenly across all the regions of Nepal. A total of 3,249 respondents were interviewed; the profile of the respondents (80 per cent rural, 54 per cent women) matches the population profile of Nepal. It should be noted that given the complex nature of issues raised in the survey, a significant number of citizens surveyed could not understand many of the key questions; in some cases this number was as high as 40 per cent. The percentages reported below are of those who understood the question and responded to it.

The survey shows that Nepali citizens retain their trust in democracy as the best form of government despite disappointment with the working of democracy and with the behaviour of politicians. As many as 62 per cent respondents say that "democracy is always preferable to any other form of government"; only 10 per cent say authoritarianism is acceptable, while 28 per cent are indifferent. It should be noted that these figures are not

very different from responses to the same question in India. Not only do they like democracy, they think it can work in Nepal. An overwhelming majority of 79 per cent holds that democracy is suitable for Nepal, while only 21 per cent say it is not. This despite strong reservations about the record of democracy in the country. When asked about the way democracy has actually worked, 57 per cent said they were dissatisfied. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents (74 per cent) strongly agreed that the political leaders worked only for their own and party interests rather than in the national interest. But then this is true all over the world.

One test for support for democracy is whether people reject non-democratic alternatives. In this survey, the Nepali citizens do so. When asked to react to different ways of governing the country, 64 per cent strongly agree with the idea that leaders elected through fair elections should rule the country. When asked the same question about the rule of a King, only 25 per cent strongly agreed. The figure was even lower, only

11 per cent, for army rule.

The survey explored people's responses to the monarchy in some detail.

Limited monarchy

There is no doubt some nostalgia and a sense of loyalty to the institution of the monarchy. But when given a clear option, people do not want the King to be the executive head. When asked to choose from the three kinds of roles the King could play, 63 per cent expressed themselves in favour of a limited constitutional monarchy, while 22 per cent favour an executive monarch with 'more powers and rights' and 15 per cent are clearly for the republican option of doing away with the monarchy. It should be re-

ported here that these figures exclude the 37 per cent of the persons interviewed who did not understand these distinctions or had no opinion. Even then the responses indicate a sea change in public opinion. Republicanism is (or perhaps was till two days ago) still a weak sentiment in Nepal, but there is a definite rejection of executive monarchy of the kind that King

Gyanendra has set out to restore notwithstanding the lip-service to the restoration of democracy. We do not know how people have responded to the events of February 1. But the survey tells us how people responded to a similar if milder act of the same King two years ago. In October 2002, King Gyanendra had dismissed an earlier popular government led again by Sher Bahadur Deuba. When asked to react to that, people strongly disapproved of the dismissal of popular government and taking over of executive powers by the King. When asked to assess the impact of the dismissal, 84 per cent respondents said the condition of the country had got bad or very bad after that.

The Constitution

There is no doubt that the ordinary Nepalis would like the current deadlock to be resolved, but they would like this to be through a roundtable discussion involving the Maoists and the political parties. A majority of 51 per cent of those who have an opinion are in favour of a new Constitution, while 40 per cent want the existing one

amended. Only 9 per cent support the Constitution as it exists. Of those who favour a new Constitution, 76 per cent want it done through a fresh constituent assembly, while only 13 per cent are for the King to appoint a commission to make a new Constitution. It should be noted that these fine points about the constitution are understood by very few, but it does give a sense of the direction of public opinion.

If this survey is any guide to the political mind of Nepal today, the King may have undertaken a very risky gamble in trying to revive the executive monarchy. In the short term, he may have an upper hand, given the state of disunity and dispute in which the mainstream political leaders find themselves today. But in the long run he is likely to encounter a public that has tasted democracy and is no longer willing to surrender its sovereignty. Unwittingly, the King may have paved the way for a Republic of Nepal.

(The writer is Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.)

The takeover in Nepal

By Kanak Mani Dixit

WHEN KING Gyanendra of Nepal sacked the Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and began direct rule on February 1, 2005, he said he did so under a constitutional provision that enjoins the monarchy to uphold and protect the Constitution. While he repeated many times his commitment to constitutional monarchy and multiparty rule, the King's drastic action on Tuesday went patently against those principles. First, he was taking over as executive monarch on the basis of a personal decision. Secondly, the royal address was replete with castigating references to political parties, who are the intermediaries for pluralism and democratic practice anywhere in the world.

King Gyanendra's antipathy towards the political parties is well known and has been often expressed. But by sidelining them completely and planning to rule as well as reign, the King has removed a buffer between himself and the rough and tumble of politics. To that extent, he has taken a great risk and put the institution of monarchy in the line of fire. Clearly, the King believes the risk is worth taking. Which brings us to the matter of whether Narayanahiti Palace has a trump card *vis-à-vis* the raging Maoist insurgency.

If such is indeed the case and there is rapid movement towards tranquility, with the insurgents being routed or laying down arms, the palace may

be able to overcome the turbulence it has introduced into the Nepali polity. Peace and an end to the insurgency would put the monarchy back on the pedestal as a respected institution, but everything depends on how soon that would happen. At one time, the Maoists did announce that they

held feelings towards the parties seem to have blocked off this avenue towards resolution. The calls made since King Gyanendra took over informally in October 2002 for an all-party government or revival of the Third Parliament, all of which would have provided political challenge to

as well as in the international community? In castigating the political parties, King Gyanendra preferred to hark back to the Parliament dissolved three years ago, while keeping silent over the interim period and the rule through palace-appointed Prime Ministers. This is the period when the peace and security of the country's populace plummeted most.

In the speech, King Gyanendra highlighted the great contribution of the Shah dynasty to the creation of the nation and ventured that he was speaking for the *janabhawana*, the Nepali people's feelings. While it is true that the desire for peace overwhelms all other political desires among the people, the question arises whether the royal takeover was the proper way to address the *chahana* (desires).

It would have been a much more popular and realistic move for the King to have used his prerogative as head-of-state to bring the bickering parties together at this critical juncture.

In the end, unless King Gyanendra is able to come up with the trump card of peace with the Maoists in the near term, his unprecedented action of February 1 will have exposed Nepal's monarchy to the vicissitudes of day-to-day politics and power play. Did the Nepali monarchy deserve this at so late a date in history?

(The writer is editor and publisher of the Himalmedia Group of Publications in Kathmandu.)

It would have been a much more popular and realistic move for King Gyanendra to have brought the bickering parties together at this critical juncture.

would negotiate only with Prime Minister Deuba's 'master'. Are we to hope that now with the King directly in charge the Maoists will extend a hand? We can hope.

Further, the Nepal Army's fight against the highly motivated and increasingly brutal insurgents thus far has been lacklustre. Will the palace's direct control of national affairs mean the military will now put up a spirited fight, and that its human rights record will improve? We will have to see.

What is clear is that this has been a radical step exposing the monarchy to flak, when other approaches could have been tried. Such as using the inherent powers of kingship to cajole the political parties to work together and put up a political front against the insurgents. But the King's deeply

the Maoists on their home ground, have come to naught.

King Gyanendra's announcement of a takeover for 'up to three years' provides a long window in which Nepal's highly successful experiment with democracy of the last dozen years may be eroded. Unless there is a rapid move towards resolution of the insurgency, the Maoists may try to make common cause with the political parties. The political parties are unlikely to go with the insurgents as long as they hold on to the gun. However, the King's action is certain to add strength to the insurgents' demand for a republican constitution and government, a call that has been taken up lately by many politicians.

How does the palace plan to attend to the criticism that is bound to erupt in the domestic political arena

No Nostradamus!

King Gyanendra did not read it right

Though by no means unexpected, the Sher Bahadur Deuba government's dismissal completes the two-and-a-half-year strangulation of Nepal's multi-party democracy. King Gyanendra has plotted the royal takeover meticulously, ever since he sacked Deuba's caretaker ministry in October 2002 for, it was said, failing to hold a snap-poll within six months of parliament's dissolution. Deuba's successor and pro-monarchist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party leader Lokendra Bahadur Chand's government fared no better and was replaced by another headed by RPP leader Surya Bahadur Thapa. When he too failed to deliver what the king wanted, he was left with little option but to reinstate Deuba in June last year. Deuba's priority was to create an atmosphere congenial for fair and peaceful elections by April this year but he failed to revive a dialogue with Maoists and his seven-month rule was characterised by violence, large-scale kidnapping of children and abduction of businessmen. Had he not insisted on Maoists surrendering weapons before sitting down to talk, it is possible that the rebels may have agreed. Of late, even his ruling partner, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) felt he was a hindrance to peace efforts. Deuba was in deep trouble when the Nepali Congress headed by GP Koirala refused to join his "all-party" ministry. And that was exactly what the King wanted.

The Monarch's promise "to restore peace and effective democracy within the next three years" is all very well but he seems to have rushed to usurp executive powers blatantly, imposing an emergency and putting political leaders under house arrest. He should have considered Koirala's plea to restore the dissolved parliament which, he argued, was justified if elections could not be held. It might have helped restore a semblance of law and order and possibly paved the way for elections. Many seemed to share Koirala's views but the Supreme Court ruled this out. For that matter, there is no constitutional provision either for an "all-party" interim government that Deuba headed. Chronic infighting split the Nepali Congress and now no single party hopes to win a majority. A possible next step is an all-party consensus ministry, and the possibility can still be explored. Since suppression of democracy is not an auspicious augury for both Nepal and India, New Delhi's immediate compulsion is to put pressure on the King to reverse his decision. The conception that the king can do no wrong has ended long ago, and also in the land of its birth.

In any discussion of a domino effect, the situation in Bangladesh cannot be wholly discounted.

King forms Cabinet, gags Press

Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU, Feb. 2. — King Gyanendra today formed a 10-member government comprising mostly his loyalists even as army and paramilitary forces patrolled the capital a day after the Deuba government was sacked and emergency declared in the country.

Press censorship was imposed with the suspension of the right to information and foreign news channels went off cable networks. Tribhuvan International Airport was opened after a day's closure and three Indian Airlines flights — from Delhi, Varanasi, Kolkata — operated. But the capital continued to be cut off from the world as communication lines remained suspended. Many leaders, including Nepali Congress Mr GP Koirala and NCP-UMLs Mr MK Nepal, were either under house-arrest or detained. New home minister Mr Dan Bahadur Shahi said: "The King has the chief executive authority now, so it will be easier for Maoists to come for peace talks. It is what they were wanting." — PTI

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LET'S JOIN HANDS TO HELP

OUR lives have been devastated once again. Thousands have been killed, many more rendered homeless and destitute. It is time for us to come together and help those affected by this gigantic tragedy. The Statesman and Dainik Statesman have set up a fund to help those affected by the calamity. We appeal to readers to donate generously to help the needy.

Please send your contributions by cash/ cheque/ demand draft to The Statesman Ltd., Statesman House, 4 Chowringhee Square, Kolkata 700001. Cheques/drafts should be made payable to "THE STATESMAN CALAMITY RELIEF FUND". The names of all those who send Rs 100 and more will be published in these columns. Donations will be exempt from income tax u/s 80G of the I-T Act, 1961.

C.R. IRANI
Editor-in-Chief

THE STATESMAN

03 FEB 2005

Nepal king suspends civil liberties

To Head 10-Member Cabinet Packed With Aides

Kathmandu: Press censorship was clamped in Nepal as King Gyanendra on Wednesday formed a 10-member cabinet comprising mostly his loyalists, a day after he sacked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's government, declared a state of emergency and assumed all executive powers for three years. All major political leaders, including Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala and NCP-UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal were either under house arrest or detained, sources in the parties said.

Kathmandu was cut off from the rest of the world as communication lines, including mobile, Internet, long-distance calls remained suspended for the second day. Press censorship was imposed with the suspension of the right to information and foreign news channels were off the cable networks. The king suspended several provisions of the constitution, including freedom of the press, speech and expression, peaceful assembly, the right to privacy, and the right against preventive detention, a statement from the royal palace said.

The situation in Kathmandu is calm and quiet till now, but uncertainty and confusion prevails every-



Gyanendra

where. The King, who will head the government, through a royal promulgation named Ramesh Pandey as the new foreign Minister and Dan Bahadur Shahi as the home minister, state-run Radio Nepal said. Veteran economist Madhukar Shumsher Rana has been appointed as finance minister while Tanka Dhaka will be the information and communication minister and Radha Krishna Mainali the minister for sports and education, it said.

The US and Britain joined India in criticising the king's action. A State Department spokesman said US was "deeply troubled" by the dismissal Deuba's government and termed the developments in Nepal as "a step back from democracy." Britain has called for immediate restitution of multi-party democracy in the Himalayan Kingdom. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the King's action would bring neither lasting peace nor stability to Nepal. Human rights group Amnesty International has expressed concern over the King's action saying "the international community must make it immediately clear to the King that by assuming power he is directly responsible for protecting the people of Nepal and safeguarding their fundamental human rights." PTI

THE KING OF A JUNGLE

In a country beset with massive poverty the Maoists of Nepal represent mass resentment against economic exclusion. Will Gyanendra be able to address Nepal's immense problems?

ARAVINDA R DEO

KING Gyanendra of Nepal has dismissed the Sher Bahadur Deuba government and taken power into his own hands. This was not an altogether unexpected development, however unwelcome it might be to the democratic forces in Nepal or to the well-wishers of Nepali people in the rest of the world. By whatever name one may call it, it was a royal coup.

In his speech announcing his decision Gyanendra charged Deuba with having failed "to make necessary arrangements to hold elections by April 2005 and to protect democracy, sovereignty of the people and life and property". And justified his takeover in

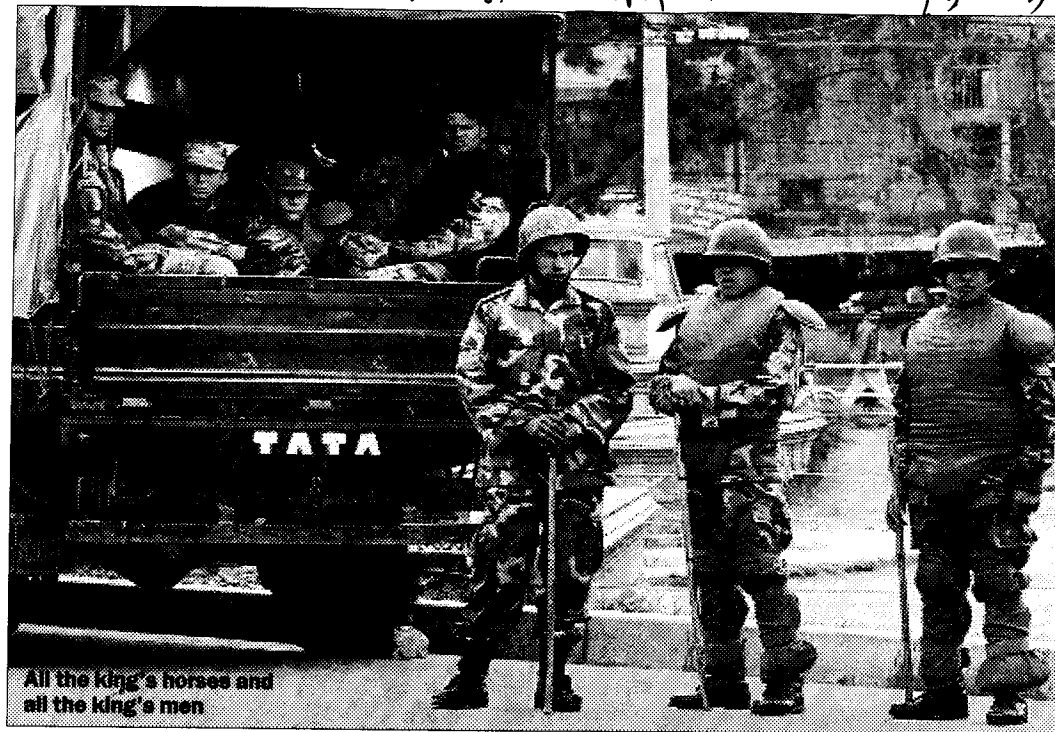
"the larger interest of the people and (for) the protection of sovereignty". He also accused political parties in Nepal of indulging in factional in-fighting when they should have united "to protect the country's democracy, national sovereignty, peoples' life and property". This is not the first time Deuba has been removed from office by the King; when Gyanendra sacked him on October 4, 2002, he had accused the Prime Minister of having failed to provide effective governance. The difference now is that unlike in 2002 the King has decided to take direct charge of the government as Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

The democratic experiment in Nepal has suffered many a setback. In 1960, King Mahendra dismissed B P Koirala's government and established a hands-on system of government more suited to "the genius

of my people". In the words of Rishikesh Shaha, himself a foreign minister under King Mahendra and later a very perceptive analyst of Nepali politics, King Mahendra's system of governance was "in practice a means of exploiting, under the garb of tutelary democracy, the age-old Nepali tradition of unquestioned obedience to autocratic authority of any kind". The three-decade-long experiment of "partyless democracy" in fact destroyed whatever little possibility there was for development of a democratic culture in Nepali polity. The Partyless Panchayat system came to a sudden end in the early months of 1990 after an escalating

political protest and the sagacious decision by King Birendra to allow the re-establishment of multi-party democracy. A new constitution was enacted and a new hope sprang in many hearts that Nepali polity had got a second chance to evolve into a parliamentary multi-party democracy with a constitutional monarch as head of state, "acting as a friend, philosopher and guide to the politicians and as a father figure to his people".

But leaders of almost all political parties squandered away their second chance and the monarch could not resist the temptation of playing parties against each other in the hope that ultimately he could get back the power he had lost to the upsurge of popular will. From 1960 to 1995, a long period by any reckoning, the Nepali ruling elite was more concerned with playing power games than with any serious long-term developmental work. King Mahendra strove to create a sense of Nepali nationalism, not so much on



All the king's horses and all the king's men

If successive governments in Nepal have been unable to overcome the challenge thrown by the insurgents it is because the self-styled Maobadis appear to offer last hope to the poor and the downtrodden Nepali hill-people, the bulk of whom have been left out of any social or political empowerment and see no prospects of even a modicum of economic progress. King Gyanendra's word is therefore likely to carry little credibility with either the Maobadis or even the politically conscious and active elite

what were positive factors uniting the country but more woven round sovereignty defined as "standing up against outside pressures", a political shorthand for India.

A group of extreme left-wingers in the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) had formed a United People's Front of Nepal (UPFN) and fought elections in 1991, emerging as the third-largest group after the Nepali Congress and CPN. The UPFN split up and two of its leaders—Baburam Bhattarai and Comrade Prachanda—led the group which called itself the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists).

This group, manoeuvred out of the parliamentary mainstream by 1995, decided to take the path of armed revolution. What began in February in 1996 as a series of isolated incidents of violence against petty landlords, greedy shopkeepers and small institutions holding public funds, such as local treasury, post offices and banks, in the western and far western zones of the Kingdom of Nepal has now engulfed more than 75 per cent of districts. Insurgent Maoists (Maobadis) have been successful in blockading access to Kathmandu valley. Their writ appears to run over large areas

of the country and the writ of the "official government" is shrinking rapidly.

If successive governments in Nepal have been unable to overcome the challenge thrown by the insurgents it is because the self-styled Maobadis appear to offer last hope to the poor and the downtrodden Nepali hill-people, the bulk of whom have been left out of any social or political empowerment and see no prospects of even a modicum of economic progress.

King Gyanendra's word is therefore likely to carry little credibility with either the Maobadis or

even the politically conscious and active elite. The King has said that he will chair his own council of ministers. A system based on an individual's power is at best fragile given the nature of human existence. An individual can seldom be an effective substitute for a working political institution. It is open to question whether Gyanendra's successor might enjoy the same credibility. His obsessive reference to protect the country's sovereignty is totally uncalled for. Challenge to a country's sovereignty comes from without. The challenge in Nepal today is from within.

Over the last few years there has been some fear, and much concern, among Nepal watchers about whether the country was rapidly becoming a failed state. Their worst fears are likely to come true in the coming months. By ruling the "traditional" pro-democracy parties hors de combat, Gyanendra could have driven them to the opposite camp. The Maobadis would have little reason to accommodate the King at an hour when his own support among the bourgeois political parties is being eroded.

Can Gyanendra repeat the "success" which his father King Mahendra achieved between 1960 and 1972? And how deep was the success? One might well ask what exactly did Mahendra achieve by way of economic development for his people? Nepal's unique vast natural resource—water—remained untapped because of unwarranted suspicions about Indian intentions. Nepal was left out of economic modernisation and opted out of building economic infrastructure to generate large-scale employment. Instead Nepal opted to go in for growth in tourism (which in real terms is largely dependent on traffic from India), using liberal Indian trade and transit regimes to engage in "unauthorised trade in towns bordering India", and in the process building up an educated class with no prospects of gainful employment inside the country.

It is no longer the 1960s. Nepal's

population today is almost 25 million as against less than 10 million in 1961. At its present rate of growth, Nepal would have a population of 50 million in three decades. A stagnant economy and an increasingly unstable polity cannot but lead to social forces such as represented by the Maobadis. Over the last four decades the quality of governance has declined. Corruption has become endemic and under an autocratic rule it can only get worse—not better. A crumbling polity in Nepal would lead to migration out of Nepal into India. Given the open border between Nepal and India it would be difficult if not impossible to check this efflux out of Nepal. According to an estimate there were five to six million Nepali nationals living and working in India in 1990. It is feared that another half a million to one million Nepali nationals have sought residence in India, generating ethnic problems in some areas. Any new influx into India would have serious consequences for Indian political stability and economic development.

What Nepal's ruling elite does to its polity (and also economy) can no longer remain an internal matter of that country if its impact is also felt by India. We need to rethink our Nepal policy, moving away from repeating the mantra that we wish Nepal well. We would have to move to a more pro-active policy respecting Nepal's sovereignty and integrity and assisting it in embarking on a programme of rapid economic development. No other country in the world has as much vested interest in Nepal's "success" as India has: no other country would face an adverse impact on its overall security as much as India would have. We need to have no vested interest in an individual but an institution. But above all we must have a conviction that without genuine democracy there can be no progress and stability in Nepal, and that is what we need to strive for.

The writer is former Indian ambassador to Nepal

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অবরুদ্ধ নেপালে জ্ঞানেন্দ্র সরকার নিন্দা আমেরিকা, ব্রিটেনের

কাঠমান্ডু, ২ ফেব্রুয়ারি (পি টি আই)— গণতন্ত্রহীন নেপাল এখন লৌহ যবনিকার আড়ালে। বহির্বিশ্ব থেকে বিচ্ছিন্ন কাঠমান্ডু। মোবাইল, ইন্টারনেট, দূরপাল্লার টেলি-সংযোগ থেকে শুরু করে সমস্ত ধরনের যোগাযোগ বিচ্ছিন্ন। সীমান্ত অবরুদ্ধ। জারি হয়েছে প্রেস সেন্সরশিপ। বিদেশি সংবাদ চ্যানেলগুলিকে কাজ বন্ধ রাখতে বলা হয়েছে। নেপালের খবর জানার কোনও পথ নেই। রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব রেডিও ও টেলিভিশন যা বলছে, সেটাই খবর। নেপালি কংগ্রেসের সভাপতি গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কৈরাল্লা, নেপাল কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি ইউ এম এলের নেতা মাধবকুমার নেপাল-সহ সব রাজনৈতিক নেতা হয় জেলে, নয় গৃহবন্দী। বিকেলের খবর, কাঠমান্ডু বিমানবন্দরে বহির্দেশীয় বিমান অবতরণের অনুমতি দেওয়া হয়েছে। গণতান্ত্রিক ব্যবস্থাকে নির্বাসনে পাঠিয়ে, সের বাহাদুর দেউবার জোট সরকারকে বরখাস্ত করে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র নিজের হাতে শাসনভার তুলে নিয়েছেন। আজ গঠন করলেন ১০ সদস্যের মন্ত্রিসভা, ঘনিষ্ঠ অনুগামীদের নিয়ে। সরকারের শীর্ষে রাজা নিজে। বিদেশমন্ত্রী রমেশ পাণ্ডে, স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী দান বাহাদুর শাহি, অর্থমন্ত্রী মধুকর শামসের রানা, তথ্য ও যোগাযোগ মন্ত্রী টঙ্কা ঢাকা, ক্রীড়া ও শিক্ষায় রাখাকৃষ্ণ মৈনালি। প্রাসাদ সূত্রে আজ ঘোষণা করা হয়, সংবিধানের কিছু অধিকার জরুরি প্রয়োজনে প্রত্যাহত হচ্ছে। বাক স্বাধীনতা, শাস্তিপূর্ণ সভা-সমিতি করার অধিকার ও বন্দী রাখার বিরুদ্ধে আদালতে আবেদন করার অধিকার এর মধ্যে আছে। রেডিও নেপালের খবর, নেপাল এখন সম্পূর্ণ শান্ত, কোথাও কোনও উত্তেজনা নেই। এন ডি টিভি জানাল, নেপাল দৃশ্যত শান্ত। ফৌজি গাড়ি টহল দিচ্ছে পথে-পথে। লোকজন রাস্তায় খুবই কম। দোকানপাট খুলেছে, তবে কেনাবেচা সামান্য। জরুরি অবস্থা জারির সমালোচনা গতকালই করেছে ভারত। আজ আমেরিকা ও ব্রিটেন সমালোচনা করল। আমেরিকার বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের মুখপাত্র বলেন, নেপাল গণতন্ত্র থেকে এক ধাপ পিছিয়ে গেল। ব্রিটেন অবিলম্বে গণতন্ত্র ফেরানোর আর্জি জানিয়েছে। নিন্দা করেছেন রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের মহাসচিব কোফি আন্নান। এদিকে, গতকাল রাতে মাওবাদী কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি তিন দিনের নেপাল বন্ধ ডেকেছে। দলের চেয়ারম্যান এক বিবৃতিতে বলেন, সামস্ত স্বৈরাচারের বিরুদ্ধে লড়াই আরও তীব্র হবে।

AAJKAL

03 FEB 2006

রাজতন্ত্রের প্রত্যাবর্তন

নেপালে গণতন্ত্রের পরীক্ষানিরীক্ষা আপাতত মূলতুবি। রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র সেখানে প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেরবাহাদুর দেউবার সরকারকে বরখাস্ত করিয়াছেন, পার্লামেন্ট ভাঙিয়া দিয়া সারা দেশে জরুরি অবস্থা জারি করিয়াছেন, আগামী তিন বছরের জন্য সমস্ত ক্ষমতা নিজের হাতে কেন্দ্রীভূত করিয়াছেন এবং সব রাজনৈতিক নেতাকে স্বগৃহে অন্তরীণ করিয়াছেন। কাটিয়া দেওয়া হইয়াছে বহির্বিশ্বের সহিত নেপালের যাবতীয় সংযোগও। নেপালরাজের এই কীর্তিগুলি কি গণতন্ত্রের সহায়ক? তাঁহার সব কয়টি ব্যবস্থাই কি সরাসরি রাজতন্ত্রের স্বৈরাচারকে ফিরাইয়া আনার বন্দোবস্ত নয়? রাজা বীরেন্দ্র নেপালে গণতন্ত্রকে ধাপে ধাপে স্থান করিয়া দিতে যে আন্তরিক আগ্রহ দেখাইয়াছিলেন, তাঁহার মর্মান্তিক হত্যাকাণ্ডের পর প্রাসাদের উত্তরসূরি জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর মধ্যে সেই আগ্রহ দেখা যায় নাই। বরং সর্বদাই তিনি নির্বাচিত পার্লামেন্টকে নানা ছুতায় এড়াইয়া গিয়া পছন্দের রাজনীতিককে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বানাইয়াছেন। বীরেন্দ্র যেমন সাংবিধানিক রাজতন্ত্রকে সাংবিধানিকই রাখিতে চাহিয়াছিলেন, ক্রমশ দেশকে একটি গণতান্ত্রিক প্রজাতন্ত্রের অভিমুখে আগাইয়া দিতে উৎসুক ছিলেন, জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর মধ্যে সেই উৎসাহও লক্ষ করা যায় নাই। এ বার তিনি নিজের পছন্দের এবং অনুগত রাজনীতিকের উপরেও আস্থা রাখিতে পারিলেন না।

এ কথা সত্য যে, গণতান্ত্রিক রাজনীতিকরা দেশবাসীর প্রত্যাশা পূরণ করিতে পারেন নাই। তাঁহাদের পারস্পরিক খেয়োখেয়ি, অহমিকার লড়াই, ক্ষমতার ভাগ লইয়া নীতিহীন দ্বন্দ্ব কেবল নির্বাচিত সরকারগুলিকে অকার্যকর করিয়া তোলে নাই, পার্লামেন্টকেও অপ্রাসঙ্গিক করিয়া তোলে। ইহার সুযোগে দুইটি সমান্তরাল ঘটনা ঘটিতে থাকে। এক দিকে শাসনব্যবস্থার অন্তিমের ফাঁকে মাওবাদী জঙ্গিরা দেশের বিস্তীর্ণ গ্রামাঞ্চলে সশস্ত্র গৃহযুদ্ধ ঘনাইয়া তোলে, অন্য দিকে প্রাসাদ দেশের রাজনীতিতে তাহার হাত নিয়ন্ত্রণ পুনরুদ্ধার করিতে ব্যস্ত হয়। মুশকিল হইল, নেপালের জায়মান গণতন্ত্রের সীমাবদ্ধতা প্রকারান্তরে মাওবাদী জঙ্গিদের বক্তব্য ও রাজনীতিকেই বৈধতা দিতেছে। তাহারা যে রাজতন্ত্রকে সমূলে উচ্ছেদ করিয়া একটি কমিউনিস্ট শাসিত প্রজাতন্ত্র গঠনের আন্দোলন করিতেছে, অগত্যা নেপালের জনসাধারণ তাহার দিকেই ঝুকিতে পারেন। অন্তত প্রাসাদের সহিত মাওবাদীদের দ্বন্দ্বই যদি নেপালের প্রধান দ্বন্দ্ব হইয়া ওঠে, মধ্যবর্তী গণতান্ত্রিক শক্তি ও আন্দোলনগুলি যদি অপ্রাসঙ্গিক হইয়া যায়, তবে তো মাত্র দুইটি বিকল্প খোলা থাকিতেছে। একটি জ্ঞানেন্দ্রর রাজতন্ত্র, অন্যটি মাওবাদীদের প্রজাতন্ত্র। দুই বন্দোবস্তের মধ্যেই স্বৈরতন্ত্রের উপাদান ঠাসা। কোনওটিই জনসাধারণের প্রতি দায়বদ্ধ নয়, ভাল বা মন্দ কাজের জন্য জবাবদিহির কোনও তাগিদ তাহার নাই এবং জনাদেশে তাহার সংশোধন বা প্রত্যাখ্যানের সম্ভাবনাও নাই। নেপালরাজ কি এই আশাতেই গণতন্ত্রকে রদ করিলেন যে মাওবাদীদের সহিত সম্মুখসমরে প্রাসাদের চূড়ান্ত বিজয় ও রাজতন্ত্রের প্রত্যাবর্তন সম্পর্কে তিনি নিশ্চিত?

নেপালের গণতন্ত্রকামী মানুষ অতঃপর কোন পথে আন্দোলন করিবেন, সেটা তাঁহাদের ব্যাপার। একচ্ছত্র ক্ষমতাজেগীরা যে নানা অছিলায় নিরঙ্কুশ আধিপত্যের মেয়াদ ক্রমাগত বাড়াইয়া চলেন, উপমহাদেশে তাহার অন্য প্রমাণও আছে। তাই তিন বছর পরে জ্ঞানেন্দ্র প্রজাদের নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধিদের হাতে ক্ষমতা ফিরাইয়া দিবেন, এই আশায় তাঁহারা নিশ্চয় বসিয়া থাকিবেন না। প্রতিবেশী ভারত নানা ভাবে নেপালের সমাজ, অর্থনীতি, রাজনীতির সহিত জড়াইয়া আছে। অনুরুদ্ধ না হইলে আগ বাড়াইয়া নয়াদিল্লি সচরাচর প্রতিবেশীর অভ্যন্তরীণ ব্যাপারে নাক গলায় না। অনেক সময় উপরোধে টেকি গিলিয়াও যে তাহা ওগরাইতে হইয়াছে, শ্রীলঙ্কায় তাহার প্রমাণ আছে। তবে তাহার জানালার কাছে ঝড়ঝঞ্ঝা বহিবে, আর ভারত উদাসীন দর্শক থাকিবে, ইহাও প্রত্যাশিত নয়। মাওবাদী জঙ্গিদের মোকাবিলায় নেপাল সরকারের অনুরোধে ইতিপূর্বে ভারত সামরিক সাজসরঞ্জাম পাঠাইয়াছে। সেগুলি অতঃপর গণতন্ত্রীদের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবহৃত হউক, ইহা নয়াদিল্লির অভিপ্রেত নয়। তবে ভারতের পক্ষে নেপালে গণতন্ত্রের জন্য তৎপর হওয়ার কোনও বাধ্যবাধকতাও নাই। তাহাকে কেবল দেখিতে হইবে, ভারতের স্বার্থ ক্ষুণ্ণ হইতেছে কিনা।

02 FEB 2005

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2005

NEPAL'S PALACE COUP

HP-10

BY DISMISSING PRIME Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba for the second time in a little more than two years, King Gyanendra has not only acted against the spirit of Nepal's system of constitutional monarchy. He has, with reckless deliberation, plunged his country into a political freefall of the kind he will find very hard to control or reverse. Since the King dismissed the elected government of Mr. Deuba in October 2002, Nepal has been in something like a twilight zone as far as democracy, civil liberties, and the normal conduct of political discourse are concerned. Parliament remained suspended and it was clear the King was in no hurry to allow fresh elections. By declaring a state of emergency now, King Gyanendra has lifted the veil of ambiguity that covered his authoritarian and reactionary political agenda. When Mr. Deuba unwisely accepted the King's invitation to reoccupy the Singh Durbar last year, he should have anticipated that what was being offered to him was something worse than even a Faustian bargain: Nepal's fractious politicians were being given precious little in exchange for giving up their democratic soul. At least Mephistopheles was promised 24 years of pleasure; Mr. Deuba barely got 24 weeks.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the increasing determination of the Government and its Maoist adversaries to settle Nepal's fate on the battlefield is, to a significant extent, the product of King Gyanendra's *putschist* politics. As Nepal, India, and the rest of the world contemplate his latest coup-within-a-coup, one thing is clear: it is this palace-engineered deportation of politics that has enabled military methods and military concerns to gain ascendancy. Thanks to the King's support, the Royal Nepal Army has had a free hand in its people- and terrain-destructive war against the Maoist insurgents; that the ensuing violations of

human rights have not brought the authorities any closer to victory is a different matter altogether. As for the Maoists, the growing illegitimacy of the King and the hollowness of the political system of constitutional monarchy have led their leadership to conclude that a spectacular victory could be round the corner. The rhetorical questions posed to Mr. Deuba by the Maoist leader, Prachanda, when the Prime Minister offered peace talks last year were aimed at highlighting the fact that the Government had control over neither King nor Army. This thesis has now been proved correct. Similarly, the extremist rebels know that their demand for a Constituent Assembly will now find an even wider echo across the Kingdom. King Gyanendra's latest move has stripped the monarchy of the *cordon sanitaire* provided by the political parties. From now on, Nepal will witness a two-cornered contest — the King versus the rest — with the Maoists well placed to increase their clout.

Although the Manmohan Singh Government has issued a statement expressing its "grave concern" over the "serious setback to the cause of democracy" in Nepal, India needs to reflect on how its own ambivalence towards King Gyanendra relates to the most recent turn of events. True, New Delhi continuously urged the Palace to compromise with the political parties ranged against him and warned that the Maoists were taking advantage of the prevailing state of confusion. At the same time, the decision to sell arms to the Royal Nepal Army was seen as tacit endorsement of the King's authoritarian ways — and of the view that a 'military solution' to the problem of insurgency was possible. In fact, there is no military solution. In addition to urging the reversal of his illegitimate, anti-constitutional adventure and an immediate return to democracy, India needs to send this message to King Gyanendra, post-haste.

King seizes power in Nepal

● Declares Emergency ● Dismisses Deuba Government ● Curtails civil liberties
 ● Army out on streets ● Political leaders under house arrest ● Flights suspended

KATHMANDU, FEB. 1. King Gyanendra today dismissed Nepal's Government and declared a state of Emergency, cutting off his Himalayan nation from the rest of the world as telephone and Internet lines were snapped, flights diverted and civil liberties severely curtailed.

This was the second time in three years that the King has taken control of the tiny South Asian constitutional monarchy, a throwback to the era of absolute power enjoyed by Nepal's monarchs before King Birendra, King Gyanendra's elder brother, introduced democracy in 1990.

King Gyanendra denied his takeover was a coup, although soldiers surrounded the houses of the Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and other Government leaders.

The King also suspended several provisions of the Constitution, including the freedoms of press, speech and expression, the freedom to assemble peacefully, the right to privacy and the right against preventive detention, according to a statement from the Narayanhiti Palace.

"Violates Constitution"

"We will oppose this step," Mr. Deuba, who was not al-

lowed to leave his house, told reporters. "The move directly violates the Constitution and is against democracy."

The Nepali Congress, the country's largest party, said that the King had "pushed the country toward further complications" and called for a joint protest.

Armoured military vehicles as worried residents stocked up on supplies. "We are so confused. We don't know what is going on or what will happen," said Narayan Thapa, a Government worker. "I am worried I can't reach my family on the phone."

In an announcement on State-run television, the King accused the Government of failing to conduct Parliamentary elections and being unable to restore peace in the country, which is beset by rebel violence.

"A new Cabinet will be formed under my leadership," he said, accusing political parties of plunging the country into crisis. "This will restore peace and effective democracy in this country within the next three years."

Later, State-run television reported that a state of Emergency had been declared.

The monarch, who is also the supreme commander of the 78,000-member Royal Nepalese Army, said security forces would be given more power to maintain law and order. But he insisted that human rights would be respected.

The King fired Mr. Deuba as Prime Minister in October 2002, sparking mass street protests demanding the restoration of a

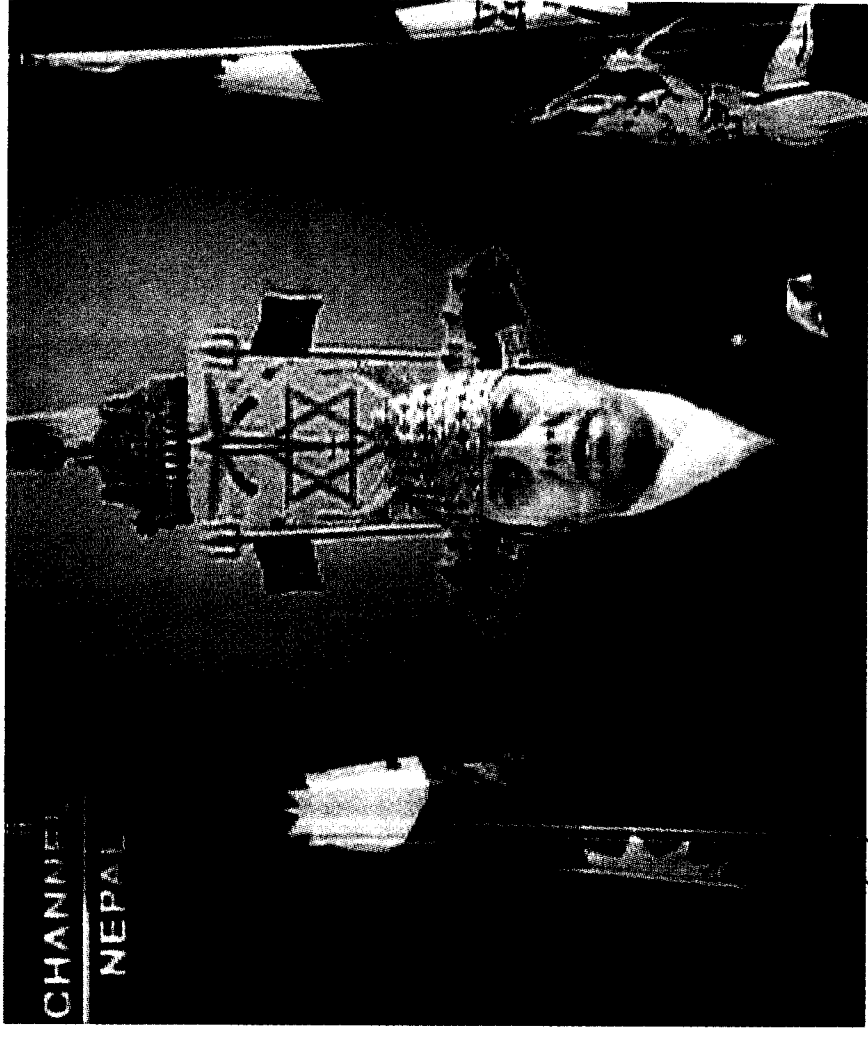
democratically elected government. He reinstated Mr. Deuba last year with the task of holding elections by March 2005 and conducting peace talks with the Maoist rebels.

Nepal has been in turmoil since King Gyanendra, 55, suddenly assumed the crown in 2001 after his brother, Birendra, was gunned down in a palace massacre apparently committed by King Birendra's son, the Crown Prince, who also died. Ten members of the royal family were killed.

Riots shook Kathmandu after the killings. Soon after, fighting intensified between Government forces and the rebels, who control large parts of Nepal's countryside.

The rebels, who draw inspiration from the late Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, have been trying since 1996 to overthrow the Government and establish a socialist state. They have refused the Government's invitation to come into the mainstream of Nepalese politics and end the violence. More than 10,500 people have died since the fighting began. — AP

Editorial on Page 10
 More reports on Page 15



King Gyanendra of Nepal addresses the nation on state television in Kathmandu on Tuesday. — AP

গণতন্ত্রের দখল নিজে নিজে নেপালরাজ



পাল্লাবদলের পাল্লা

জুন, ২০০১	রাজা বীরেন্দ্র নিহত হওয়ার পরে রাজা হলেন জ্ঞানেন্দ্র।
জুলাই, ২০০১	গিরিজাপ্রসাদ কেরালার ইস্তফা, প্রধানমন্ত্রী শের বাহাদুর দেউবা।
মে, ২০০২	রাজা সংসদ ভেঙে দিলেন। অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রধান দেউবাই।
অক্টোবর, ২০০২	দেউবা বরখাস্ত, প্রধানমন্ত্রী লোকেন্দ্রবাহাদুর চাঁদ।
মে, ২০০৩	চাঁদের ইস্তফা।
জুন, ২০০৩	প্রধানমন্ত্রী সূর্যবাহাদুর থাপা।
মে, ২০০৪	থাপার ইস্তফা।
জুন, ২০০৪	ফের দেউবাকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী করলেন রাজা।

ফেব্রুয়ারি, ২০০৫ সরকার গদ্যচ্যুত



জ্ঞানেন্দ্র



শের বাহাদুর দেউবা

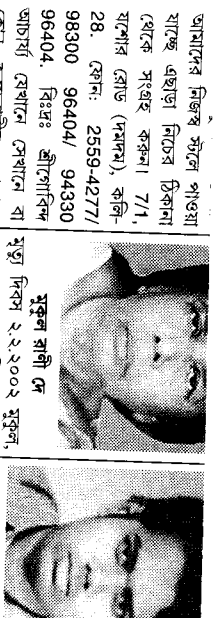
দেউবা বরখাস্ত, জরুরি অবস্থা, নেতারা গৃহবন্দি

কাঠমান্ডু, ১ ফেব্রুয়ারি: 'অভ্যুত্থান' ঘটালেন খোদ রাজাই। প্রধানমন্ত্রী শের বাহাদুর দেউবাকে সরিয়ে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রের যাবতীয় ক্ষমতা দখলকে এই ভাবেই দেখেছে নেপালের রাজনৈতিক মহল। আর রাজার আজকের সিদ্ধান্তের ফলে মাওবাদী হামলায় বিধস্ত নেপালে গণতন্ত্র ফেরা আরও অনিশ্চিত হয়ে পড়ল বলে মনে করছে ওয়াকিবহাল মহল।

আজ সকালে দেউবা সরকারকে বরখাস্ত করে রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্র জানিয়ে দিলেন, দেশের শাসনভার আগামী তিন বছরের জন্য তিনি নিজের হাতে নিয়োজেন। সরকারি বেডিও-এ রাজার এই ঘোষণার পরেই গৃহবন্দি করা হয়েছে বহু রাজনৈতিক নেতাকে। দেউবার বাড়িও ঘিরে ফেলবে সেনারা। নেপাল রাজসরকারের তরফে সরকারি ভাবে কিছু না বলা হলেও দেউবা জানিয়েছেন, তাঁকে এবং অন্যান্য কিছু নেতাকে মৃত্যুদণ্ড দেওয়া হলেও দেউবা জানিয়েছেন, গৃহবন্দি করা হয়েছে। মোবাইল ও সাধারণ টেলিফোন পরিষেবা বন্ধ। কাঠমান্ডুর রাস্তায় টলে দিলে সেনাবাহিনীর সাজেয়া গাড়ি। তাতে মেশিনগান উচিত্তে সতর্ক সেনা। কাঠমান্ডুর ত্রিভুবন আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দরও সারা দিন বন্ধ বন্ধ ছিল। দেশ জুড়ে জরুরি অবস্থা জারি করা হয়েছে। অন্য দিকে, রাজার সিদ্ধান্তকে ঘণ্টায় সামন্ততন্ত্রের মতো একনায়কত্ব বলে মন্তব্য করে কাল থেকে তিন দিনের সাধারণ ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিয়েছে নেপালের মাওবাদী কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি।

নেপালের এই রাজনৈতিক পটপরিবর্তন দেখেছে হাওয়ায় প্রতিক্রিয়া জানিয়েছে। নেপালে ২০০২ সাল থেকেই নিষিদ্ধিত সরকার নেই। সংসদ ভেঙে দিয়ে দেউবাকে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর আসনে বসান জ্ঞানেন্দ্রই। কিন্তু আজকের সিদ্ধান্ত গণতন্ত্রের সেই মুখোপাধিকারকে খসিয়ে দিয়ে পুরোদস্তুর রাজতন্ত্র আনল বলে রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির অভিযোগ। এ নিয়ে গত তিন বছরের মধ্যে চার বার রাজা দেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বরখাস্ত করেছেন। দেউবাকেই ২০০১-০৪-এ এক বার বরখাস্ত করেছিলেন। সে সেনা দেউবার বিবিরাজার আভিযোগ ছিল, মাওবাদী হামলার আশঙ্কায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী ভোট পিছানোর সুপারিশ করেছেন। তাই দেউবাকে ১৩ মে মার্কিন হাওয়া পেড়েছে। ১৩ মে মার্কিন হাওয়ার সঙ্গে শান্তি আলোচনা শুরু করে দেউবাকে।

দেউবাকে ২০০২ সাল থেকেই নিষিদ্ধিত সরকার নেই। সংসদ ভেঙে দিয়ে দেউবাকে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর আসনে বসান জ্ঞানেন্দ্রই। কিন্তু আজকের সিদ্ধান্ত গণতন্ত্রের সেই মুখোপাধিকারকে খসিয়ে দিয়ে পুরোদস্তুর রাজতন্ত্র আনল বলে রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির অভিযোগ। এ নিয়ে গত তিন বছরের মধ্যে চার বার রাজা দেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বরখাস্ত করেছেন। দেউবাকেই ২০০১-০৪-এ এক বার বরখাস্ত করেছিলেন। সে সেনা দেউবার বিবিরাজার আভিযোগ ছিল, মাওবাদী হামলার আশঙ্কায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী ভোট পিছানোর সুপারিশ করেছেন। তাই দেউবাকে ১৩ মে মার্কিন হাওয়া পেড়েছে। ১৩ মে মার্কিন হাওয়ার সঙ্গে শান্তি আলোচনা শুরু করে দেউবাকে।



মাওবাদীরা আরও শক্তিশালী হবে, আশঙ্কা দিল্লির

গণতন্ত্র এবং রাজতন্ত্র, দুটি প্রতিপক্ষই ধ্বংস করতে চায়।" সীমান্ত সন্ত্রাস মোকাবিলা নিয়ে দেশ কিছু বিষয় এই ঘটনার ফলে আপাতত ভেঙে গেল বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। দু'দেশের মধ্যে বন্দি প্রত্যর্পণ হুজি এবং ভারত ও নেপালের মধ্যে অপারেশনের বিষয়ে পারস্পরিক আইনি সহায়তা সম্পর্কে কথাবার্তা হয়েছিল। তা বাস্তবায়িত করার কথাও চলছিল। কিন্তু ভারতের পক্ষে সবচেয়ে সমস্যার কথা, নেপালের ঘটনায় মাওবাদী সক্রিয়তা বেড়ে যাওয়ার সম্ভাবনার মোকাবিলা করা। তাকে তো ভারতের আভ্যন্তরীণ মাওবাদীদের সঙ্গে নেপালের মাওবাদীদের ঘনিষ্ঠ যোগাযোগ রয়েছে। তা হুজি নেপালের রাজা এর পর কী ভাবে মাওবাদীদের মোকাবিলা করবেন, তা নিয়েও যথেষ্ট সংশয় রয়েছে। ভারত স্বাব্যবিক্রম ভাবেই চায় না নেপাল অন্য কোন্ দেশকে নিজের সহায়তার জন্য ডাকুক।

দিল্লি মনে করে।

সার্ক সম্মেলন নিয়ে অনিশ্চয়তা বাড়ছে

সার্ক রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১ ফেব্রুয়ারি: নেপালে নাটকীয় পরিবর্তনের পরে সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন নিশ্চিত সময়ে হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা ঝুলিয়েই রাখল বাংলাদেশ। ৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি থেকে ঢাকায় সম্মেলন শুরু হওয়ার হবে বলে ঢাকার বিদেশ মন্ত্রক সূত্রে ইঙ্গিত মিলেছে। সার্কের গুস্তিত চলছে ও ঠিক সময়েই সার্ক শুরু হবে—এই আশার কথা বিদেশসচিব সন্দেহের মতিন টৌদুরী বার বার বললেও নেপালের পরিস্থিতি সার্কের সে দেশের কোনও প্রতিনিধি আসবেন কি না, সে সম্পর্কে বাংলাদেশ অক্ষরিত। সার্কের নিয়মানুসারে অবশ্য রাজা নিজেই সম্মেলনে আসতে পারেন। রাতে নেপালের বিদেশ মন্ত্রককে উদ্ধৃত করে সে দেশের একটি বেসরকারি চ্যানেলও জানিয়েছে, সার্ক সম্মেলনের জন্য রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রই সস্তীক ঢাকা যাবেন। সার্কের নিয়ম অনুসারে, সাতটি দেশের মধ্যে কোনও একটি দেশও না-এলে বাতিল হতে পারে সম্মেলন। তাই নেপালের বর্তমান পরিস্থিতিতে চিন্তায় বাংলাদেশ ও অন্য সদস্য দেশগুলো। ঢাকায় প্রথম সার্ক সম্মেলনে তৎকালীন রাজা বীরেন্দ্রই নেপালের প্রতিনিধিত্ব করেন। বিদেশসচিব বলেন, "ওখানকার পরিস্থিতির উপরে নজর রাখছি। কিন্তু নেপালে আমাদের দু'তাবাস বা সৌভাষ্যের কোনও প্রতিনিধির সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে পারিনি।" বিদেশমন্ত্রী মোরশেদ খান পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী মাহমুদ কাসুরিকে ফোন করে

সার্ক রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১ ফেব্রুয়ারি: নেপালে নাটকীয় পরিবর্তনের পরে সার্ক শীর্ষ সম্মেলন নিশ্চিত সময়ে হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা ঝুলিয়েই রাখল বাংলাদেশ। ৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি থেকে ঢাকায় সম্মেলন শুরু হওয়ার হবে বলে ঢাকার বিদেশ মন্ত্রক সূত্রে ইঙ্গিত মিলেছে। সার্কের গুস্তিত চলছে ও ঠিক সময়েই সার্ক শুরু হবে—এই আশার কথা বিদেশসচিব সন্দেহের মতিন টৌদুরী বার বার বললেও নেপালের পরিস্থিতি সার্কের সে দেশের কোনও প্রতিনিধি আসবেন কি না, সে সম্পর্কে বাংলাদেশ অক্ষরিত। সার্কের নিয়মানুসারে অবশ্য রাজা নিজেই সম্মেলনে আসতে পারেন। রাতে নেপালের বিদেশ মন্ত্রককে উদ্ধৃত করে সে দেশের একটি বেসরকারি চ্যানেলও জানিয়েছে, সার্ক সম্মেলনের জন্য রাজা জ্ঞানেন্দ্রই সস্তীক ঢাকা যাবেন। সার্কের নিয়ম অনুসারে, সাতটি দেশের মধ্যে কোনও একটি দেশও না-এলে বাতিল হতে পারে সম্মেলন। তাই নেপালের বর্তমান পরিস্থিতিতে চিন্তায় বাংলাদেশ ও অন্য সদস্য দেশগুলো। ঢাকায় প্রথম সার্ক সম্মেলনে তৎকালীন রাজা বীরেন্দ্রই নেপালের প্রতিনিধিত্ব করেন। বিদেশসচিব বলেন, "ওখানকার পরিস্থিতির উপরে নজর রাখছি। কিন্তু নেপালে আমাদের দু'তাবাস বা সৌভাষ্যের কোনও প্রতিনিধির সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে পারিনি।" বিদেশমন্ত্রী মোরশেদ খান পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী মাহমুদ কাসুরিকে ফোন করে

A king-sized dilemma

96 46 As Nepal goes under, India's cluelessness is cause for concern 22
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BY dismissing the government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Nepal's King Gyanendra has added yet another chapter in the tragically repetitive pattern of Nepali politics; a pattern where the monarch appoints a prime minister only to dismiss him within a few months. The outcome always seems foreordained, because it is impossible to succeed as prime minister of Nepal. On the one hand, the prime minister is vulnerable to being undermined by the king. On the other hand, the fact that the prime minister cannot act authoritatively is used as an argument against him. This was the case the last time Deuba was dismissed. He was then accused of not holding elections on time. A prime minister of Nepal cannot succeed unless he undermines the power of the monarchy; if he does not do so, the monarchy will undermine him. On this occasion, too, the king pronounced Deuba — whom he had handpicked to head the interim government — incapable of dealing with the Maoists. Both these failures in part stem from the fact that prime minister does not carry enough authority. It is partly for this reason that the Maoists, at one point, had demanded direct negotiations with the king.

Meanwhile a strong sense of *deja vu* has descended on the region. Nepal's political parties are deeply factionalised and too discredited to mount an effective protest. And India, which has more stakes in Nepal than in any other country, again ap-

pears indecisive and completely out of the loop. Although there were enough hints that the king would resort to precisely such a dismissal, the Government of India allowed itself to be taken by surprise once again. India has not had the courage to lean hard enough on the monarchy in order to make Nepal genuinely more democratic; nor has it cultivated Nepal's political parties and civil society enough to inspire trust and confidence. What is more, it has displayed neither a clear strategy nor a sense of purpose in dealing with its Himalayan neighbour.

It would be a mistake on the part of King Gyanendra to assume that he can control Nepal, single-handed, and ensure lasting peace. The fact that there is no meeting ground between the Maoists and the king only points to a political vacuum that can only spell more uncertainty and chaos in the days ahead. Perhaps the only spark of hope is that the king — by dismissing the Deuba government — has given up the pretense of running a government by proxy. This may bring some much-needed clarity to whatever negotiations are to be conducted. But the king has to face up to the fact that public unrest in Nepal will not subside unless there is a new constitution and genuine democracy. But this is something the king is unlikely to accede to. India, however, should actively support all efforts to achieve such an outcome. A functioning democracy offers the only way out of Nepal's current problems.

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DRASTIC STEPS

Monarchs are not the best defenders of democracies. By dismissing the government and assuming all powers for three years, Nepal's King Gyanendra has not only dealt a deadly blow to the country's fledgling democracy but also put the monarchy itself under a cloud. His drastic steps, which include placing the country's senior politicians under house arrest and the media under the army's control, will raise uncomfortable questions about his commitment to constitutional monarchy. The sweeping powers that he has given himself are more likely to make him an absolute monarch. The consequences of this attempt to undo the country's political history can only be disastrous for the country. This amounts to undoing two decades of pro-democracy movements that culminated in 1990 with the end of Nepal's absolute monarchy and the introduction of the multi-party parliamentary democracy. Also, the king's action will revive suspicions about the monarchy that surrounded his ascension to the throne in the wake of the palace massacre in June, 2001, that wiped out the family of his predecessor, King Birendra. With the Maoist revolt getting increasingly intractable, the collapse of democracy could not have come at a worse time for the Himalayan kingdom.

It is true that democracy was not functioning smoothly in Nepal. The political parties failed to give the country even a semblance of stability. Governments rose and fell without completing their terms and, more important, without doing anything meaningful to stem the rot. Even the government of Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba, which the king had installed after dissolving the elected parliament, failed in its two primary tasks — to revive the peace talks with the Maoists and to work out a political consensus for the next elections. But the failure of the peace process was mainly because of the rebels' refusal to return to the negotiating table, and the parties refused to cooperate with an unelected government whose legitimacy they questioned. But all these failures of governments and the parties cannot justify the king's action. For while it suppresses all freedoms, the royal intervention may actually help the rebels who have thrived on the weakening of democratic politics. King Gyanendra's indiscretion will also upset countries, particularly India, which aided Nepal's battle against the Maoists.

Nepal's uncertainty casts long shadow along border

Amitabha Banerjee
Pashupatinagar, February 1

Kingdom's buildup to chaos

Following the royal massacre in 2001, Nepal has got caught in a vortex of political instability

2001

June 1 King Birendra and his family members are assassinated by his son, Crown Prince Dipendra, in a shooting spree at the royal palace. The prince goes into a coma from apparently self-inflicted gunshot wounds.



June 2 Crown Prince Dipendra declared king while still in coma. King Birendra's brother, Prince Gyanendra, declared regent.



June 4 Dipendra dies, Gyanendra declared king. Anti-Gyanendra protests trigger off in Katmandu, a curfew is imposed.

July Maoist rebels step up violence, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala resigns.

July Sher Bahadur Deuba named new PM, announces truce with rebels.

Aug 30 Government, rebels begin peace talks. Rebels demand new constitution.

November Maoists kill 24 policemen in attacks at 15 sites, ending four-month cease-fire.



Nov. 26 King Gyanendra declares state of emergency. Royal Nepalese Army deployed against rebels.

2002

FEBRUARY Violence intensifies further. Authorities say hundreds of Maoist rebels killed in army operations.

MAY Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba meets with US President George W. Bush seeks support for his campaign against Maoists. Bush pledges US\$20 million. Rebels offer truce, its rejected by the government.

MAY 22 King Gyanendra dissolves Parliament, orders fresh elections. Deuba expelled by his party the Nepali Congress, but remains interim PM.

AUGUST 28 Government lifts state of emergency.

OCT 4 King Gyanendra fires Deuba calling him "incompetent" and "incapable" of holding parliamentary elections on schedule.

Deuba had asked for the postponement of elections a day earlier due to fears of Maoist violence.



OCT 11 King Gyanendra names Lokendra Bahadur Chand, head of the pro-monarchy Rastroya Prajatantra Party, the new PM.

2003

JANUARY 29 Rebels declare cease-fire, begin peace talks with government.



MAY 30 Prime Minister

Lokendra Bahadur Chand resigns.

JUNE 4 King Gyanendra appoints monarchist Surya Bahadur Thapa, 75, as new prime minister.

JULY 31 Maoist rebels agree to government requests for a resumption of peace talks.

AUG 17 Peace talks resume for the first time since May.

AUG 27 Maoist rebels call off seven-month cease-fire and withdraw from peace talks. Fighting resumes. Clashes between soldiers and rebels escalate through late 2003.

2004

MAY 7 PM Surya Bahadur Thapa announces his resignation after 11 months in office and months of protests by political parties.

JUNE 2 King Gyanendra reappoints Deuba as prime minister with the task of holding general elections.

AUGUST Nepalese rebels enforce blockade on Kathmandu, cutting it off from rest of Nepal for a week.

NOV 27 Maoist rebels reject another government offer for peace talks, saying they negotiations must be with international mediators present.

2005

FEB 1 King Gyanendra dismisses government, declares a state of emergency, taking control of the kingdom.

WITH EMERGENCY declared in Nepal, a shadow of uncertainty has descended on the India-Nepal border areas, too.

In Pashupatinagar, a market on the Nepalese side of the India-Nepal border, 30 km from Darjeeling, the day continued as normal. But fear of the unknown was the general feeling. There have also been unconfirmed reports of the borders being sealed soon.

A Royal Nepal Army official (on condition of anonymity) said they had no official orders on what was happening, nor what line of action should be adopted. Everyone in Pashupatinagar decided to remain tight-lipped on Tuesday, gripped by constant fear.

A businessman in Pashupatinagar said, "We're dependent on Indian tourists and, if the border is closed, we'll starve. The Maoists have done enough damage to our business and now, with emergency, we don't know what to do".

Many Nepalese television channels, too, were blocked. Phurba Sherpa, a resident on the Indian side, said, "We're very worried. We have some of our relatives on the Nepalese side. We haven't heard anything from them yet.

"As Nepalese channels are blocked and even telephone lines in Nepal are down, all communication with them has been cut". Most Indians with relatives in Nepal are relying on the Indian news media for news updates.

Even the Maoists have decided to use this political instability to their full advantage. They are even supposed to have declared a three-day strike from February 3. Sources in Pashupatinagar said the Maoists, in a display of power, held a well-attended meeting at Baghbirey, a small settlement below Pashupatinagar, on Tuesday.

Hemraj Karki, school-teacher of Bhanubhakta Primary school in Pashupatinagar said, "We're just praying that normality returns". Meanwhile, security forces and intelligence departments are keeping a close watch on the extremely volatile situation.

With the SSB manning the India-Nepal border, security has been further tightened.

"Though everything was normal today and vehicles plied across the border as usual, we're on alert and are keeping a close watch", Darjeeling ASP said.

Nepal King sacks govt, cuts off nation

Press Trust of India

KATHMANDU, Feb. 1. — Nepal's King Gyanendra today sacked Prime Minister Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba's coalition government, assumed all executive powers for the next three years and declared a state of emergency.

The Himalayan kingdom has been cut off from the rest of the world as telephone and Internet lines have been snapped, flights diverted and civil liberties severely curtailed.

Armoured vehicles with mounted machine-guns patrolled the capital amidst reports that several politicians were put under house arrest. Kathmandu airport was closed down and all telephone lines, including mobile phone services, were disconnected soon after the royal announcement. The 59-year-old Prime Minister, who was nominated by the King as Prime Minister in June last year, termed the action as "anti-democratic" which will throw the country into a "grave crisis" and said "we will oppose this step".

Charging the Deuba government with failing to hold talks with Maoists and conducting parliamentary polls by April, the King, in a televised address to the nation, said: "I hereby dismiss the Deuba government and assume all executive powers, in line with the constitution. The government hasn't done anything with seriousness to start the election process," he said announcing Mr Deuba's second dismissal in three years.

The 55-year-old monarch, who assumed the throne in 2001 following the gunning down of his brother King Birendra, declared that a new government would be formed under his leadership that "will restore peace and effective democracy in this country within the next three years".



Soldiers patrol a street near the Narayanhiti Palace in Kathmandu on Tuesday. — PTI

Later, the state-run television reported that a state of emergency has been declared and all fundamental rights suspended. King Gyanendra, who is also the supreme commander of the 78,000-strong Nepalese army, said the army will be given more power to maintain law and order.

Accusing the King of indulging in "a flagrant violation of the constitution," Mr Deuba said many leaders, including himself and NCP-UML's Mr Madhav Kumar, have been put under house-arrest.

Flights suspended
NEW DELHI, Feb. 1. — All flights in and out of Kathmandu were suspended and the airspace closed today. "The authorities in Nepal have stopped permitting flights into Kathmandu. We are concerned about the safety and security of Indian passengers and we will resume the flights as soon as we are permitted," civil aviation minister Mr Praful Patel said here. Five flights from India to Kathmandu were cancelled. They were two flights of Indian Airlines — one from Delhi and another from Varanasi — and one flight each of Jet Airways, Sahara and Royal Nepal Airlines. An Air Sahara flight took off from Delhi in the morning but returned after hovering over Kathmandu as it was not permitted to land. — PTI

Britain today called for immediate restitution of multi-party democracy in Nepal and said it was reviewing its travel advice there in the light of the develop-

ments. Foreign office minister Mr Douglas Alexander summoned the Nepalese ambassador in London to convey the British government's grave concern.

2001

June 1: King Birendra and his family are assassinated by his son, Crown Prince Dipendra. The prince goes into coma from apparently self-inflicted gunshot wounds.



Prasad Koirala resigns. Deuba named new Prime Minister, announces truce with Maoist rebels.

August 30: Government, rebels begin talks. Rebels demand new constitution.
Nov 26: Gyanendra declares emergency.

2002

May 22: Gyanendra dissolves parliament, orders fresh elections. Deuba expelled by his party, the Nepali Congress, but remains interim Prime Minister.

TROUBLED TIMES

August 28: Emergency lifted.

Oct 4: Gyanendra fires Deuba calling him "incompetent" and incapable of holding parliamentary elections on schedule.

Oct 11: Gyanendra names Lokendra Bahadur Chand new Prime Minister.

2003

January 29: Rebels declare ceasefire, begin talks with government.

May 30: Lokendra Bahadur Chand resigns.
June 4: Gyanendra appoints monarchist Surya Bahadur Thapa as the new Prime Minister.

August 17: Peace talks resume with rebels for the first time since May.

August 27: Maoist rebels call off seven-month ceasefire and withdraw from peace talks.

2004

May 7: Surya Bahadur Thapa resigns.
June 2: Gyanendra reappoints Deuba as PM.
August: Maoists impose Kathmandu blockade.
Nov 27: Maoists reject talks offer.

2005

Feb 1: Gyanendra dismisses Deuba and declares emergency.

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 1. — India today criticised the dissolution of Nepal's parliament and declaration of emergency as a "serious setback" to democracy.

An MEA statement said the developments bring the monarchy and the mainstream political parties in "direct confrontation" with each other. "This can only benefit the forces that not only wish to undermine democracy but the institution of monarchy as well." Foreign minister Mr Nat-

Border alert

DARJEELING, Feb. 1. — An alert has been sounded along the India-Nepal border in Darjeeling district. "The border has not been sealed and movement of people is normal," said Mrs CS Lepcha, Additional SP, Darjeeling. — SNS

war Singh briefed the Prime Minister on the crisis.

The MEA also expressed its concern at the suspension of fundamental rights and imprisonment of political leaders.

In Guwahati, Union home minister Mr Shivraj

Patil said India was concerned about the developments in Nepal. "Our policy has been not to interfere in domestic affairs of neighbours. Having said that, I would like to say that India has always valued the democratic system. We need not comment but we hope that our neighbour will be able to tackle the situation as best as possible," he said.

Regarding the possible effect of a Maoist upsurge in Nepal on the bordering states of the country, Mr Patil said a multi-pronged strategy was in place to tackle the situation.



Nepal shuts down Dalai Lama office Kingdom for one-China policy

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, January 28

RISKING OPPOSITION from major aid donors, Nepal has closed down the office of the representative of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Refugee Welfare Centre here in pursuant of its "one China" policy.

The two offices were set up in 1959 after the Dalai Lama escaped to India following Tibet's takeover by China. Nepal-based Tibetan leaders have approached India, the US, the European Union and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees for their intervention. Two years ago, pressure from the US and western nations had forced Nepal to reconsider its decision to deport Tibetan refugees to Tibet. It is believed that China, whom Kathmandu describes as "model friend," is opposed to third party mediation in Nepal's Maoist crisis basically to keep neighbouring Tibet away from the glare of the international community.

Nepalese minister of state for external affairs

Prakash Sharan Mahat on Friday said, "We shut down the two offices because they were being run without permission. Though we give Tibetans freedom to carry out their cultural and religious activities, we do not allow them to indulge in political activities on our soil." He, however, declined to comment on whether the two offices were involved in any kind of political activities.

On January 24, the Dalai Lama's Representative in Nepal, Wangchuck Tshering, received a notice from the Nepal government ordering closure of the two offices. On January 21, the chief district officer of Kathmandu had summoned him for questioning.

Tshering said, "This is the first time Kathmandu has served us with such a notice. It will definitely put our people in great difficulty. Every year, more than 2,000 Tibetans escape to Nepal from Chinese repression who are routed to India with the help of the UNHRC." There are about 20,000 Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

29 JAN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Maoists free 325 students but abduct 700 youths

हेर नेपाल
KATHMANDU, JAN. 28. Nepal's Maoist rebels released 325 students and 25 teachers abducted from Sankhuwasabha district on Wednesday but seized over 700 youths from the same district, police said today.

"The Maoist rebels on Friday freed all the 325 students aged between 12 and 16 and 25 teachers after keeping them in captivity for 48 hours in Sankhuwasabha district on Wednesday," police said.

The rebels had abducted their victims for indoctrination sessions, a local rebel official said on Thursday.

However, they abducted 700 more youths, aged between 18 and 22, from Matchepokhari and Dhoopgaon villages from

HO 1 28/1
the district on the same day, police said. Sankhuwasabha is 390 km northeast of Kathmandu.

The Maoists have been using the local youths to dig bunkers to fight against the security forces as well as to train them in laying underground mines, a local village chief, Bhim Bahadur Gurung, said.

"The youths were abducted to train them to carry the dead or wounded rebels in course of fighting with the army," the local police said, quoting the former village development council chief, Shashiraj Upadhyay. Nepal's human rights groups in a press statement have appealed to the rebels to stop the abductions. — AFP

29 JAN 2005

THE HINDU

Nepal situation grave, says Bhutan King

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, JAN. 28. The situation in Nepal is deteriorating day-by-day, with the Maoists holding sway over 69 districts in the country, the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, warned today. He said the Maoists had almost total control over Nepal and this would have negative implications for both Bhutan and India.

Talking to a select group of correspondents, the King, however, was hopeful that "something good, something positive" would come out of the current situation in Nepal. Asked if military operations of the kind conducted by Bhutan against Indian insurgents were a way out in Nepal, he responded, "I am in no position to make comments about what others should do."

The King took a dim view of India's plans to link rivers. "I've read about it, but I haven't seen the plan," he said, adding that the proposal would not be feasible in practice. Millions of people, the King pointed out, would be affected — they would lose their land and property.

According to the monarch, a huge environment lobby — both within and outside India — would oppose this project. It would take decades and billions of dollars, the King maintained, stressing that implementation of the project was very unlikely.

SAARC summit

In response to a question, the ruler of Bhutan maintained that



the issue of China being associated with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation would not be discussed at the coming SAARC summit in Dhaka. SAARC members had not taken any decision on associating China with the grouping.

Asked about efforts being made to resolve differences over portions of the Bhutan-China border, he said the two issues persisted. Some differences of opinion continued between the two countries on portions of their 450-km border, still to be demarcated.

The King was, however, confident that these differences would be resolved through ongoing discussions between Bhutan and China. The border was well defined by the Himalayas and their peaks. He said that last year the Chinese Government laid some roads in portions of the territory on which there were differences of opinion. The King said the area of

difference was quite small, but chose not to give any details.

India providing assistance to its tsunami-hit neighbours would bring it a lot of goodwill. "It will do a lot of good at the SAARC summit." India's decision not to accept relief assistance was a reflection of its strength.

Military operations

About the military operations launched against Indian insurgents in December 2003, the monarch said it was the last option and taken after many rounds of discussions and even involved a personal visit by him to the training camps of the militants.

The King said he was happy to report that there were no militant camps in Bhutan any longer. "We are trying to ensure that our borders remain secure." India and Bhutan, he said, had agreed that their territories should not be used to harm each other's interests.

On the state of some 100,000 "Bhutanese" refugees who have been living in Nepal for well over a decade, the King said these people were not Bhutanese "citizens" and could have been living in India or Nepal previously.

The King said a verification team that had gone to one of the camps in December 2003 had been attacked, but offered that if the (Maoist) "situation" improved in Jhapa, then another verification team could be sent. Jhapa, he claimed, was a Maoist stronghold.

Bhutan prince in Delhi for lessons

He is
Bhutan

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 25: Bhutan Crown Prince Choetse Penlop Jigme Khesar Nangyal Wangchuk is attending a 12-month intensive course on security concepts at the National Defence College here.

It is aimed at helping him prepare to take over the responsibility of the land-locked Himalayan kingdom when the time comes for him to step into his father's shoes.

Brigadier Prakash Menon, the course in-charge, refused to speak about the star student



The prince in Delhi on Tuesday. (Reuters)

who joined on January 10, quoting security reasons. "We want to keep this extremely low key for security reasons."

Over the last two years, the prince has been taking a keen interest in every aspect of Bhutan's administration. He has been travelling with King Jigme Singye Wangchuk to far-flung villages and watching his father's interac-

tion with his subjects.

The crown prince is the first member of the Bhutanese royalty to attend a course in the defence college.

Bhutan has not fought a war for over 130 years but was forced to take action against Northeast militants in December 2003. Operation Pushback, against Ulfa and other insurgent groups, led to increased security concerns for the crown prince.

The National Defence College is one of India's premier institutions and is modelled on London's Royal College of Defence Studies. It seeks to comprehend and interpret the dynamics of India's security strategy in a changing world.

The section on international security focuses on geopolitical and geo-strategic concepts, the global security environment and its relevance to India as well as international relations and India's foreign policy. There is an attempt to understand the role of powerful nations like the US, China, Russia, France, the UK as well as the European Union and Japan in international politics. Nuclear issues, the role of the Indian defence forces in the 21st century and India's defence and internal security all form part of the course.

By the end of the course, the crown prince will have an overall understanding of India's security interests. For the future monarch, this would be extremely useful.

Bhutan is one of India's closest allies and bilateral ties have always been excellent. Bhutan is about the only neighbouring country where allegations of Indian high-handedness are not heard. This is perhaps because Delhi has over the years taken care not to tread on Bhutanese sensitivities.

The King of Bhutan is the chief guest at tomorrow's Republic Day celebrations.

26 JAN 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Space for political action shrinking in Nepal

By Aniket Alam

KATHMANDU, JAN. 23. With Maoists in control over vast swathes of Nepal and the Royal Army mobilising in full strength for what appears to be a protracted countrywide war, the space for democratic political action is fast shrinking. Political parties as well as civil society institutions are finding themselves pressured in an increasingly militarised context.

The Royal Nepal Army (RNA), which was 35,000-strong less than a decade ago, now has 80,000 soldiers while plans have been made for inducting another 13,000 in the coming months. Similarly, the Maoist army consists of three divisions, nine brigades and 29 battalions, with about 20,000 men.

Stern measures

Anti-Government protests outside Kathmandu are often dealt with sternly by the security forces as they claim that these

are "infiltrated" by Maoists. Non-Maoist political workers have either left the villages and district towns for Kathmandu or have bought peace with the Maoists in their villages, claims Govind Sharma 'Bandi', a Supreme Court advocate who has taken up human rights cases. "The monarchy has lost its legitimacy and survives on the support of the army which is under its direct control," he says. The army has been accused of various human rights abuses, which include extra-judicial killings, rape, illegal detentions, torture and threats to political activists who are opposed to King Gyanendra. Recently, there have been reports of aerial bombing by the army of schools and villages suspected of sheltering Maoists.

The frequency and extent of reported human rights abuses by the RNA has now led some international human rights organisations to call for the setting up of a war crimes tribunal in Nepal. "The Maoists also do not allow any expression of independent opinions in the areas they con-

rol," says a human rights activist working in a Maoist-controlled district of mid-western Nepal. "From their top leadership to their local cadre they repeat the same lines," this activist says and adds that speaking one's mind may even lead to a bullet in the head.

The army does not seem to be in a position to defeat the Maoists while the Maoists are not expected to be able to control Kathmandu. With Parliament having been dissolved since May 2002, and no elections held since then, King Gyanendra has been nominating Prime Ministers to run the administration.

Parties in disarray

Denied the oxygen of elections and popular mandates, political parties are being riven by internal disputes and differences over strategy. While the leadership of both the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) have accepted positions in the Government nominated by the King, open dissent has emerged within their ranks over the wis-

dom of running the King's Government. Mandated by the King to find a solution to the Maoist militancy, this Government has not met with any success till now.

"We shall talk directly to the master (King Gyanendra) and not his servants (nominated Ministers)," is the famous retort of the Maoist chief Prachanda to the invitation for talks by the Government. They have ignored the Government's deadline of January 13 for peace talks.

The Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, favours holding elections. "If Afghanistan can hold elections, why can't Nepal," he asks. But the veteran Nepali Congress leader and former Prime Minister, G. P. Koirala, says this Government nominated by the King lacks legitimacy.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Madhav Kumar Nepal, of the CPN (UML), also argues that elections are the way out of the present crisis. But his colleague in the standing committee of the CPN (UML), Pradeep Nepal, dismisses all talk of holding elections

as "ridiculous" and alleges that elections will throw up a weak Government as most people will not be able to take part in them due to the violence. The King will then have a Government which is nominally elected but without any real popular mandate.

Share in power

He claims that senior Maoist leaders have told him that they would be willing to negotiate peace if given a share in power. The only legitimate political authority in Nepal is the Parliament and it should be reinstated, he says.

Parliament can then enter into negotiations with the Maoists. It may also be possible then to elect a constituent assembly to address the larger issues involved, he says.

"Merely providing arms and money to the Royal Nepal Army will not defeat this insurgency," he warns and cautions that countries such as India and the U.S. should refrain from "putting all their eggs in the basket of King Gyanendra's Government".

Nepal threat at Bengal door

HG-5 2/11
JES 88 - Nepal

Siliguri sounds alert as Maoists gun down 18 RNA men on border

Keshav Pradhan and Pramod Giri
Kathmandu & Siliguri, January 20

AT LEAST 18 Nepalese security personnel were killed in a Maoist offensive in Ilam district bordering Darjeeling on Wednesday. The rebels were reported to have lost six men. The incident has prompted a security beef-up in North Bengal and Sikkim.

This is one in a series of major Maoist attacks in eastern Nepal in recent times that may deepen India's worries. Darjeeling and Sikkim across the border share a common ethnicity and language with Nepal. Fearing a spilling of Maoist violence in their territories, the two states have tightened security along their borders with Nepal.

According to intelligence sources in Siliguri, border security had been intensified and steps taken to ensure that no Maoist sneaked into West Bengal.

West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, presently in Siliguri attending the CPI(M)'s Darjeeling district conference, took stock of the situation in a meeting with high-level police and intelligence officials.

A Royal Nepalese Army official on Thursday said, "We lost 10 soldiers and three police personnel in action. Sixteen others have gone out of contact. Reinforcements have been sent to launch a combing operation in the area." However, Radio Nepal said altogether 18 security personnel died in fighting that broke out when a 49-member United Command Force went to clear roadblocks put up on the Ilam-Phidim Highway.

The Maoists' seventh brigade said it lost six men in the gun battle that took place near Puwakhola, 12 km north of Ilam town. It claimed to have captured 20 security personnel. There were reports of



File photo of underground Maoist leaders at a rally in eastern Nepal.

the rebels taking away a number of INSAS rifles, SLRs and LMGs and ammunition from the soldiers.

The incident took place a day after the rebels warned of serious consequences if the government held elections without creating a suitable atmosphere for peace talks. They ignored the government's January 13 deadline for dialogue, saying it was not serious about dealing with their basic demands like formation of a constituent assembly.

Naxals gain foothold in at least 16 districts

Aloke Banerjee
Kolkata, January 20:

EVEN AS the CPI(M) continues to deny the growing influence of the Naxalites in West Bengal, the Delhi-based Institute of Conflict Management (ICM), headed by former Punjab police chief K.P.S. Gill, has in its latest report observed that the CPI (Maoist) has already spread to 16 of the 18 districts in the state.

In his report, Ajai Sahni, executive director of ICM, has also observed that between November 2003 and September 2004, the Maoist influence has spread from only 55 districts in the country to as many as 156 districts in 13 states.

After the recently held central committee meeting of the CPI(M) in Kolkata, politburo member Prakash Karat had said that West Bengal was in the main free from Naxalite influence and that the Maoist activities were confined only to the jungle areas of the state.

"There is little sense of urgency in even the highly affected states and virtually no sense of a crisis in the states that are presently marginally affected or targeted by the Naxalites," Sahni said in

his report. "West Bengal had been largely free of Naxalite activities after 1973 till the end-1990s. But intelligence sources indicate that the Maoists are now poised to unleash a wave of terror in the state," he observed.

The report, which has appeared in the latest issue of *South Asian Intelligence Review*, has identified Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Orissa as the core states where 99 districts are under Maoist influence. Apart from these states, Maoists are also active in six districts of Uttar Pradesh bordering Bihar, five districts of Uttaranchal, 16 districts of West Bengal, five districts of Madhya Pradesh, six districts of Maharashtra, 12 districts of Karnataka, four districts of Tamil Nadu and three districts of Kerala.

"Beyond these districts is a much wider network of covert mobilization. Indeed, districts are added virtually by the week - as the pace of expansion over the past year demonstrates," the report observes.

Intelligence agencies are pinning their hopes on exploiting internal dissension to check CPI(Maoist), says the report.

✓
Gurkha Regiment soldiers were in Nepal on home leave

Maoists abduct 14 jawans

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16/1

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SR - Nepal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KATHMANDU, Jan. 15. — A group of Gurkha soldiers of the Indian Army were abducted by Maoist insurgents in far western Nepal when they were going home on leave yesterday.

According to initial reports, the jawans, posted in J&K, were heading for their home districts in southern Nepal when the Communist guerrillas abducted them from Chuha village in remote Kailali district, mistaking them to be members of the Royal Nepalese Army. Although 15 jawans were said to have been abducted by the rebels, one was released when his captors were apparently "convinced" that he was not on the pay roll of the Nepalese army.

The local media, however, quoting unnamed Maoist sources, said the insurgents had decided to release the 14 jawans but no official confirmation was available.

The news of the abductions took Indian Army personnel in Kathmandu by surprise as the men were on leave and had not yet reported back to

Army's stand



NEW DELHI, Jan. 15. — The Indian Army is yet to make an official comment on the abduction of the Gurkha soldiers. A senior officer, however, said the government has asked the defence attache in its Kathmandu embassy to find out more about the possible whereabouts of the missing soldiers. The Army believes that 12 jawans are missing. "We have asked the Nepalese and let's see what they can do," the officer said.

Given that there are thousands of Gurkha soldiers in the Army, it is still confirming the identity of these soldiers. — SNS

their units.

Defence officials at the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu declined to comment, saying they were yet to receive confirmation about the reported abductions.

The news of the abductions comes on the heels of the outlaws torching three Indian vehicles in western Nepal yesterday. The Maoists had called a strike in Nawalparasi district near the Indian border. Two jeeps and a van with Indian number plates that were heading towards Kathmandu from Sunauli on the border were stopped and torched for "defying" the shutdown. No one was, however, injured.

This is the second incident in which Maoists have abducted soldiers belonging to a non-Nepalese army. Last year, they had abducted a British officer and two Nepalese employed in the British army who had gone to the outer districts to supervise recruitment. All three were later released unharmed.

The Indian Army, which runs pension camps for its former Gurkha soldiers in Nepal, has warned them of possible trouble from the insurgents who are known to be demanding money from former Indian and British Gurkhas. Former soldiers travel to and from the pension camps in groups to avoid being robbed.

THE STATESMAN

16 JAN 2005

STIR OVER FUEL PRICE HIKE

Nepal erupts

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, Jan. 11. — Fresh unrest spread over Nepal and prominent roads in Kathmandu turned into battlefields today as student organisations fought with security forces to protest against an increase in fuel prices, the third in five months during the tenure of the Sher Bahadur Deuba government.

On the day the country celebrates National Unity Day, commemorating the birth anniversary of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, an ancestor of the present King Gyanendra who over 200 years ago brought nearly 50 principalities under one rule, demonstrations erupted against the government and fissures appeared within the ruling coalition itself as the government raised the price of petro products by

Rs 6 to Rs 100.

Student unions brought traffic to a standstill for half an hour in the capital in the morning, burnt tyres and pelted bricks on security-men who tried to clear the roads. Several student leaders were arrested, adding to the ire of the unions who say their protests will continue unless the prices are rolled back or the government resigns.

The agitation was started by the student wing of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist, a that is part of the coalition government and the party to which the minister for industry, Mr Ishwar Pokhrel, belongs. Both the UML and Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, another coalition partner, distanced themselves from the price hike, saying they had not agreed to it when the Cabinet took the decision yesterday.

Maoists set deadline to shut Nepal industries

Keshav Pradhan
Kathmandu, January 3

NEPAL'S MAOISTS on Monday replied the palace-installed government's January 13 deadline for peace talks with a much tougher ultimatum having an identical time frame.

Setting January 13 as the deadline for the fulfillment of its demands, the Maoist-run All-Nepal Trade Union Mahasangh declared, "We will launch an extensive struggle for the protection of workers and national entrepreneurs from the month of Magh (which begins on January 14)." It asked all "patriotic Nepalese" to take up arms against foreign capitalists.

Earlier, the mahasangh had closed down 47 multinational companies, including Indo-Nepal joint ventures, from August 17 to September 15, demanding a better deal for workers and release of their leaders. This time, its focus is on the government's alleged move to impose "fascist military rule with the support of

Election dates

THE NEPAL government on Monday said that it would announce the dates for Parliamentary elections by next week if the Maoists did not come forward for dialogue. "The government will announce dates for the general elections by the second week of January in case the Maoists do not come forward for dialogue to resolve the nine-year-old insurgency through peace negotiations," government spokesman Mohammad Mohsin said.

PTI, Kathmandu

imperialist and expansionist forces," location of four arrested key leaders, exploitation by foreign capitalists and implementation of its September 15 agreement with the government and the Federation of

Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries.

The ultimatum comes close on the heels of a Maoist-sponsored economic blockade that crippled life in Kathmandu and a number of districts bordering India and Tibet from December 23 to 29. Besides, it coincided with announcements by the government and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress (Democratic) that they would go ahead with the election programme if the rebels did not resume dialogue by January 13. The Maoists have so far ruled out negotiations with the government, questioning its legitimacy.

Interestingly, almost all mainstream parties, including the Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist Leninist (a ruling coalition partner) are against having elections without resuming negotiations with the rebels. This has made things difficult for Deuba who has been directed by King Gyanendra to conduct polls by April.

Maoists relent

But Nepali Congress must make amends

Nepal's Maoists have, at last, withdrawn an indefinite high-way blockade since 23 December — imposed in protest against killing and detention of their cadres by the army — in response to appeals by human rights activists and civil society. Earlier, in August, they had forced the closure of 47 establishments, including hotels and some Indo-Nepalese joint ventures and British enterprises, to press for release of two leaders and information on missing cadres, rendering nearly 100,000 jobless for about three weeks. They relented when the government met their demands. But since that came about after Sher Bahadur Deuba's return from an Indian visit, the impression was that he did so at Delhi's prodding. However, all that was sought was security and protection for Indian establishments. Bandhs and road blockades hardly evoke public response — having become a feature of Nepalese life for the past seven years — but the success of some of these owed much to the Maoists' strong-arm tactics. Now public opinion seems to be growing against the unwanted interference, as is evident from a recent mass rally's message to Maoists who claim to have the public interest in mind but pursue an anti-Mao policy by persecuting poor daily wage earners and innocent villagers.

Since the Nepali Congress is solely responsible for throwing the country into chaos through its chronic infighting, it must make amends by setting its house in order. Admittedly there is no love lost between party chief GP Koirala and Deuba, but they must, for Nepal's sake, try to reunite. After all, both factions aspire for the restoration of multi-party democracy. Deuba replaced Koirala who failed to rein in the Maoists, but he has proved no better. Perhaps parliament's revival, as Koirala suggests, might help. But that would depend on whether the Supreme Court reinterprets its ruling at the time of parliament's dissolution in 2002.